

Kings and Prophets 13-08-02a

This is Friday, the 2nd of August, 2013. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets in the Old Testament. It's a subject that doesn't come up a lot.

It's not one of the spectacular things. It's not the parting of the Red Sea or the flood, but we're going to be looking at some of those things in connection with it. But we have come to 1 Kings 17 and the introduction of a prophet in Israel, really the first spectacular name on the billboard, Prophet Elijah.

Samuel had been there for the United Kingdom, anointed Saul, anointed David. Then the whole prophetic ministry just came in spits and spurts. You'd see a prophet show up and give a brief word, but there wasn't a sustained career, you know, you see Nathan talking to David, but we're going to see tonight that Elijah really has a spectacular ministry.

And my question is, why? Why all of a sudden after the kingdom is split, do you have a man like Elijah doing these amazingly miraculous things? Why does God choose this time to send this guy to do these things? And if we can figure that out, hopefully it will mean something to us, because this happened a long time ago, even in Jesus' day, it was a long time ago, and it's a really long time ago now. And so we say, this guy Elijah shows up and does some stuff 2,800 years ago, give or take. And, you know, this is archaeological days, so why would we care? Well, we're going to pause for just a moment, as is our custom, and go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our concentration to the study of God's word, and then we'll begin.

Father, what a privilege it is to spend time with the cares and tasks of this life set aside in the company of fellow believers who love you and love to study your word and to try to gain a better understanding of it. We thank you for this passage, this portion of your word that is before us tonight. We ask your blessing on us as we study it together.

May each one here find something meaningful, something that is helpful, that will contribute to growth and to reflecting your glory in the time that is left to us in this life and in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. First Kings, chapter 17.

We saw last time, Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word. And so, as you know, in the ancient world, when people are largely in an agricultural economy, there's nothing worse than drought. It's not like they're making cars or manufacturing tablet PCs or something where you've got assets to feed stock and keep them healthy and reproducing, to grow crops and have a good harvest.

You have to have rain. Now, what is Ahab famous for? We saw last time that there was a succession of bad kings. How many kings before him? Well, he is number seven, right? There were six previous and he is number seven.

Seven in the Bible is the number of summation or fulfillment. It's like the days in the week, days of creation. Six days God creates the heavens and the earth and on the seventh he rests.

Six kings in the northern kingdom and now we have Ahab. And he is worse than all of the kings before him rolled together. And the biggest thing that he does, if you look at the end of chapter 16, he did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him, as if it was a trivial thing to walk in the sins of all these other guys.

He married Jezebel who is from the region of Sidon and that's important. That's up in Lebanon now. But this is the Phoenician area, Tyre and Sidon.

She's a Sidonian. Her father is Ethbaal, the king and also a priest of Baal, by the way. We learned this from Josephus.

And Ahab set up an altar for Baal. Now, who is Baal? Baal, B-A-A-L, he is the Canaanite answer to the God of Israel. In Israel, God is Yahweh Elohim.

In Canaan, it's Baal, Baal. And his claim to fame is he's the storm God. What would the storm God control? The rain.

The storm God would control the rain, pray to Baal, sacrifice to Baal, you'll have good crops, you'll have abundant herds and flocks and so on. So, for this dusty prophet to show up, and he's the first prophet to really wear the prophet uniform, the camel hair robe with the rawhide belt, locusts and wild honey kind of a thing. He shows up out of nowhere in this chapter and says, I represent the God of Israel and there's not going to be any rain up here.

All you Baal worshippers, you're out of luck. Now, what would the equivalent of that be today? What is the conventional wisdom of how to get prosperous today? What would be the equivalent of building an altar to Baal today? You've got to find a way to make money, right? You know, money is the key. Who wants to be a millionaire? You know, get a singing contract, you know, be the last one off the island or whatever it is.

Win the great race, cash prizes. I believe Pat Sajak is still on the letter-flipping show with Vanna White. What is that? Wheel of Fortune.

You know, Wheel of what? Fortune. You want to go to college, you agonize and slave through to get a degree. Why? Because supposedly, allegedly, you make more money with a college degree.

The practice of that is somewhat iffy. But this is the idea today in the secular world. Our God is, and it's not our goal.

What's our goal? To be prosperous. In the ancient world, finding one of these gods, whether it's Baal or Dagon for the Philistines or any of these other heretical things in the later Greek and Roman world. You've got the whole pantheon of Jove or Jupiter and Mars and Thor, the

hammer guy.

But whichever one you pick, you pick one that's supposed to be able to have some influence over some area that you want. There were gods in Egypt that were related to agriculture or to the Nile, controlling the flooding of the Nile, which was critical to them. So everybody knew that there's some invisible force somewhere.

And if you can just get in good with this invisible force, good things will happen for you. Well, today in the postmodern world, we don't believe, you know, I say we as in the secular world, doesn't believe that there are invisible entities. Everything is material.

Everything is secular. It operates according to the laws of physics and kinetics and exchange of energy and so on. So you've got to manipulate circumstances to make things happen.

So get a degree, know the right people. We want to manipulate the environment. We're children of the world of physics, and it's cause and effect.

You pull the right strings, push the right buttons. I saw a great – I heard somebody say something very interesting. They had just visited their parents.

And, you know, sometimes when you're an adult and you go back and visit your parents, it can be frustrating because you find yourself reverting to when you were a child, and you have some of the same angst that you had growing up. This is people that don't have a real warm, friendly relationship with their parents. So this guy was that way.

He went and stayed with his mother, and she was, you know, giving him a hard time. And when he left, he said, why is it that when you visit your family, they always know how to push your buttons? And then he answered it, because they installed them. But, you know, we think, well, I'm a product of my environment.

I'm a product of my upbringing. I've been shaped by these things. And if I can just find a way to manipulate my own psychology some kind of way, there's sort of a physical way, like a scientist in a lab, if I can just get the right DNA and put it in the right test tube and heat it to the right temperature and add the right supplements, it will turn into what I want.

And so really materialism is the substitute for the ancient gods now. We think, well, there's got to be some way to position myself. I want to be sure I don't run out of money.

So there's got to be the right kind of investment. I need to position myself financially. I need to position myself socially.

I need to position myself professionally. Position myself in my relationships. I've got to learn to, you know, speak my truth and be heard and be validated and validate others.

And we just think that it's a rule-based, materialistic way to get around. Well, just any time in the Bible when you see somebody worshiping Baal, they're doing the very same thing, except

Baal is the big slot machine. You sacrifice to Baal, something good will happen.

This was their way of doing what we do with physics and psychology. So Ahab says, oh, you know, the God of Israel. Interestingly, however, have you looked at the names of Ahab's sons? They're all good Israelite names with pieces of God's name in them.

We'll get to that when we look at his sons. But, you know, Jehoram and so on. And you know what this is? This is like rock stars wearing crosses.

It's like, well, it's tradition, and it just, it's cool. You know, if you're the king, you should have one of these traditional names. You know, it's real tough to get elected if you've got a, you know, President Obama amazingly got elected with a real, he has the most foreign-sounding name of any president we've ever had.

And it was an obstacle for him. And he, in his earlier days, had tried to get around that by calling himself Barry instead of Barak. And, you know, names can be an obstacle.

So Ahab, when he names his sons, he gives them good old traditional Israelite names because he wants these guys to be viewed as king's successors. He doesn't know which one's going to survive and be the next one on the throne, but he doesn't want to take a chance. So he doesn't name them, you know, Son of Baal or Baal Loves Me or some equivalent thing.

He gives them good, but he doesn't give two hoots and a rain barrel for the God of Israel, but he uses these traditional names. It's just so like us, isn't it, to do a superficial nod to tradition when you don't really believe in it. That's what he does.

Well, this is Ahab. So this is what's going on in the Northern Kingdom. He sets up this thing.

It's just like our modern day where everybody is going down the road of how can I get ahead, Baal worship. This is the new big thing. We're tired of the God of Israel.

He hasn't done anything spectacular in a long time. So we get this Baal guy. The Canaanites, look at them.

We like to never did lick them, and they never did go away, and they seem to be prosperous, so let's do what they do. So that's what he does. So Elijah shows up out of nowhere.

He dresses strangely. Nobody knows quite who he is, and he walks in and he says, Look, Baal, your storm god, supposedly controls the wind and the rain and all the rest of it. Well, guess what? It's not going to rain until I say so on behalf of the God of Israel, and he walks out.

Well, initially people are like, you know, too many days in the hot sun, but it doesn't rain, and weeks and weeks go by, and it doesn't rain, and it doesn't rain, and it doesn't rain. They said, Who was that dusty guy that came in here, and he said it wasn't going to rain? Well, he has disappeared. He went to the brook Cherith, and he's drinking out of the brook.

Now, we have a lot to cover, and so I'm not going to necessarily give chapter and verse for everything, but Elijah goes to the brook, and he has water in the midst of this rocky ravine, which kind of reminds you of Moses. Remember Moses two different times brought forth water from the rock. The first time he struck the rock.

The second time God said, Speak to the rock. But Moses was all put out with the people because they were carping at him, and he had led them for all these years, and they were still complaining. The first time something went wrong, they were blaming Moses.

And so he says, Must I bring you water forth from this rock? And he smacks it when God told him to speak to it. The water still comes out, but because of that single episode, Moses doesn't get to go into the land. We look at that and say, Boy, that's harsh.

One flare of temper, and you don't get to go into the land. But it isn't so much that God says, Well, that's the penalty for this momentary failure. It's symbolic.

It draws attention to the idea that the Lord Jesus, as our rock, was struck once. For our transgressions and the water of life flows out. And when Moses struck the rock the second time, God is able to make the point, No, once for all.

Christ died once for all. He isn't stricken over and over again. And this point is made in the book of Hebrews.

Now all we have to do to receive that water of life is ask. We speak. We speak and accept the gift, and that's the way it comes.

So by Moses making this mistake, God draws attention to it with this radical judgment, and we learn this very valuable lesson. So it's sort of at Moses' expense, but trust me, he's okay with it now. He doesn't mind.

He's going to be well rewarded in the eternal future. But it was a rough go at the beginning because he slogged around for 40 years with the Israelites, and then he didn't get to go into the land. Goes up on Mount Pisgah and looks over and sees it afar off, but he'll get there later.

Remember the Mount of Transfiguration with who else? Elijah, our guy. Moses and Elijah are identified, and this is my point. You know, there's a lot of stuff in the Old Testament, and what is helpful is to see patterns and to see associations.

So to cut a long story short, Moses and Elijah are identified even in the Old Testament, and one of the first clues you get is no sooner is Elijah introduced here, then he says there's going to be no rain, and he goes into the wilderness, and what does he do? He gets three things. We looked at this last time. He's drinking water out of the rocky ravine, and the birds, the ravens, are bringing him what? Bread and meat.

What did God give the Israelites under Moses for 40 years in the wilderness? He gave them

water. He provided them bread, which was called what? Manna. And from time to time, they got meat.

So just at that level, without going into too many details, there's an association, and what we're going to see tonight is that you don't need a theological degree. You don't have to go to seminary. You don't have to be incredibly gifted.

I saw somebody this past week ask a biblical question about who is God, what is God like, but he titled the thing, For Geniuses Only. And it really bothered me, and I was tempted to give kind of an unkind answer to that, because God has been so careful to not make Bible knowledge and knowledge of himself and an understanding of what he wants from us so high and lofty that you have to be a genius to find it. The essential knowledge about God and his plan is accessible.

As it says in another place, it is near. It's not up in heaven that you've got to try to fly up and find it. It's not down in the deep that you've got to dig down to find it.

It's near. Think about it. If an understanding of God and of the Lord Jesus and of what God wants us to do here in this life, if it was all sophisticated and you had to go to great lengths to figure it out, it would be really unfair to people that don't have the time or aren't really super high IQ people.

What if you had to have an IQ of 135 or something to figure out divine truth? Well, where would that leave the rest of us? I don't have an IQ of 135, so where would I be? Am I just out of luck because I'm not smart enough? God has made these things available irrespective. So my question is, well, how? You say that and it sounds good, God's gracious, everybody can access it. Well, okay, how? It's a big Bible, 66 books, Old Testament, New Testament, prophets and kings falling out the sides, and apostles and signs and wonders and apocryphal dragons in heaven and stars and all the miracles happening.

So how do you figure all of this out? Well, here's one of the ways. We're going to see an example tonight that reminds me of what God told Moses. You remember when Moses is getting ready, he says, Lord, he kind of says the same thing.

You got all these Israelites, I'm supposed to lead them to the promised land. It's a big job. How am I supposed to do this? And God says, look, I will show you.

When it's time to make the tabernacle, what does God tell him? Make it according to the pattern that I showed you on Mount Sinai. I showed you a pattern. Just follow the pattern.

And the great thing about the Bible is there are patterns. There are patterns. And so you don't have to exegete every single verse.

You don't have to memorize long chunks. Just look at the patterns. The one thing you do need to know are the stories themselves.

And this is what's tragic to me. And I'm actually leading up to something, so don't think I've gone too far astray. I can find dozens and dozens and dozens of people who can tell you every plot turn in the whole Harry Potter saga.

From when Harry first shows up at Hogwarts until he has his kids and waves goodbye to them when they're on their way to Hogwarts. Yeah, I know. He's got a broom.

He plays hockey in the air. Now, you know this is true. And you may be some of these people.

Just don't play poker if you are. But there's people that know every little twist and turn, and they know how to pronounce Hermione. We read the whole first book out loud, and we're calling her Hermione or something.

Yeah, no, the person that was reading for us butchered it much worse than that. But, you know, look, we don't have any trouble learning stories, do we? You know the Twilight series with the little spangly guy and the abject girl that's just so full of angst she can hardly drag herself through the day? See, I've never seen a more depressed-looking child in my life than the girl in that series. And I've seen a couple.

I've waded through it manfully, chugged through, saw the spangly guy from beginning to end and the little wolf boy, you know, Native American wolf boy. But there's people that know every detail of these stories, right? Now, am I right or am I wrong? Are there not people that are intimately familiar, know the names, the father with the pickup truck for the wolf boy and the whole bit? They know the whole thing, right? Now, why is it we can memorize that kind of stuff? And in earlier days, you know, I studied some Shakespeare. I know the plots and the characters and can quote lines out of, you know, soliloquies and things.

People learn Dickens and can tell you all about Pip and Great Expectations and that, right? What are we really good at? Remembering stories. Stories are entertaining for us. They stick in our minds.

We remember them. Aesop's Fables, Mother Goose, you learn these as a child. You never forget them.

Jack Horner and the Woman in the Shoe and, of course, they've – well, that's another story. They've taken a bunch of those out because they're politically incorrect. You know, the old woman that lived in the shoe? They don't tell that anymore because it's denigrating to women or something.

A woman living in a shoe, how politically incorrect is that? So they don't teach that one anymore. I think it's – I don't understand it. But we're story-oriented.

Now, look, most of the Bible is stories. Think about it. Genesis, after the story of creation, starting in Chapter 2, it's a story, and it goes all the way through to Chapter 50, and it's stories.

Here's the descendants, and then you get the line of Noah, and here's Noah with his sons, and you've got the ark, and then he comes out, and you've got Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Then you come down, and you've got Nahor and Abram and Terah, and they leave Ur of the Chaldees, and they're coming around. Then you've got Isaac and Rebekah, and this great love story.

You've got their twin sons, Jacob and Esau, fighting in the womb and coming out and fighting over the stuff, and Jacob chisels his brother out of his inheritance. He's the younger brother. Then he has the 12 sons, and you have the story of Joseph, and it carries all the way through to the end of the book.

Then what do you have? Exodus. And here's Moses and the Israelites, Moses in the bulrushes, growing up in the palace, learning all the things he's going to need to know to be a great leader, but he's not going to be a great leader in Egypt. He has a huge setback.

He's got a 40-year vacation in Midian. And so he has 40 years in Egypt, 40 years in Midian. He's 80 years old when he comes back to deliver the children of Israel.

How long do they wander in the wilderness? Another 40 years. His life divides into real nice 40-year chunks. Then Moses hands off the reins to whom? Joshua.

What does Yeshua mean? Yah-shua. Yahweh saves. The Lord saves.

Shua is the Hebrew verb that means to deliver or to save. The Lord saves. That's what his name means.

Moses is the one who teaches Israel God's name. That's the first time they learn that God's name is Yahweh. Who shall I say sent me? I am that I am.

That's what Yahweh is. So Moses is identified with giving Israel its national identity and its covenant relationship with God and his covenant name is Yahweh. That's Moses.

Joshua delivers them into the land, completes the deliverance and brings them into the land of promise. Moses, Joshua. Moses doesn't get to finish his work.

Why? At the rock? Speak to the rock the second time? Has a temper tantrum? And this is the same Moses that when God says, you know, the golden calf thing, God says, look, I'm going to blow these people away and start over. Moses, I'll make a new nation out of you. Just stand back.

I'm going to incinerate this group. I'm sick of them. What does Moses do? Throws himself between God and the people and says, Lord, please don't do that.

What will the nations think? Look at your promises. And God approves. You know, this God is doing a little bit of posing here because it gives Moses a chance to show his soul.

I don't think God was actually going to blast the people away. He's not subject to temper. But

he presents himself that way to Moses, giving Moses the opportunity to intercede in a real and meaningful way.

Be aware. Moses introduces Israel to God as Yahweh. What does Elijah's name mean? Eli-Yah.

Eli, God. Eli, my God, is Yahweh. Elijah, my God, is Yahweh.

What does Moses tell the people? Your God, my God, is Yahweh. Elijah identifies with Moses. This is one of these patterns.

This is why it's Moses and Elijah on top of the Mount of Transfiguration. These guys are linked. They do the same thing.

Elijah's doing it later. Moses did it earlier. Joshua, Yeshua, which is the name of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus has the same name as Joshua. He takes over from Moses, right? Who takes over from Elijah? Elisha. You know what Elisha means? Elishua, my God, saves.

Yeshua, Yahweh saves. Elisha, my God, saves. It's the Shua part, the Elisha, that's Elishua.

It's the same part as Yeshua. Yahweh, God. So, are Moses and Elijah linked? Are Joshua and Elisha linked? Why is it that Elijah doesn't finish and Elisha comes on the scene? We're going to see it up on the mountain where God asks Elijah a question.

Why are you up here? Why are you so depressed? Elijah's going to give an answer. God's going to demonstrate some things, try to cool him off, calm him down, get him to think, get him to change his answer. Elijah's not going to change his answer.

And God says, okay, fine. It's time to bring your Joshua on because you've got the same temporal problem that Moses had. And so it's a pattern.

It's a pattern. There is a replacement. There's a guy that begins and a guy that finishes.

You have David and you have the son of David. You have the dove that is slain and you have the dove that is set free with the blood of the slain dove on it. You have the goat that is slain and you have the scapegoat that is daubed in its blood and set free.

You have the younger replacing the elder. It's a pattern and it teaches us something. Now what is going on with this pattern? Why Elijah? And this is the question I began this evening with.

We're in chapter 17 of 1 Kings. Elijah comes out of the blue. We've seen this string of six increasingly evil kings.

Now we've got the most evil king of all. Where down in the south, you've had just a handful of relatively good kings. All of the faithful people are down south.

So I'm thinking, well, the faithful people ought to be the ones that God talks to and God makes

a demonstration to and sends prophets to and enfolds in his arms and reassures with his miraculous presence. God isn't doing anything down in the south. He goes to the wicked land with the Baal-worshipping people and sends Elijah up there to Ahab, the awfulest king that the northern kingdom has ever had.

So my question is, what is going on? And we're going to solve this, or at least I'm going to suggest an answer to this, based on the pattern. If I just read this, I'd say, well, God's God. God does what he wants to do.

I don't really know. But if we look at the pattern and see we have these clues. What's the first clue we get about Elijah? Water, miraculously.

Bread, miraculously. Meat, miraculously. Well, it kind of reminds me of another guy that did miraculous water, miraculous bread, miraculous meat.

Last guy to do all three of those together was Moses. So God gives us this clue. The whole Bible is this way, as we have seen over and over again.

It's like that Yogi Berra saying, you can observe a lot by watching. You can observe a lot by watching. We look in the context.

We look for these clues. God has a pattern. He wants us to get this.

It's not supposed to be opaque. It's not supposed to be random. It's not supposed to be inscrutable.

And it's not supposed to take a genius to understand it. So how do ordinary people figure things out? We work by experience, and experience teaches us to recognize patterns, to recognize similarities. Well, this reminds me of this other thing.

And I kind of understand this other thing, so that'll help me understand this. That's how science works. Science observes and says, well, this happened three times over here, so I think if I replicate the same condition, it'll happen over here.

It's patterns. And the Bible is no different. It's straightforward in all of the essential truths if we just look for these patterns.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to develop this pattern just a little bit. Because now that we've seen the Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha thing, there is a whole series of these through the Bible.

And we're just going to quickly pick a few of those and look at them. And when we see what they do and how they work, that's going to really inform us in this passage on why God sends Elijah and then Elisha up to the northern kingdom. So that's what we'll look at when we come back.