

Kings and Prophets 13-08-23a

This is Friday the 23rd of August 2013. I am pleased to welcome those who are tuning in from a distance as well as everyone who has assembled here for our Friday night Bible study. We are currently studying Kings and Prophets.

We have covered the first generation or the first phase of the divided kingdom prophets in both the Northern and Southern Kingdom up to the time of Ahab in the Northern Kingdom and Jehoshaphat in the South. At this juncture we find the great prophet Elijah ministering in the Northern Kingdom and we will be resuming our study in 1 Kings chapter 18 in that regard. But we will take just a moment at the outset to organize our thoughts to ensure that we are free of distractions, that we are susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit and that we can profitably make use of this opportunity and this time that God has given us to better understand his word.

Shall we pray? Father it becomes ever more meaningful to us to ponder the words not by might nor by power but by your spirit. We recognize that in and of ourselves we can accomplish nothing but in Christ with the provision of your word and your spirit we can do all things. We thank you for this time of fellowship.

We thank you for the blessings that we receive through it as each one contributes and is a source of blessing from you. We thank you for this passage and the truths that are contained in it and we pray that as we look at it that each one of us will find meaning and encouragement in the things that we learn, that they will remain with us and will guide us in our thoughts and in our decisions in the days ahead so that we can live our lives in a way that reflects your glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well we have taken a few weeks now looking at the great sign of the prophet Elijah occurring not in the southern kingdom but in the north where there is great apathy and indifference where there is active Baal worship which has been encouraged and fostered and stimulated by Ahab and his ne'er do well wife Jezebel. We have seen that there is a lot of numerical reinforcement in this.

Ahab is the seventh king and we realize that there is something of a decision point. There is the opportunity for a rebirth. Wouldn't it have been wonderful? You can imagine that if there had been an eighth king that came in response to a great revival and a great turning in the northern kingdom what would he represent? What does the eighth day mean in Israel? What is the number eight? It's a number of rebirth and restoration.

What day marked the day of circumcision for a newborn baby boy? What day marked the return to fellowship and function of a cleansed leper in Israel? It's the eighth day. It's the day of rebirth and renewal. What day in human history will begin with the kingdom of the father? You have the seven days, the 6,000 years followed by the Sabbath rest, the 7,000 of the millennial

kingdom and then what would be the eighth day is going to be the new kingdom of the father which will be everlasting.

It will be our full entrance into the eternal realms to enjoy the new Jerusalem if we qualify and all of those concomitant blessings. There is a lot of numerical reinforcement in this passage. We have seen in addition to the seventh king being Ahab that there have been seven signs to the northern kingdom.

By way of quick review the first sign was Jeroboam's altar and Jeroboam's hand. The anonymous prophet that then has an untimely fate because of disobedience. He has the opportunity to be fully obedient.

He is waylaid by the old prophet and those signs we studied in great detail. That was sign number two, the prophet's fate because he was initially obedient but then he fell away. And this is a picture.

It's a story picture for the nation. It is not enough to begin well. You've got to continue and end well.

We think about that for ourselves. We've come to faith in Christ. Many of us have had great days in the past of our growth and our enthusiasm and vitality and interest in the things of God.

But if we let those things begin to plateau, if we start to rest on our laurels, if we figure well I've gained enough momentum I'll just coast to the finish line. That's not enough. That young prophet's fate in not persisting, not enduring to the end.

You have need of endurance even if you suffer for a while so that you can receive the promises we're told in the New Testament. That was the second sign. Everybody in the Northern Kingdom heard about this strange story, this very prominent, this individual who just suddenly comes to fame by this supernatural intervention of God.

Nobody has seen miraculous intervention by God in memory. And here is this altar broken down and Jeroboam's hand withered and restored. Then there is the sickness of Jeroboam's son.

And they appeal to the prophet. And the prophet says no, he's going to die and the moment his mother returns that's the end of his life. This again, widely disseminated.

Everyone hears about this. How can you not know about such a happening in the royal family? This would be like Princess Diana having her car crash and nobody in Britain noticing. It's just not possible.

Everybody in the Northern Kingdom knew about the heir apparent, the crown prince dying. And that death having been predicted and not forestalled by the prophet of God. That was the third great sign.

The fourth one was the assassination of King Nadab. When had this ever happened? When had a king in Israel ever been assassinated? They had lost one on the field of battle. To be assassinated by those who were thought to be friends in his own household and so on.

This was unheard of. It was shocking like the Lincoln assassination or the Kennedy assassination. Again, this reverberated through the kingdom.

This bloodshed and violence from within. That was the fourth sign. And then the massacre along with that of all the house of Jeroboam.

Again, according to the word of the Lord. The fifth sign was the prophecy to Baasha regarding Jehu. And again, you have the wiping out of an entire household.

Another bloody result. And then the sixth sign occurs early in the reign of Ahab where Hiel rebuilds Jerusalem. And the fulfillment of this early, early prophecy going back hundreds of years.

When Jericho was destroyed in the days of Joshua. That it should not be rebuilt. And if it ever was, there would be a curse on the one who rebuilt it.

And this man loses his sons. He loses one son when he starts and he loses another son when he finishes it. And this was a sign and it harked back to those who remember the early days of Israel.

You can't help, you think back to the days of Joshua and the origin of that pronouncement. And you think, what has happened to us? Look at the distance between then and now. What we were then and what we are now.

It was, again, a sign that reverberated throughout the nation. Everyone heard about this. What is the seventh sign to the northern kingdom in the days of the seventh king Ahab? It is the appearance of Elijah himself.

And Elijah then begins his ministry. And there are three public challenges. Seven is the number of perfection on earth.

Seven days complete a week. In six days, God created the heaven and the earth. And on the seventh, he rested.

And that completed the project. And then on the eighth day, as it were, human history really begins. And is carried forward to its purpose and its conclusion.

What is the number three? The number three is the heavenly number of perfection. It speaks first and foremost to us of the trinity itself, the triune God. The three holies that are pronounced in God's presence, holy, holy, holy.

And it is the number of the triangle, the strongest geometrical structure, the basis of strength

in almost every type of human building, going back, beginning with the pyramids and coming forward, bridge girders. And this strength and any one part missing, it's not the same. Triangulation has been the basis of so much by way of knowledge, not only in mathematics, but in geography, in navigation, in measurement.

Three is a productive number because it is as though the truth of God has descended to benefit and to bless man. And it is in the full-orbit revelation of the trinity that we find salvation and we find eternity before us. Well, there are three public challenges and there are three private challenges for the prophet Elijah.

What are the three public challenges? First, the introduction of Elijah in chapter 17. There will be no rain except at Elijah's word. This is an attention-getter.

There's another time when God used rain as an attention-getter, but it wasn't the withholding, it was the excess. So back in the days of Noah, you have the excess of rain. In the days of Ahab, you have an absence of rain.

And this, of course, is in fulfillment of those blessings and curses that were pronounced on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. I will turn the earth to iron and the sky to brass, God says. Your crops will fail, your livestock will suffer and die, your children will suffer and die.

And the basis for famine in areas like this is lack of rain, lack of water for crops and for flocks and herds. So suddenly there is no rain. How long does this last? Three and a half years.

The second great sign is the one we find in chapter 18, verse 20 and following, which is the confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. This, again, you can't get more ubiquitous and all-encompassing and widely known than a nationwide famine. And this confrontation of 450 prophets of Baal versus one prophet of God on Mount Carmel is, of course, the biggest news of the day.

The third one is when the drought ends and the rain comes, again, at the word of Elijah. This is in chapter 18, verses 41 through 44. These are the three great public notices through the prophet Elijah to the entire nation.

Interleaved with these are three private challenges that are known largely only to Elijah and a few in his immediate vicinity. The first of these is his sustenance at the brook. He is hidden away by God at Cherith.

And he is sustained with three types of sustenance. He has flesh, he has bread, and he has water. When the water dries up, God takes him to a second place of provision, which is the widow's house.

And there you have the container of flour and the cruse of oil that don't ever run out. And initiating that particular miracle, Elijah comes to the village and the lady that he encounters, he asks her, What are you doing? She says, I've got the last little scraps here and I'm going to

make up the last meal and then my son and I are going to die. And Elijah says, Make one for me first, then make one for yourself and your son.

How many cakes does she make? Three. When she does, by faith, that barrel of flour and crews of oil miracle takes place and sustains them. Interestingly, by the way, there is another three here in terms of, in fact, we'll jump a little bit ahead, but turn with me to chapter 19.

After Mount Carmel, after the rain comes, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. And Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, So let the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. This is your last day on earth, Jezebel says.

When he saw that he arose and ran for his life and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. By the way, her prophecy is already broken.

If he's gone a day's journey into the wilderness and she said, You'll be dead by this time tomorrow. He's already beat that, right? But is he happy? No. You would think, well, you know, that one didn't come true.

He prayed that he might die. Now, Elijah is held up as a symbol of effective prayer later on by James. But you kind of think he must be glad that God didn't really honor this prayer.

If Elijah is such a great man of prayer and God just does whatever Elijah prays, Elijah would have just keeled over at this point, and our story would be really different. But thankfully, just because we pray, God doesn't feel obligated to robotically respond. He prayed and said that he might die, saying, It's enough.

Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my father's. As he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, Arise and eat. Then he looked, and nearby his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water.

So he ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back the second time and touched him and said, Arise and eat, because your journey is too great for you. So he arose and ate and drank, and he went in the strength of that food.

It says in the Old King James, he went in the strength of that meat. But, of course, it's food. Forty days and forty nights, as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

And there he went into a cave and spent the night in that place. And the word of the Lord came to him. And you go on from there.

But what we have read thus far completes a set of three. Because, how many times does God supernaturally sustain Elijah with food? Three times. The first time at the brook Cherith, ravens bring him his meals.

The second time, the supernatural crews of oil and the supernatural barrel of flour provide his food. And the third time, he's got an angel waiter bringing him his meal. He didn't even order.

It's gratis. It's on the house. He gets water and bread.

Now, just to slow down for a moment and look at this. What does Elijah eat the first time? What are the components of his diet? Flesh, bread, and water. What are the stated components of his diet the second time? It's cakes and water.

They were living on cakes at that time. Because, remember, the rain has come. But it takes a while for agriculture to crank back up.

You can have the rain, but you've got to get a whole season of planting and harvesting and threshing and whatnot before you get... There's a delay. You've got a whole growing season after the rain comes before you get... You don't just say, well, it rained yesterday. I've got flour today.

This takes time. So, in the interim, they've got water and he has the cakes made with oil and flour. What does he have the third time? Look at it.

As he lay and slept under the broom tree, suddenly the angel touched him and said, arise and eat. He looked and there by his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water. So, the third time, he's eating basically the same thing he did the second time, except the widow didn't bake it.

Did the angel bake it? Talk about... Are these angel food cakes? I don't mean to be facetious, but where did they come from? They're cooked on the coals. Somebody had to mix the oil and flour, put it on the thing. But what's missing in the second and the third iterations of his diet? What was in the first one that's not in the second and third? I was going to commend the Brooke Cherith to all the vegans out there, but I'll leave that for another discussion.

Between them and the Levites, it's pretty tough to find a biblical leg to stand on. Be that as it may, it's interesting that that element disappears in the second and third supernatural provisions. And I ask myself, what's the question I ask myself? Why? Why is that? Or another way of asking it is, if water and cakes are good enough the third time, and they're good enough the second time, why weren't they good enough the first time? Ravens can't carry them properly? Why is there flesh in the first one, not the second and the third? Well, I run the danger of doing what I promised I would not do in this study, which is to just sit and posthole endlessly.

But there is the key back in the Levitical offerings. What is the difference between an animal offering and a grain offering? What is the purpose of those offerings? And more importantly, what do they represent and what do they foreshadow? And very quickly, I'm not going to leave you dangling here. This is my estimate of the situation.

I think the flesh in the first case, when he is by himself, and it comes to him very supernaturally. God has commanded the ravens, and they bring this food to him, and it includes the flesh. Those bullock offerings, those lamb offerings, those kid goat offerings, the meat offerings, speak of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

He bore our sins in his body on the tree. And of that, we partake once. It is as though Moses is striking the rock.

You do that once. After that, it is the bread of life. The words I speak to you are bread.

They are life. And the memorial of Jesus' body, which is broken for us, is not meat, is it? What's the memorial that he established? It's bread. This is my body, which is broken for you.

The bread is a memorial. Of course, he actually establishes that in anticipation with the disciples, but he sort of had to. But this is my body.

This do in remembrance. This do looking back. And the bread is a looking back at the once-for-all sacrifice that Christ makes on the cross.

And even in the career of Elijah, you see that the second and third supernatural provisions, it's as though he doesn't need the meat. And look at what these cakes do for him. On two meals of cakes and water, he goes nearly a month and a half southeast to Horeb, the mountain of God.

You know how far it is from the northwest of the northern kingdom up there at Mount Carmel all the way down to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God? It is a distance. It takes him a month and ten days. And he doesn't eat another meal.

That's the bread of angels there. You wonder, you know, did this meal even originate on the earth? Because whatever it is, it is some good food. But it speaks of the power of God's word.

You remember when Jesus breaks the bread and distributes it to the 5,000 and later to the 4,000 and their families? And he asks the disciples about it later. Do you remember how many you started with and how many baskets you took up at the end? And we saw what that bread represents, the word of God. We have the incarnate word, the word made flesh that dwelt among us.

And he bears our sins in his body on the tree. But after that, the memorial and the recognition and the sustenance comes not from returning to the cross but from returning to the word and the communication of God's truth. And that's the cakes.

That's the bread. And the cakes are made with flour, which is ground, which is a reminder of the testing and the suffering of the Lord. And oil, which is the imbuing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And it is flesh filled with the Holy Spirit that is able to accomplish the will of God. It brings us to the place of meeting God. It's going to take Elijah all the way to Mount Horeb.

So it's suggestive. I wouldn't die for that, but I just think it's interesting to look at. Anyway, that's another three.

There are three times that Elijah is said to be supernaturally sustained by God. He gets bread from heaven. And each time it seems to be more not ordinary.

You could say, well, you know, the birds are grabbing stuff off of people's windowsills and dropping it in Elijah's lap, perhaps. There's even been speculation that ravens is a euphemism for Arabs or something. That these were guys in dark clothing coming across the desert.

And that he lived off of the hospitality of the Bedouin or some such thing. It's pure speculation. The Bible says ravens.

It's good enough for me. The Bible says a raven. It's a raven.

If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense. But the birds are there. Unclean birds at that.

But God commands them. You can talk for a long time about these supernatural provisions and what they suggest God can provide for us. We work and do our jobs.

Oftentimes we may work for unbelievers. We work in a secular industry of some kind. It doesn't mean that God can't provide for us through these what you might call unsanctified means.

It's sanctified at the point that God says that's going to be your source of provision. It's sanctified like the dead bodies and the lepers were sanctified by the touch of Christ. If God decides that's going to be your source of provision, guess what? It's sanctified.

Your presence there can make a difference because you're a representative of the Lord Jesus. And so long as God chooses to use it, it's no longer classed as unclean. If it becomes corrupt and unclean, that may be a sign that we need to separate from it.

But same thing when you get to the widow and the basis upon which that oil continues to flow and that flower continues to replenish. It began at the point of her clear expression of faith. And by the way, that faith wasn't expressed in a statement.

It was expressed in an action. She took the last of what she had and she made the cake and she gave it to Elijah. I will show you my faith, James says, by my works.

And that's the point at which God honors her with unending sustenance for as long as it's needed. And then the third time, we find Elijah in a very broken down condition. Now this is interesting because Elijah is enormously significant in Scripture.

Enormously significant. His is the last name mentioned in the Old Testament. His is one of two presences that joins the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

His is the name that comes up in one of the general epistles in a very interesting context that we're going to look at as soon as we come back from the break in regard to prayer. His is the prophetic presence that is sent by God to pave the way for the kingdom and the king. And Elijah must surely come for that kingdom to be established and for that king to sit on his throne.

Elijah must come first. Jesus himself confirmed it. Why Elijah? Why not Moses? Why not Daniel, David, Noah, Job, Caleb, Joshua, any one of a number of other Old Testament personages.

Joseph could come back and rule in Egypt or something. Why Elijah? If you look, Elisha has got far more column inches, if you will, to use a newspaper term. As far as coverage, there's a lot more Scripture on Elisha than there is on Elijah.

But it's Elijah who must come first. Why is that? Well we're going to pause and take our break. When we come back we're going to look at these other notices of Elijah in Scripture.

And as we go forward and analyze these harkings back, these looks back at Elijah, it's going to help us understand what we are seeing in 1 Kings. And the significance not only of Elijah to later history and later biblical teaching, but also it clarifies for us his significance and his purpose. And the reason God sent him as the seventh sign to the northern kingdom.

Do they need to listen? Of course they do. But why? What is the message? That's what we'll look at when we come back.