

Kings and Prophets 13-08-23b

We pick up our study now, we're looking at Elijah and his role as this great prophet to the northern kingdom and beyond that his significance and his importance as a symbol and as a harbinger of things later on and his rather frequent mentions in the New Testament. And in keeping with that, we want to first of all see the nature of his career, which in reality in Scripture is rather circumscribed. It doesn't take up a lot of space, but you always want to be sensitive to the zoom out and zoom in, the macro and the micro view that Scripture gives us of things.

There are times when the camera will back up and you have sort of a transparent calendar flipping as they used to do in the old movies to show the passage of time. Moses goes to Midian, meets Zipporah at the well and flip, flip, flip, suddenly it's 40 years later and he goes to the burning bush. You see places in Scripture where huge spans of time are seemingly sort of given a very light touch or completely skipped over.

The drought in Israel lasts for three and a half years and we have just a couple of notices of what happens during that time. And three and a half years is practically a presidential term and you know how much time can take place, how many events can take place in that time. Well, you notice that the rain symbolism, there are two things that fall from heaven or don't fall from heaven in Elijah's career and they mean something.

First, rain does not fall and then it falls. When you get to Mount Carmel in chapter 18, first fire does not fall and then it does. And so you've got a great potential band name here with earth, fire and water.

But if you look at the raising of the widow's son, this is a private event. It's not done in a public venue. Who would know someone from afar might hear this and say, well, maybe he was just really deeply asleep.

This is something akin to Jesus in the upper room with Peter, James and John. There are only a few witnesses and yet it is a far more remarkable miracle in some ways than some of the public demonstrations. What's easier, to wither an arm and restore it or to bring a dead corpse back to life? And yet it's the breaking of the altar and the withered arm that happens in public.

It is the resurrection from the dead that takes place in the sight of only a very few. We find this in chapter 17 after Elijah proclaims the drought. He stays at Cherith.

He's fed by the ravens. He has the three forms of sustenance, flesh, bread and water. And then the water dries up and this is a signal for Elijah to move.

Because in verse 8, the word of the Lord came to him saying, Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon and dwell there. Look, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you. If you look at verse 4, I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.

Now, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you. Now this is interesting. It's an overlooked verse.

Because Elijah is going to go and meet this woman and he's going to ask her for a cake. But what has God already said? I have already commanded a widow there. He doesn't say, I will command or I will provide or you will be able to talk a widow into providing for you.

He says, I have commanded a widow. What does this tell you about the widow? Unbeliever or believer? Zarephath is a town where? Where is Zarephath? Just outside Sidon. Where is Jezebel from? Sidon.

Evil woman down sitting on a throne in Jerusalem. Not in Jerusalem, in Samaria. And honorable woman, widowed, with a child, without sustenance.

So, does crime pay? Does evil and bail worship pay? Look at Jezebel. She's the queen. Look at this faithful woman.

She's starving and at the point of death. For a time. But she is going to become one of the most privileged women in all of history.

Because she is going to be the hostess for God's prophet. And God is going to work a miracle to sustain him and her. Notice, God says, I have commanded the widow to provide for you by obedience to that command.

Which God doesn't say it was accompanied with any promise. But because she is obedient, she has not just provision, but unique and supernatural provision. Not just of sustenance, but of care for her child.

Why does this woman receive back her son from the dead? Because of her faith and her obedience. This is obedience. She is commanded and she responds.

Has Israel been commanded? Yes. Do they respond? No. And guess what? When Israel's son will eventually experience death, guess who is not going to receive the son back from the dead? The benefit, the blessing of the son returned from the dead.

It is the widow nation of Israel. Because the husband is gone. God the Father is no longer functioning as husband, as protector, as provider for Israel.

And the nation is, as it were, widowed. And the son through whom redemption and salvation is to come is going to die. And only those people of faith and obedience are going to receive the son back from the dead, as it were.

This is a harbinger. It's a foreshadowing. If you would only have the faith of this widow.

And Jesus, as we saw last time, is going to mention this widow. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, but only one got her son back from the dead. Which one was it? A

Sidonian widow.

Not a Samaritan widow. Not a Galilean widow. Not even a Judean widow.

It's a Sidonian widow who gets her son back from the dead. And this, again, is something of a preview of the days of the church, where your racial or hereditary link to Abraham isn't the issue. It is your faith and your obedience.

It doesn't really matter where you're from anymore. There is neither Jew nor Greek. Well, there's a lot going on in these passages.

But let's turn our attention to Elijah as a symbol. What is the mission of Elijah? Why these signs? Why these three public challenges? Why is he the seventh sign to the glory of the kingdom? What is the purpose of it? What is the purpose of it? Well, turn to the last page of the Old Testament. Turn to Malachi 4. Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly, will be stubble.

And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts. What's going to happen to them in that day? What's going to happen to them in that day? They're going to be burned up, says the Lord of hosts. We'll leave them neither root nor branch.

If a plant is burned up, and it has no more root and no more branch, how alive and present and existent is that plant? It's not. Neither root nor branch. So, to you who fear my name, if you are one who marks important things in your Bible, mark that, underline it.

Verse 2, But to you who fear my name, this is a condition. This isn't for everyone. This doesn't apply to everyone.

To you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings. Now, what's brighter and hotter? A fire or the sun? It's the sun, right? So, the day burning like an oven, the wicked are going to be burnt like stubble by this oven fire. And they'll be neither root nor branch.

They'll be utterly and totally consumed. But, to you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings, and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You're going to have the kind of heat and light that is not an oven fire of judgment that consumes wood, hay and stubble.

This is going to be the sunshine that warms, that encourages growth and productivity and health. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet. They're ashes.

You're not trampling branches. You're not trampling roots. You're not trampling anything that exists in its former configuration, its earlier form.

It's just remnants. It's the memory of what used to be. On the day that I do this, says the Lord

of hosts, this is true to you who fear my name.

Now, in Israel, does everyone fear his name? There will only be certain ones that the sun will warm, who will grow fat like stall-fed calves, who will trample the wicked. There are others who will not. To those who fear my name, this promise is given.

It's critically important when it comes to Elijah. You say, what? What's the sun of righteousness and wings and all that and ashes trampled? What's that got to do with Elijah? Remember the law of Moses, my servant. Who are the two guys on the Mount of Transfiguration? Who's up there with the Lord Jesus and Peter, James, and John? It's Moses and Elijah.

Who's mentioned right here in the space of three verses? Remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb. What mountain is it that Elijah's going to run to, powered by those two cake breakfasts? Horeb. The law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, statutes and judgments.

Look, I will send you Elijah the prophet. They're mentioned in adjacent verses. They go to the same mountain.

They encounter the same God in a very similar way, as we will see. I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Now, what is the great and dreadful day of the Lord? The day of the Lord, is it a day of blessing and restoration, or is it a day of judgment? It is the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Now, this plays into your view of, let's say, for example, who the two witnesses are in Revelation. Because their ministry lasts 1,260 days, which is three and a half years, which half of the 70th week of Daniel do those two witnesses occupy, and during which do they prophesy? And what is the nature of their ministry? Do they raise people from the dead? Do they call people to repentance? Do they demonstrate the power of God with a view toward turning people? What does it say here? He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Otherwise, this lest here is the same kind of lest that you find over there where it says, seeing they see and do not perceive, hearing they will hear and not understand.

The heart of this people has grown callous. Otherwise, it says lest, I turn, lest they turn and I heal them. It's otherwise.

If it weren't that way, otherwise I would turn. Same thing here. Otherwise, if the hearts don't turn, Elijah's function is to do what? What's Elijah's ministry? To turn hearts.

Otherwise, I will come and strike the land. Scratch out earth. Had this discussion about the difference between earth and land when it comes to the flood and several other things in Scripture.

This is the land. I will smite the land with a curse. Not the earth.

The earth's already cursed. The earth's been cursed ever since the fall. Adam and Eve exiting stage left of the garden.

And it literally was stage left. They had to go east of Eden. They had to go out.

Lest I come and strike the land with a curse. The fate of the whole earth doesn't depend on what Israel chooses. The fate of the land of Israel depends on what Israel chooses.

And if their hearts do not turn, the land is smitten with a curse. Now, just as sort of a side note, the two witnesses do seem to identify broadly with Moses and Elijah because they can shut up the heavens and there is no rain, which harks back to Elijah. They can call down fire from heaven, which sort of harks back to Moses.

However, however, it is the last half of the tribulation in which those two witnesses perform. It is the great and terrible day of the Lord during which they function. When does this Elijah come? In verse 5. I will send you Elijah the prophet in the great and terrible day of the Lord, after the great and terrible day of the Lord, before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

This is during the time of opportunity, not the time of judgment. This is Noah pounding a few more pegs and daubing a little more pitch on the ark before God shuts the door, not after. Those two witnesses in Revelation operate after the seals and trumpets and bowls and thunders.

That is when they are operating. And they are slain and they lay in the streets for three days and then are raised and taken up just before the end of the tribulation. That is the mark that the thing is about over.

They haven't been converting people. They've been calling down fire and roasting people. They've been slaying enemies with this fire and judging nations with this withheld rain and so on.

But there is no hint that they are in any sort of repentance-mongering mission at all. So it's an interesting commentary that although they have the powers that God granted to the likes of Moses and Elijah, their ministry seems to be different. What is the Elijah ministry here? To turn hearts.

If the hearts don't turn, then God doesn't say Elijah is going to smite them with a curse. I will smite the land with a curse. Well, here's what's interesting.

And this is a little bit of a side trip, but it's too fascinating to leave out. Turn with me to the book of James. This is another... Well, actually, before we do that, let me just do something real quick here.

Turn to Luke 1. I'm just going to exercise all the pages here. Luke 1. This is the story of the birth of John the Baptist. You know that John the Baptist is identified as Elijah by the Lord Jesus.

But in the story of his birth, look at what the angel is telling Zacharias. In verse 11, the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias saw him troubled, fear falls on him.

The angel says, Don't be afraid. Your prayer is heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son.

You'll call his name John, and you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. Why? Verse 15. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.

He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will turn many to the Lord their God. What is the ministry of Elijah in Malachi 4? To turn the hearts.

Otherwise, a curse comes. He will turn many. He will go before him, verse 17, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Is he to eliminate the enemies that are before the children of Israel? No. He is to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Why Elijah? Out of all of the Old Testament figures that could have been drawn upon, that could have been compared, why is John's ministry compared to that of Elijah? Because that's Elijah's ministry in 1 Kings 17, 18, 19.

It is a call to repentance. It is a call to change of mind. That's what Elijah symbolizes.

When you turn the page, and Luke chapter 1 is a very long chapter, turn down to verse 67. His father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit after his tongue is loosed, and the baby is named, and so on. Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, and so on.

Skip down to verse 74. He's going to grant that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people.

To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the day spring on high has visited us. Light to those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death, guide our feet into the way of peace. This doesn't sound an awful lot like the ministry of the two witnesses in the latter half of the tribulation period, does it? No mention made of any such ministry for those two individuals.

They are more what I would call sons of thunder. They function after the thunders have spoken, and it's all judgment time from those guys. Turn back a gospel to Matthew chapter 17.

Matthew chapter 17. The disciples ask specifically about this Malachi prophecy. Matthew chapter 17.

They have just witnessed the transfiguration. They've seen Moses and Elijah on the mountain. Peter says, let's make three booths.

By the way, speaking of threes, how many times does God speak from heaven during the ministry of the Lord Jesus? How many times is the voice of God heard out of heaven during the ministry of Jesus? Three times. The first one is at His baptism. The second one is here.

And the third one is when the Lord Jesus prays, Father, glorify Thy name. And He says, I both have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. Three times.

But the center one is right here. And why does God speak from heaven? I think part of it is because Peter, the only thing Peter gets right is, it's good for us to be here. And then after that, he kind of falls off the pinnacle.

It is good for us to be here. If you wish, let us make here three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. What's the problem with that? Aside from it's not yet time for God to dwell with man and the booths and all the rest of it, do you detect any sort of problem here? Three booths, three tabernacles, three dwellings.

So on what plane is the Lord Jesus being placed by Peter here? He's even and level with Moses and Elijah, right? There's three little houses. Well, you might as well have three similar crosses. Is Jesus in common with the criminals or not? Even the criminal says he doesn't deserve to be here.

Does Jesus deserve equal billing with Moses and Elijah, the way Peter gives it here? So what happens when God speaks out of heaven? While He was still speaking, He says, Lord, you, Moses, and Elijah, three little outhouses right here. A bright cloud overshadowed them, and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Hear Him.

They fell on their faces and greatly afraid. And look at verse 8. When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. It's not a matter of, well, you can join the panoply of the law and the prophets.

The Lord Jesus is a third revelation on a par with. As soon as the words in the process of them escaping Peter's lips, God in heaven interrupts him and says, This is my Son. This isn't another prophet.

This isn't another great leader in Israel. This is my Son. Listen to Him.

His glory makes the other two disappear. It's another three, by the way. Three times the Lord speaks.

Three individuals up there, but the Lord Jesus sums up and encompasses and subsumes the others. The brightness of His glory, the fact of His presence, the other two disappear at the

word of the Lord. Anyway, after that, they're coming down from the mountain.

Verse 9. Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead. Point of application. Just because you know a thing doesn't mean it's time to speak a thing.

I say again, Just because you know a thing doesn't mean it is the proper time to speak that thing. We have opportunities to speak the truth to one another in love, but there is an important level of discretion, of self-control, of restraint, of sensitivity, of prayer. It will be given to you in that hour what you should say.

If it's not given to you, don't come up with something on your own. Don't extemporize. Don't invent.

Don't fill the gap. Sometimes the reason we can't think of anything to say is we're not supposed to say anything. Jesus says, You've seen things.

Do not speak of them. Now, who would they first speak of them to? How about the other nine disciples? Jesus says, He doesn't say, Tell no one, except... He says, Tell no one. That means, Peter, don't tell Andrew.

That means, Don't tell James the Less, or Simon Zelotes, or Nathaniel, or Matthew, or any of the others down there. Until the Son of Man is risen from the dead. You can tell them then.

You've got to tuck it away. His disciples asked him, saying, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Of course, the scribes said that because they read Malachi chapter 4. Jesus answered and said to them, Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. Or, Elijah comes first and restores all things.

But I say to you that Elijah has come already. So, what Jesus affirms isn't so much a prediction that Elijah will come. Notice this is sort of a present tense construction here.

And this is when you say, You know, When you build a house, the foundation comes first, then the walls, then the roof. Or, now the walls, now the roof. And the construction is taken out of time.

This isn't necessarily a proof that Elijah is still coming in the future. In fact, I would argue that Elijah has come, as Jesus says. And there are no more Elijahs.

There's not going to be an Elijah. And there's a deep study you can do based on imminency. But nowhere in Matthew 24, what will be the signs of the coming of the Son of Man and so on.

And he doesn't say, Well, watch for Elijah, because he's going to come and start preparing the way. Folks, Elijah has come. It was John the Baptist, and he turned some hearts, just as the angel predicted to his father Zechariah, he will turn the hearts of many.

But that many was not enough. There weren't ten righteous left in Sodom. And because of the rejection of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, beginning at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus began to tell his disciples that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of men, suffer and die, and be raised the third day, and he no longer preached openly, and he began preparing for the cross, it was clear that the second half of that prophecy at the end of Malachi was coming to pass.

Their hearts did not turn. And God said, When the hearts don't turn, I will smite the land with a curse. What is that curse? It was fulfilled in 70 AD, and the land has been under a curse ever since.

And Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. That's this age. And until this age is fulfilled, and the rapture takes place, the land of Israel is under a curse.

God has smitten it with a curse. The nation is under a curse. And what exists over there as Israel today isn't God's Israel.

It's a secular state. It is a-religious. It is not dedicated to the things of God.

It doesn't have, although there are individuals who love God, there are Messianic Jews, there are people who practice Judaism and so on as a cultural religion, but it is not the Israel of God. That land is under a curse. Elijah came.

How many Elijahs are there? How many would you expect? How many Elijahs would you think there would be? Either three or seven, right? I'm going with three. There are three Elijahs. There are three men in Scripture associated with the spirit and power of Elijah.

Exactly three. Elijah himself, Elisha, who receives a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, and John the Baptist, who specifically comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. If you will receive it, Jesus said, this is Elijah.

This is Matthew 11, 14. If you will receive it, what did Malachi say to you? Remember the condition? If you're not the wicked, to you others, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings, and to you, I will send Elijah to turn the hearts. And that's the key.

To you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall arise. To you who fear my name, remember the law of Moses. Behold, to you, I will send Elijah the prophet.

And those who feared his name were the ones like Peter and John, who were down there by the Jordan, listening to Elijah, their hearts turned, and when the Lord Jesus came, the son of righteousness rose with healing in his wings. And to them, what happens? They are translated, as it were, into the church age. They are delivered from the curse that is going to smite Israel, and under which that nation has labored ever since they put Christ on the cross.

And it will continue to and through the tribulation period and the 70th week of Daniel and that final time of judgment. And then, he cometh with clouds. So, there have been three Elijahs.

Elijah Senior, Elijah Junior, Elisha, and that last great prophet of man born of woman, none greater than John, Jesus said. He came in the spirit and the power of Elijah. He who has ears to hear, Jesus said in Matthew 11, 15, let him hear.

If you will receive it, he is the one. This is in keeping with the threes that we've seen throughout the life of Elijah. And you have the sign given and what is its purpose? What is the signature mission of Elijah? To turn hearts.

We see this with Elijah, we see it with Elisha, and we see it with John the Baptist. Now, the passage that we're going to look at next time is in the book of James. Oddly, and seemingly out of context, Elijah is mentioned by James.

But this is a clue, what we have just studied now is a clue to understanding what has been a very difficult passage to understand in the book of James. And we'll see that next time you can look at it in chapter 5 of James for next time. See if you can anticipate where this is going.

But, Elijah is mentioned in 5.17 as an example. Think about that example. Think about the ministry of Elijah as we have reviewed it.

Think about the example that James cites. And ask yourself, there is a real blatant question that this mentioned by James raises. So, that's your homework assignment.

See if you can see if you come to the same question that I have in James 5.17 and 18 as to the nature of this example that James adduces in this context. And we'll cover it next time as we continue our study of Elijah in the days of the kings and prophets of Israel. But we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the constant reminders we have of the importance of our minds being changed, of responding to the call for change of mind, the importance of the renewing of our minds through the study of your word, through taking in that bread from heaven under the ministry of your Holy Spirit that sustains us, that empowers us, that guides us, that gives us a sense of the proper time and the proper place, the proper words, the proper actions, those things that reflect your plan and purpose in the days of our flesh and in the days that you have allocated to us in this life. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister these things to our hearts in a way that gives us encouragement and motivation so that we can live the time that remains to us as a reflection of your glory, as a credit to the Lord Jesus Christ who purchased us, who redeemed us, who has taken us to himself and he is the one that we now represent on this earth. We pray that we can be fitting representatives, that our light will shine before men, they will see us and glorify you.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.