

Kings and Prophets 13-10-11a

This is Friday, the 11th of October, 2013. We're prosecuting our study of Kings and Prophets. And we will pick up tonight where we left off last time, looking at something of the symbolic value of the events recorded about both Elijah and Elisha.

I've had some good questions in discussion and via email this past week, which I'll try to address in the course of it. And by the way, if anybody has emailed me this past week and I didn't answer, I apologize. As most of you know, Ken is gone, Patty is gone, and so at work I'm doing three people's jobs beyond the two or three hats that I already wear down there.

So I've been a little bit like a mummy, pressed for time. And so I apologize. If I missed anybody's email I'll try to... Yes, now you know how I feel.

Anyway, we'll begin our study here momentarily. Let's pause and go to the Lord in prayer. Father, how gracious you are to us.

You provide for us. You watch over us and protect us. You orchestrate the circumstances and events of our lives for our benefit and for our blessing to teach us, to encourage us to grow and to express faith and to make progress in your plan and purpose.

We thank you for this portion of your word. We look at tonight and we pray that as we try to understand it and find its value for ourselves individually and for us as a group, that God the Holy Spirit will superintend and will enable and empower both the presentation and the reception of it. May each one of us be motivated and encouraged in the area of the good works that you have foreordained that we should walk in them.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We have come to the artificial dividing line between first and second kings, as you know, in the Hebrew Bible.

It is one book. But it sort of divides conveniently here with the transition from Elijah to Elisha. We looked last time at chapter 2 of second kings and as it says in your New King James at the beginning of chapter 2, at least if yours is like mine, Elijah ascends to heaven.

And I have suggested that maybe that was just the first heaven and he got some frequent flyer miles there as he was transported to another location something which seems to have been an occurrence in the past. The sons of the prophets refer to this and are convinced that he is on some nearby hilltop or mountain and they will spend three days looking. But we have seen this constant reference back to numbers as we reviewed the career of Elijah and why it is that he seems to be retired at this point.

With his flight from Jezebel, his trip to Mount Horeb back in first kings chapter 19, we saw for example that after receiving two meals from the attending angel in Mount Horeb, Elijah in the first part of that chapter, verse 8, he arose and ate and drank and he went in the strength of

that food 40 days and 40 nights as far as Horeb the mountain of God. And as soon as you see 40 days and 40 nights you think, boy that is sure a familiar number. Why would it come out, it wasn't 36 days and a night extra, it wasn't 21 days, it was 40 days and 40 nights.

Well it is probably time for us to review, we have covered these things a time or two before, but specifically looking at the repetition of some of these numbers and their significance because we have seen the number 3 both implicit in the text, the number of public miracles and the number of private signs that are associated with Elijah and Elizabeth pointed out last week I made some mention that the fiery chariot episode was a third in one of those sets and of course it isn't the rain being withheld was number one of the public miracles, Mount Carmel was number two and then the end of the drought and the rainfall was the third and then the three private episodes we have seen with his sustenance at the Brook Cherith, the flower and oil for the widow and then the raising of the widow's son are the three private ones. So if you look at the chariot there that would maybe be the number 7 which is also kind of an elegant summary. But let's take a look at the number 40 in the Bible.

If I were to say everybody close your books, get out a post-it note and write one word that you associate with the number 40, what would it be? Testing? We normally associate it with testing? I have got a list of words that I associate with testing. I have got a list that I haven't even counted of places where the number 40 occurs in Scripture, probably 30 odd occasions. So let's take a look at those and as we look at them we want to recognize that there is indeed the notion of testing but there is something beyond that and I find it particularly helpful to think a little bit further.

Suppose you are facing a test. What is the response? How do we meet a test? What are we supposed to do in testing? We meet it with panic. We meet it with fear.

We meet it with chaotic efforts in all directions. We just vibrate quicker and quicker and then explode. What do we do in a time of testing? We are supposed to express faith, to trust.

Well, think a step beyond that. You are in a challenge and you are supposed to have faith. Have faith brother.

Count it all joy when you fall into various trials. What do we trust? What is the substance? What is the object of that faith? God personally and in general of course but specifically what are we supposed to claim by faith? It is the Word of God and in many cases it is the explicit promises of God. What God has said He will do.

He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. The testing of your faith produces patience. Let patience have its perfect work in you.

My God shall supply your needs. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.

Run and not be weary. Walk and not faint. These are expressions of truth in the Bible and they

function as promises to us.

Do they not? So let's see if when we find these instances of the number 40, if beyond testing we find this notion of promises claimed and fulfilled. Let's just start where you would expect us to start in the book of Genesis. Turn to chapter 7. You know what is happening here.

Genesis 7-9 famously deals with Noah and the flood right after the perhaps even more famous Genesis 6. Genesis 7 verse 13 on the very same, well actually let's begin up in verse 10. It came to pass after seven days, this is when the animals, Noah and his sons, his wife, his sons' wives went into the ark. He is 600 years of age.

You find this up in verses 6 and 7. The clean animals and the unclean animals two by two went into the ark, male and female as God commanded. Verse 10. It came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth in the 600th year of Noah's life.

In the second month, the 17th day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened and the rain was on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights. This is our first great archetypal reference to that period of time, 40 days and 40 nights. Now would there be any promise of God in view being claimed by Noah and his family during this time? Is God faithful to Noah, Ham, Shem and Japheth and the four wives? Of course he is.

The Lord said to Noah at the beginning of that chapter, come into the ark you and all your household because I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you the animals for after seven more days, verse 4, I will cause it to rain on the earth 40 days and 40 nights and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made. Verse 5, Noah being obedient did what the Lord commanded and in chapter 8, verse 1, God remembered Noah.

God remembered Noah. God made a wind to pass over the earth and the waters subsided. The waters prevailed if you look at the last verse of chapter 7, the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

That's a good long time. We know that Noah ends up being in the ark a total of about 14 months. How many months is 150 days? How many 30 day months is that? It's five months but he's in there a total of 14 months, right? So you've got nine months and five months specifically as a sort of a division point there.

But God remembered Noah and every living thing, all the animals that were with him in the ark. God caused a wind to pass over the earth, the waters were divided, fountains of the deep, windows of heaven were stopped, the rain from heaven was restrained and the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the 150 days the waters decreased then the ark rested in the seventh month, 17th day of the month on the mountains of Ararat.

The rain began as you may recall in the second month on the 17th day of the month and exactly

five months later they recede and the ark touches down but he doesn't just hop out and start canoeing around looking for artifacts or souvenirs. They're going to be there quite a bit longer. It's very interesting to me that deliverance from the judgment is effected and accomplished at this point but there is a delay before he can really enjoy its benefits.

But that's our first occasion and the period of 40 days and 49 is mentioned twice there in chapter 7. The next instance we have of the number 40 denoting a period of time is going to be in the next book of the Bible, Exodus. If you turn to chapter 16. But so far we can say we're battling one for one on there being trust in God and His promise of provision and preservation.

Noah is a pretty archetypal, if I can use that word, archetypal example of God's provision. So we go to Exodus chapter 16 verse 35 and we discover here early on that the children of Israel ate manna 40 years until they came to an inhabited land. They ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

So from the time they leave Egypt until the time they come to the border of the land of Canaan where this is very familiar to us, the 40 years of quote unquote wandering. I have a little problem with the word wandering because they didn't wander. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire led them.

I wouldn't call that wandering if you're camping when God says camp and getting up and moving when God says move. That doesn't sound like wandering to me but sojourning might be a better term for it. But that's 40 days and 40 nights.

And specifically what happened during that time in Exodus 16 verse 35. What is the focus here? What showed up 5 days a week, 6 days a week for the Israelites? God promised them provision and it appeared. 6 days out of 7 there was manna for them to gather.

They gathered it. It sustained them according to God's decree, God's promise. We'll have to speed up here a little bit to get through these.

Exodus chapter 24 verse 18. If you're reasonably familiar with the geography of Exodus you know that this is Mount Sinai. Chapter 24 verse 18.

The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. Moses went up into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. Moses was on the mountain.

How long? 40 days and 40 nights. What comes down from that mountain? These are the covenant promises of God, the commandments of God. Do these and you shall live.

These are direct expressions of truth from God designed to be the object of faith and obedience on the part of the Israelites. Turn over about 10 chapters to Exodus 34. We once again are going to find Moses in a mountaintop scenario to Exodus 34.

The Lord said to Moses, I'm going to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones that you smashed. I will write on these tables the words which were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself to me there on the top of the mountain.

By the way, one of the sort of blatantly obvious lessons you can learn from Moses' example in this regard is just because you're mad at people doesn't mean you can break God's law. You know, it pretty much goes without saying. But skip down to verse 28 and I'm starting at 27.

The Lord said to Moses, write these words for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. So he was there with the Lord again, I might add, forty days and forty nights. Neither ate bread nor drank water.

Why? Who else do we know that didn't need to eat bread or drink water for forty days and forty nights? This would be our prophet. This is Elijah. He's very closely identified with Moses in this regard at this point in this passage.

He wrote the tablets of the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. The ten words, literally. If you think about the life of Moses, how long was he in Egypt being raised and living in the palace of Pharaoh? How many years was he there before he departed in haste, having slain the taskmaster? Forty years.

How long was he in Midian? Forty years. How long did he live after he returned from Midian, went to the land, led the children of Israel out and was their leader all the way to the point that they reached the border of the land? Forty years. His life divides very neatly and exactly into three forty year periods.

Once Joshua takes over, if you go to Numbers chapter 13 verse 25, in fact this is actually before that, Numbers chapter 13, the Lord spoke to Moses, send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I'm giving to the children of Israel. So verse 21, they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehov, near the entrance of Hamath. They went up through the south and came to Hebron, Ahim, Sheshai, and Talmi.

The descendants of Anak were there. Hebron was built seven years before Zoan and Egypt. They came to the valley of Eshkol, there cut down a branch with a cluster of grapes.

They carried between two of them on a pole. They brought pomegranates and figs. It was called the valley of Eshkol because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there.

And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. Forty days. Are we going to trust God to give us this good land flowing with milk and honey, with these giant clusters of grapes and these abundant figs and so on? Are we going to see and seize by faith the promise of God? Are we going to trust God with regard to this land? They spied it out for forty days.

They were not able to trust God for that provision, for that fulfillment. So what happened? Look

at the next chapter, Numbers chapter 14, verses 33 and 34, Your son shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and bear the brunt of your faithlessness in fidelity. Fidelity is faithlessness, right? Semper fidelis, always faithful, the Marine Corps motto.

In fidelity is lack of faithfulness. Did not trust God's promise. Did not claim His provision and His presence.

So your carcasses will be consumed in the wilderness according to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days. For each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know my rejection. You will experience my rejection.

There is quite an issue made here out of the failure to claim and believe God's promise of deliverance and victory and possession. The turnover, this is an interesting one, one you may not have, I don't think I remembered this, mainly because we haven't done Deuteronomy verse by verse. Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 25.

If there is a dispute between men, Deuteronomy 25, one, if there is a dispute between men and they come to court, the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence. There is no long term incarceration.

There is no great system of appeal. People don't sit on public provision for months and years awaiting the final disposition of their case. If he is found guilty, he lays down and he is beaten in the presence of the judge, and then he is all done.

This is a wonderful remedy to expenditures for jails and prisons and correctional systems and all of that. Just lay him down, beat him, turn him loose. Forty blows he may give him, no more, lest he should exceed this, and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight.

Forty blows doesn't humiliate him, but more than that, he is going to be greatly humbled in your sight. You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. One of these days we will be able to come back and look at the odd seeming non-sequiturs in various parts of Scripture, and that is one of the best right there.

Talk about the need for a big paragraph marker, you need one right there. But forty blows, and remember the Apostle Paul is notable for having received that punishment on a number of occasions. Judges chapter 3, you will recall that there was a departure from observance of God's law in the land.

Verse 7, in the times of Othniel, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God. They served Baals and Asherahs.

The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. He sold them into the hands of Cushon Rishathayim, king of Mesopotamia. The children of Israel served Cushon Rishathayim eight

years.

When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel who delivered them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel. He went out to war and the Lord delivered Cushon Rishathayim, king of Mesopotamia, into the hand.

His hand prevailed over Cushon Rishathayim. The land had rest for 40 years. You had an eight-year subservience, you had a deliverance, and then there is a 40-year period of rest.

What should they be doing? Now that we've kind of got this connection made, what do you think would be a good thing to do during this 40-year period to avoid a repetition in this endless gilgal rolling cycle of up and down, blessing and judgment, blessing and judgment? How could they break that cycle right here? What do you do during 40 years? What do you do when you see the number 40? Trust. Meet the challenges. Why would people get upset and start following the Baals and the Asherahs and departing from God? They felt some pressure, didn't they? They didn't see things going quite the way they wanted to, so they started looking for other solutions.

They didn't feel that God was the answer. They weren't satisfied with the provision of God and they began looking elsewhere. That's what we've got to avoid looking at this example.

You find the same idea again in Judges 5.31. You find it again in Judges 8.28. So your three Judges passages, 3.11, 5.31, and 8.28, there is pressure, there is failure, there is a cry to God, there is deliverance, and then the land has rest for 40 years. 3.11, 5.31, 8.28 in Judges. Then pretty soon you have a judge, Abdon in Judges 12.14, and he has 40 sons.

That's Judges 12.14. Shortly thereafter in Judges 13.1, instead of a short period of oppression, now God puts them under the power of an enemy for 40 years. Judges 13.14 and verse 1. So this is not just testing, this is a challenge. It is a challenge to faith.

And this is the way we ought to look at testing. We tend to look at testing as a problem when what we ought to look at it, the way we should look at it, is as a potential, as an opportunity. When you see something and you say, wow, that's a problem, we want to get one step beyond that.

If this is a test, it's a potential, it's an opportunity. Here's a chance to claim the promises of God. This is how we accrue righteousness.

This is how we lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven, righteousness by faith. It's a citizenship privilege. And we don't do it in prosperity, we do it in adversity.

We do it in a time of testing. Judges 13.1, again the children of Israel did evil, the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years. Learn to trust, O Israel.

1 Samuel 4.18, how long did old Eli judge Israel, would you guess? 1 Samuel 4.18, Eli's time of oversight was 40 years. He fell off his seat backward, his neck was broken and he died. He was old and heavy and that was at the end of 40 years.

Is Eli going out with a victory cry or with a whimper, with a thud? No, he's kind of going out with a, you know, that's not a triumphant exit. That's not a great, you know, way to end your career. 1 Samuel chapter 17, and again if you're, you know, some of these things we ought to have sort of a general sketch of the outline of a book.

We've been through 1 Samuel twice, at least I have. And you know in 17 this is where the story of David really picks up, David and Goliath and he really dominates the latter half of this book. But in chapter 17 verse 16, how long did Goliath taunt Israel? How long was Israel challenged to trust God for a victory against this single opponent? Forty days.

Forty days. Our premise here is that 40 is not just the number of days. 40 is not just the number of days.

It's the number of days of faith. Sometimes people achieve it, sometimes they don't. Very quickly now, Saul had an opportunity to claim the same promises, God gave him the same promises that he's eventually going to give David.

If you are faithful, if you rule well, if you're obedient I will establish your house and you'll have a dynasty after you. How long did Saul rule Israel? This is a little tricky. Actually, I have to get this out of the New Testament.

In Acts 13.21, Saul reigned for 40 years. Acts 13.21, the reign of Saul, the first king of Israel, 40 years. Ish-bosheth, I don't know if it's significant or not, but when Ish-bosheth tried to come to the throne and reign in 2 Samuel 2, he was 40 years of age.

But his family, and he in particular had already demonstrated that he had no faith, wasn't interested in relationship with God or the promises of God, tried to implement the promise without faith, tried to be a dynasty of Saul without that necessary condition being met of trusting God, and the dynasty, of course, does not continue. He only reigns for an extremely short time. And is replaced by God's man, God's anointed, King David.

How long does David reign over Israel? 2 Samuel 5.4, 1 Kings 2.11, tells us David reigned 40 years. Well, we're about halfway through our biblical allusions to the number 40. Let's pause here and take our break.

If this was the only class you had a chance to hear, if you have to leave during the break or only get a chance to listen to half of the night's study, what would the conclusion be? Are any of us not tested? Do any of us cruise through life on flowery beds of ease? I see a hand, I see that hand. Congratulations. For the rest of us, what should the response be? It's not just testing.

It is required of us to be faithful. So if we're going to be faithful, what do we aim our faith at?

We look to the promises of God. And sometimes that's the reason God's promises are so simple and so straightforward and stated so clearly in Scripture.

We can't think up a detailed doctrinal study. We can't remember the substance or even the gist sometimes of Bible classes we've heard in the past. What comes to our minds and our hearts under the ministry of the Holy Spirit when we're really under the gun and under pressure? It's God's promises.

So familiarity with those promises, reviewing them from time to time, praying in the illumination of those promises is a good thing. This is the first weapon in our arsenal. It's the first tool in our toolbox.

What are the promises of God that pertain? What are the promises that apply? What should I be claiming and resting in and affirming in my mind and my heart in this time of trial? It's the promises of God. That's what the number 40 suggests to us. Let's pause here and take our break.