

Kings and Prophets 13-10-18a

This is Friday, the 18th of October, 2013. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets. We're looking at this transition from Elijah to Elisha.

We have some fascinating things to look at tonight in that regard. I think it will shed significant light on why Elisha is presented the way he is in this portion of the Scriptures. Let's take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to the Lord by spending a moment in prayer.

Father, how grateful we are for this time to refresh our souls at the oasis of your Word, to find the truth and the insight that your Holy Spirit provides to us as he illuminates these truths for us. We pray that as we look at them together that they will be meaningful, they will be motivating to us, and that each of us will find pertinent and applicable truth in this passage, that it will transform us, that it will encourage us to continue walking in the narrow road, heading for the straight gate that leads to life. We know that this reflects your glory and the glory of our Savior.

We pray these things in his name. Amen. I often mine the work of saints gone by.

Sometimes they are overlooked, particularly in this generation where we have such an information glut. There's been so many quality works that have been published in the last few decades, the last 50 years, and yet I find myself more and more being impressed with what was done by godly men of old. In the days when the pace of life was slower, there was more time to pause and reflect.

They didn't have the internet, didn't necessarily even have access to great libraries of works, and it left them with the scriptures and with the Holy Spirit and their request to God that it would be given, that it would be opened, that they would find God's truth. I think in so many cases these great gray heads of the faith gone by really discovered truths that are difficult for us to access and to capture because we're just hurtling along at such a pace and we're fire-hosed with so much information and we have the need to press and to move and to get on with it. There are certain things that only come with time.

It's like a fine wine maturing, it's like an aged cheese, it's like furniture that doesn't look new anymore because it has seasoned, it's like fine musical instruments made of wood. Time matures them and gives them a quality that you just can't attain any other way. And I think sometimes our time spent in reflection and in meditation on the things of God is of that same quality where the more you spend, the better grip we get, the more firm grasp, the deeper understanding and appreciation we gain.

And it isn't something you can just get if somebody hands you a Bible-sized page of bullet notes and you say, Oh yeah, great. We need to steep, we need to simmer, we need to really spend that time in gazing at the truth of God as it is revealed. There was a gentleman born in England

back in 1886.

I have read several of his books and sometimes I want to throw my arms around him and hug him. Other times I want to throw my arms around him and squeeze the life out of him because he was a very committed dyed-in-the-wool Calvinist. And some of his most well-known works are in defense of absolute iron-clad five-point Calvinism.

And I just want to grab him and shake him sometimes. But in other areas, and I will say he is one of the ablest proponents of that view because he was a man of God and a man of the book. And he loved the Lord.

Wonderful guy. He just got that part of theology wrong. And I say this, he refused to go to a seminary such as the one I attended because he felt that they taught dangerous errors there.

So the perception is mutual that there is theological error on one side or the other. However, having said all of that, Arthur W. Pink had a lot of wonderful insights in other areas where he wasn't hemmed in. His vision wasn't constrained by the limits of that Calvinistic persuasion.

And he spent some time looking at the relationship of Elijah to Elisha. And I came across that work. I have several of his books.

I have actually used him as a foil in the construction of a number of my arguments against the Reformed theology and so on. Because he is one of its most profoundly diligent defenders and exponents. So, you know, go with the best.

Answer the arguments of the best. But he's largely, not entirely, but largely free of constraints when it comes to Elijah and Elisha. Although you will find, for example, where does Elijah find Elisha? How do they meet? On the day that Elijah throws his mantle on Elisha, what's going on? Elijah is passing by and Elisha is plowing.

Remember the 12 yoke of oxen? He throws his mantle over him. Well, this is the irresistible call in the mind of someone like Arthur Pink. See, he wasn't in there studying.

He wasn't on his knees in prayer. He wasn't offering his sacrifice. He wasn't importuning the throne of grace to give him a mission.

He was out there plowing and here comes the prophet, throws his mantle on him. Hey, now you're a prophet. It's the overruling will of God.

So you can see the way that might work for somebody that's already got that persuasion. But I forgive him because he does such a beautiful job in other areas of this passage. And I want to credit him because some of what I'm presenting tonight I learned and came to appreciate because Arthur Pink observed it first.

And he has some wonderful observations. And I am freely drawing upon the good work that he did on this as well as my own and that of others. This is always the way when you bring

together everything you can find and everything you can learn and everything you can observe in a Bible class.

It's always a synthesis. All of us in recent days stand on the shoulders of others. And sometimes when I think it's particularly noteworthy, I'll tell you people that are worth going back.

If you can find Arthur Pink on Elijah and Elisha, read it. It's wonderful. And there's more detail there than what I'm going to present tonight.

But I want to assure you that his insights in this are really good for the most part. Just nose out the straw, go for the good hay, the good grain that's in there. The occasional lapse into Calvinistic bombast can be forgiven for the sake of the other.

But I was gratified to see, because I didn't come to this until after I'd already done several of our classes. In fact, I didn't really read it until today. But he drew many of the same conclusions that we did in looking at the transition between Elijah and Elisha and a comparison of the two.

And I wanted to read you something because, honestly, hand to the sky, I had no idea Arthur Pink had written anything. I didn't see it until today. But I was struck because he makes the very same point that we have observed in recent weeks.

And let me just start. This is his introduction. He says, What's he saying here? What do we have in the Bible for Elisha? Do we have a lot of biography? Do we have a lot of background? What do we have? That which occupies the central and dominant place in the scriptural record of Elisha are the miracles performed by and connected with him.

Performed by and connected with. That solves the problem I mentioned last week of how do you count the miracles? If he delivers a prophecy, is that a miracle? If he's standing there when God does a thing, is that a miracle? Well, performed by or connected with him. Far more miracles were wrought by Elisha or were granted in answer to his prayers than by any other of the Old Testament prophets.

In fact, the narrative of his history consists of little else than a record of supernatural acts and events. That's pretty much all we have of Elisha. Nor need this at all surprise us, though it is strange that so few seem to grasp the implication and significance of the same.

Now, before we even go any further with Pink, what did we conclude about this flurry of miracles in the Northern Kingdom? Why was God performing miracles up north and not down in the south? What was our conclusion? They were faithless. They were in a state of apostasy, apathy at best, outright rebellion and idolatry at worst. Led by kings who promoted and encouraged and fostered that.

And so, did God just send teaching prophets up there? Well, let me just teach the word of God. God confronted them with miracles, didn't he? You've got the king with his withered arm, with his broken altar. You've got miraculous interventions taking mountaintops off, creating

droughts and so on.

It is to confront, it is to use supernatural events to wake people up and to force them to a decision point. Because the simple truth of the word of God doesn't impress them, doesn't make a dent. So, Pink says it shouldn't surprise us that Elisha's ministry is presented to us in the scripture almost entirely in connection with supernatural miraculous events.

Why? The character of Elisha's mission and ministry was in thorough keeping with Israel's condition at that time. The very fact that these miracles were needed by them indicates the state into which they had fallen. It just makes me so happy to see somebody make this connection.

And Arthur Pink definitely does. It indicates the state into which they had fallen. Idolatry had held sway for so long that the true and living God was no longer known by the nation.

Here and there were individuals who believed in and owned the Lord, but the masses were worshippers of idols. Therefore, by means of drastic interpositions, by awe-inspiring displays of His power, by supernatural manifestations of His justice and mercy alike, God forced even the skeptical to recognize His existence and subscribe to His supremacy. What do they say after the Mount Carmel altar disappears? The Lord, He is God.

The Lord, He is God. Now, this attestation, this admission, this testimony doesn't serve as a harbinger of a great national revival, does it? It isn't the beginning of a sea change in attitude. In fact, you wonder if those people are somewhat like Pharaoh or like others who have a temporary admission, a temporary recognition, but they very soon return to their old ways.

There is a time coming when every eye will see Him, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. But that doesn't mean that they are all heartfelt, committed, faithful, growing believers at that point. They admit it.

Every knee will bow. But many of those knees are going to be bending because of the pressure and the weight of the presence of Jesus Christ, not from an inner persuasion and an inner commitment, but from an external, there is no other thing to do but acknowledge, yes. But there will be people who will be grinding their teeth and chafing even as they bow the knee, even as they make that admission.

Well, Pink makes an interesting point. It's something I had not thought of in his next paragraph. He says, talking about what it is to be a prophet, why did God commission prophets at all? It's fitting here that we make a few remarks about the reason and meaning of miracles.

The two, the prophetic office and miraculous interventions, partake of much the same nature, for prophecy is really an oral miracle. Prophecy is really an oral miracle, which explains why some of these prophecies and their fulfillments are listed in the enumeration of what Elijah and Elisha did. That's why you have varying numbers of miracles because some people count the prophecies and they really are.

A prophecy is an oral miracle. It is a supernatural revelation through God's prophet of divine intention, divine judgment, divine action that is impending. While miracles are virtually prophecies, forth-tellings of God in action.

We've seen this in our miracle series, haven't we, when we looked at the miracles of Jesus Christ, when we looked at the meaning and emphasis of these miracles performed in the presence of or in connection with Elijah. They communicate, don't they? They are symbolic attestations. They communicate specific truths.

So prophecies are oral miracles and miracles are action prophecies, action communications. They are acting out. They communicate things.

And this, I would put this on a refrigerator magnet or a coffee cup. It's such a great thing that Arthur Pink says here. And it's such a great affirmation of the things that you and I have learned together over the course of time.

God only sends forth one of his prophets in a time of marked declension and departure of his people from himself. You only get the prophets in a time of decline. Who is the prophet, capital P, that Moses prophesied? There will come a prophet like unto me.

It's the Lord Jesus, right? He's the ultimate prophet. He is the greatest in the summation of man born of woman. Nobody achieved the heights of John the Baptist.

But he said, I'm not worthy to mess with the sandals of the one that is coming after me. John was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. And he said, he must increase, I must decrease.

He's the one coming after me. I don't hold a candle to him. He is the greatest prophet.

And if prophets come in a time of decline, what kind of time is the greatest prophet of all going to come in? The time of the greatest of all declines in Israel. Which is why the Lord Jesus ends up on the cross. Instead of on the throne of the Millennial Kingdom.

So it's a wonderful observation. And he states it so succinctly. As God only sends forth one of his prophets any time of marked declension and departure of his people from himself, so miracles were quite unnecessary while the sufficiency of his word was practically recognized.

Recognized in practice. This is why there's nothing miraculous going on down in Judah. You've got a good king sending teachers throughout the land.

And it's quiet growth. It's structural integrity being built. It's foundation being laid.

It's character and faithfulness in practice down there. So you don't have prophets arising and working miracles down there. Which of the patriarchs, the priests, or the kings performed any miracles? How many miracles did Abraham perform? How many miracles did Isaac do? How many miracles did Jacob, in sight, cause, perform? King David, any miracles? I mean, he slew

Goliath, but he wasn't a king.

And that was quite a feat. But it was mainly a feat of courage and faith. Was it miraculous, or was he just a really good shot? And unafraid, able to concentrate, able to focus, able to rely on God to preserve him while he did his job as a soldier.

But as a king, did he do any miracles? Solomon, do any miracles? Which of the patriarchs, the priests, or the kings performed any miracles? How many were wrought during the lengthy reign of Saul, David, or Solomon? Why then were so many wonders done during the ministry of Elijah, and still more so during that of Elisha? The mission and ministry of Elisha, and this is what we're seeing in coming pages in 2 Kings. Mission and ministry of Elisha was the same in character as that which God did in Egypt by the hand of Moses. There, Jehovah was unknown, entirely so by the Egyptians, largely so by the Israelites.

The favored descendants of Abraham had sunk as low as the heathen in whose midst they dwelt. And God, by so many remarkable signs and unmistakable interventions, brought them back to that knowledge of Himself which they had lost. There is either response or reaction to these miracles.

Now, Pink doesn't do this, but I would suggest to you, think about that comparison. God's miraculous intervention in the days of the nine plagues, and then the death of the firstborn, and the deliverance of Israel out of bondage. And His miraculous attestations and testimonials in the days of Elijah and Elisha.

What's the difference? What was the response of the people of Israel when they saw God's miraculous hand at work, judging Egypt and preserving them? What was their response? They moved toward God in a mighty national revival. It creates the nation. These are the people that go to Sinai and say, all the Lord has said we will do.

Now, they've got some stumbling steps along the way. But this is the nation that marches out of Egypt with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Marches across the parted waters of deliverance, baptized with Moses, with the cloud.

There is a response. God is doing equally miraculous things in the days of Elijah and Elisha. What is the response of the people? You've got a remnant.

You've got 7,000 who recognize God, who refuse to bow the knee to Baal. But isn't it interesting? They're characterized not by what they do. They don't march out with a mighty hand.

They don't fight the Amalekites. They don't move into the desert and collect the manna. This 7,000, even the 7,000, what is their claim to fame? Well, we didn't worship Baal.

Not yet. Not yet. Well, not yet.

Don't be jumping ahead. What is the characterization? What does God tell Elijah? I have 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. And up to this point, that's the best you can say about the faithful in the northern kingdom, is they haven't gone into outright idolatry.

So there is a comparison and also a contrast. The last time God intervened at this level of miraculous supernatural activity, there was a tremendous national response in Israel. Now we've got people that are refusing to worship Baal.

But is there a great movement? Is there a groundswell? Do the people rise up and say, We are sick of these kings and these... Do you even have Gideon going and destroying the idol? Do you have them tearing down the high places? Do you have any sort of a grassroots, let's get our nation back to God or let's all migrate down to where there is a nation serving God and we'll go down south. Very tepid response in the northern kingdom to these mighty miraculous actions. This is the reason the nation is not going to survive much longer.

But this is an interesting observation. It informs our understanding of Elijah and then Elisha. By the way, the next time you have a flurry of miracles on this order is when? The Lord Jesus.

You will not see this level of miraculous activity again until the Lord Jesus comes. So who do you have associated with intense concentrated miraculous activity? You have Moses, you have Elijah, and you have the Lord Jesus. The trio on top of the Mount of Transfiguration.

Because God will be glorified. And that is the mountain of glory. And those are the prophets who remind God's people, I will honor those who honor me and those who don't, I will lightly esteem.

And to be lightly esteemed by the Lord means you have no cause to escape judgment. In the context of that statement, I will honor those who honor me. You remember Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who had been given the priestly responsibilities and were abusing them.

And you remember their fate. You remember the fate of the nation in battle and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant. That's what God means when he says, I will lightly esteem.

It's not just an absence of blessing. Well, I really appreciate Pink. And if you can find this discussion of Elijah and Elisha, you will be blessed in reading it.

I will point out just a couple of other things looking at this. We have already noted something that he mentions further down, quite a ways further down. The principal contrast between the two prophets appears in the character of the miracles wrought by and connected with them.

The majority of those performed by Elijah were associated with what? What have we already seen? Judgment, death, and destruction. What happens when you withhold rain for three and a half years? Crops die, animals die, people die. It's harsh.

Drought is responsible for a lot of the suffering in the world today, in third world countries. But

the greater of those attributed to Elisha were works of healing and restoration. What does Elisha do relative to water? He heals the water.

He makes it drinkable. He takes food that can't be eaten, makes it eatable. He is the healer and the restorer.

You have the first prophet Elijah representing judgment and harsh rebuke and confrontation with evil and with rejection of God. You have Elisha coming with restorative life-giving things. However, you also have Elijah dwelling with a widow and raising the widow's son.

Elisha is going to dwell with the widow and raise the widow's son. So there are these close correspondences. And there was never a better subject for comparison contrast, which is a classic assignment you get in English.

Any piece of literature, any author or whatever, they say, well, write a comparison contrast. What is the same and what is different? But where Elijah is a prophet of judgment, Elisha is a prophet of grace. And if the course of the first was fittingly closed by a whirlwind removing him from the scene, a peaceful dove would be the more appropriate emblem of the other, or maybe a bear.

I think he kind of temporarily forgot about the bear. But Elisha commences his mission by a miracle of blessing, healing the death-dealing springs of water. And what immediately followed was the establishing of his authority, the symbol of his extraordinary office.

The work of Elijah was chiefly a protest against evil. The work of Elisha was an almost continuous testimony to the readiness of God to relieve the distressed and respond to the call of need wherever that call came from a contrite and believing heart. But there is still the acts of judgment that will fall, as you see by those mocking teenagers.

Just because God is in grace mode doesn't mean judgment has fallen away. Well, I really like these things by Pink, and I always like it when we find somebody that has come to the Word of God, observed it carefully, thought about it, meditated on it, and has found these treasures that we have seen together over the course of many weeks. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break, but here's the thing.

Which kind of life do you want? Do you want a life where God reveals his confrontational, judgmental side? He is going to have to withdraw provision. He is going to have to stop blessings. He is going to have to put us between a rock and a hard place and pressure us to be the people we are called to be.

Or do you want the southern kingdom of Judah with teachers presenting the Word of God, people together growing in grace, gathering together to face the enemies of God's people and watch the deliverance of God without having to shoot an arrow or raise a sword or lift a shield, watch God confound and confute and rout and eliminate enemies in a great victory by his mighty hand? We make this choice day by day, whether we honor God or whether we give lip

service to God. Do we serve him or do we merely acknowledge him? Are we practicing Christians or are we nominal Christians? We choose because by default the days are evil. And if we do not redeem the time by concentrated, proactive steps, I will set aside time to think about what I learned in Bible class.

I will set aside time for prayer. I will set aside time for undistracted fellowship with the God who saved me. If we don't do that, we are going to be the northern kingdom.

And we are going to find suddenly that we are experiencing epic, climactic episodes of divine judgment, which are designed to turn us, to draw us up short and bring us back. Why be the child that has to be beaten with many stripes to get the message? Why not be the child that God says, I will guide thee with mine eye? That's the kind of child a parent enjoys. That's the kind of person anybody appreciates.

All it takes is a look and they get it. Ah, not supposed to do. No problem, I can change.

I see, I got the message, here I go, changing direction. Or who wants to have to impose discipline and harsh measures to try to get the attention and achieve the persuasion level required for repentance? God is the same way. We want to be those children that He can guide with His eye.

That the voice of the Holy Spirit communicating the truth of God is more than enough. We are grateful, we think about it, it makes sense to us, we turn, we grow. God prunes us, we bear more fruit.

That's what He is looking for. We make that decision. God does not dictate it.

You are not the product of sovereign divine foreordination. We are offered grace. And notice that when Elijah threw the mantle on Elisha, Elisha didn't throw it off.

Elisha didn't say, you know, I've only got a third of the field plowed here, so come back at a more convenient season. And you'll notice that, just as our closing thought here, in 1 Kings 19, verse 19, Elijah departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, son of judgment. He's not the judgment guy, his name's not Shaphat, he's son of judgment.

He's son of Elijah, son of the judgment prophet. He was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen before him and he was with the 12th. I'll talk about that more after the break.

I just want to make one point here. Elijah throws his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, please let me kiss my father and my mother and then I will follow you.

This is freedom of thought. This is formulating a plan and deciding what priorities need to be observed. I can't just leave my folks hanging.

I need to let them know that they need to make other arrangements. Let me honor my father and mother, that my days may be long in the land that the Lord has given. Part of the Ten

Commandments.

Then I will follow you. And what did Elijah say? Go back again, for what have I done to you? I have not put an irresistible effectual call on you here. I haven't done anything to you.

I've communicated a message from God. God told me, cast my mantle on you. I have done so.

Your response is up to you. What have I done to you? I haven't put an effectual call on you. And so Elijah does what he thinks is best, which is best.

Well, we'll see more when we return from the break.