

Kings and Prophets 13-10-18b

We pick up our study now in this very intriguing section. This is such a nexus, such an intersection point of divine principles and God's pattern that repeats over and over again, where you have two individuals whose identities and fates are intertwined. Sometimes they are a positive combination, Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon.

Other times it is a great contrast, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Saul and David, or Saul and Jonathan. And then you turn these things different ways and you see the contrast and all of it is tied back to and dependent upon these individuals' attitude toward God. It totally determines what happens.

God confronts Cain. If you do well, will you not be accepted? But if you don't, if you choose otherwise, sin is crouching at the door. The croucher lies in wait.

And he is completely the product of his decisions. Think about Abraham and Lot. Lot has so much potential in his relationship with his uncle Abraham.

What would you want as an Old Testament believer in terms of provision, opportunity, connection? Abraham goes so long with no son. If you are Lot, you think, you know, God could have done a wonderful picture of adoption as sons. It is a principle of Scripture over and over again that we are adopted as sons and Lot could have been a beautiful illustration and picture of what God is going to do in taking us and establishing us and granting us the privileges, the double portion that the firstborn has coming to him.

In a way, Elisha is leaving his father and is becoming Elijah's firstborn, prophetically speaking, and is going to receive that double portion. But Lot decides another way. He is allured by the attractions of the city of Sodom and finds a way to rationalize it, reconcile it, and look at the tragedy that ensues with the loss of his wife and the corruption reflected in his daughters and the nations that are going to arise out of that, these two nations that are going to be an affliction and a thorn and a curse for his descendants for untold generations to come.

And it all hinges on, it all depends on. We see these things and it is visible to us. But you can read the story of Abraham and Lot in less than an hour.

You can listen to it on an audio Bible like many of us have. I love that, dramatized, music filled, sound effects, Bible thing. And it takes such a short span.

But remember, these people were like us. They lived lives of long duration. And in the moment and in the milieu of daily life, it is much more difficult to see clearly that your decisions are closing off options and preventing God's blessings and God's provisions and leading us down a road of fruitlessness and non-production and futility and ultimately discipline and potentially judgment.

We just don't see it. We're the frog in the water that's slowly changing temperature. And it is so helpful for us to make observations like we are doing here with Elijah and Elisha and to be reminded constantly that our daily decisions make a difference.

They form a pattern. One day we will stand for judgment. One day the books will be opened.

One day the things that were said and done in secret will be brought to light. That which was whispered in the ear will be shouted from the housetops. The hidden thoughts and intents of the heart will be revealed.

I pray that it's a closed session with just the Lord and me and it's not the Jumbotron, the IMAX screen and the assembled crowds are viewing all of my horrendous failures and inadequacies and bad decisions and mistakes. The opportunity that we have because of the Lord Jesus Christ, because His blood cleanses us from all sins when we acknowledge them is... Have you ever heard of juvenile offenses being expunged from someone's record? The record is expunged. I've been listening, you know, my ongoing saga of audio books.

I'm listening to one called Indestructible by a guy named Jack Lucas, the guy that jumped on a couple of grenades on Iwo Jima and lived, got the Medal of Honor. He, for various reasons, whether you believe his reasons or not, he got in a lot of trouble as an enlisted man in the Marine Corps and had, I think, 21 separate what we would call NJPs, now non-judicial punishments of various kinds. He was locked up a couple of times for doing bad things.

But once he won the Medal of Honor, they went back and expunged his record and all 21 of his malfeasances and mistakes and offenses and so on were cleared off his record. His service jacket was just slick as a whistle. Model Marine.

And that's what God does for us. And we do not need to fear the judgment seat or the revelation of all things at the end of life and the end of time because we have the promise. The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

But it's a promise we have to claim. There are going to be believers that, having ignored and neglected the availability of God's cleansing grace, the availability of God's mercy and God's compassion on us and the application of the great work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will stand and they will face judgment for those things that they did not take the opportunity to have cleared from their record. And there will be, it's pictured different ways, the wood hay and stubble burning, being saved yet so as by fire, not having the white robe of righteousness to stand in that day, having to be in the stands watching while the Lord Jesus leads the victorious bride and brethren in their white-robed glory into all of the wonderful functions of deliverance and rulership and things that take place beginning at his second coming.

Behold, he cometh with clouds. Not everybody is going to be in that cloud. Some of them are going to be after the parade, those guys with the broom and the little shovel after the horses.

That's what some people are going to be doing. And some people won't even qualify for that.

Anyway, we want to pay attention to these patterns, these impressions that are made by God's Word.

It's not just Bible stories, and it's not just something to take up time in Bible class and then we go back and, well, now I've got to live my real life. This is real life. This is more real than the things around us.

This display that our brain creates out of inputs from the light that strikes our retinas and the vibrations in the atmosphere that strike our eardrums and are relayed and turned into signals that we can make sense of, it's an artifice. This is not reality, what we see around us. Things that look solid and feel solid are not solid.

There's no solidity there at all. Our perceptions of distance and time and everything else are artificial. They are working models, and they are substitutes for the reality where God dwells, the reality where angels operate.

And man in his hubris and man in his arrogance says, I know what reality is, and I have figured out the rules that define it, that make it go, and this is all there is. If I cannot weigh it, if I cannot observe it, if I can't put it under a microscope or subject it to Newton's laws or some other scientific formula, then it is not reality. And man in his arrogance thinks that the artifice is real and that the reality does not exist.

We are privileged to have the reality communicated to us through God's Word, by the agency and ministry of God's Spirit. And we know what is real, and we know what is true, and we know that we will soon drop this stage play, this temporary training film that we're in, and move into, by God's grace, move into that place of reality, the place that the Lord Jesus is preparing for us and preparing us for. It's a wonderful thing.

Not only has He gone to prepare a place for us, but His Holy Spirit and His Word are preparing us for that place. So we learn so much by observing these patterns and these evidences of that greater and higher truth than the mere temporary things that go on around us in the mundane world. So, as we look at Elisha, this opportunity presents itself.

Elijah casts the mantle, which represents his prophetic office, his prophetic authority. Ken made a great point right after the first session about the similarity to Boaz, casting his cloak over Ruth, expressing his willingness and her willingness for his authority as her husband, represented by that cloak. She places herself under it, he extends it over her.

And that was basically the marriage ceremony. Our notions of justices of the peace or church weddings and pastors pronouncing words, none of that's in the Bible. When a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves unto his wife and they too become one flesh, that is a marriage in God's eyes.

And this is why promiscuity and fornication and adultery are such offenses in God's eyes, because that is supposed to be... That night on the threshing floor, that was the marriage. They

had more than one way to get married in Israel. And when he threw his cloak over her, they're married.

That was the point of their... They didn't spend time in betrothal and they didn't gather together and say mazel tov and stomp and dance and have all of the amenities that would come in later Judaism. On that night, when she came to Boaz and he extended the cloak, that was marriage. And everything that happened after that was utterly legitimate, because the two became one flesh and in the eyes of God, that was their marriage.

It's a beautiful thing. The willingness to extend his protection and his provision and his authority over her and her willingness to accept it and be a part of it and be his life's mate. And from that comes Obed and Jesse and David and Solomon and the entire line that ultimately comes down to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

But it began with that voluntary recognition of authority. That's what you have here. This is what Elisha does.

Elijah extends the mantle. He doesn't shrug it off and say, what are you doing? I've got a field to plow. He doesn't say, well, I can't do that right now.

Come back in a more convenient season. He says, let me wrap things up. I need to be sure my father understands that my acknowledgement and submission to his authority is at an end and my acknowledgement and submission to your authority has begun.

And it is symbolized by taking that yoke of oxen and that yoke, making a fire out of the yoke, cooking the oxen and providing a meal and saying, it is a benefit to you that my work here is done. And I am entering a new phase. I am coming under a new authority.

And I'm not going to be plowing. Don't need the oxen. Don't need the yoke anymore.

What's especially interesting, I think some people think that when Elijah came by, Elisha had like the 20 mule team. He had some massive plow and there were 12 yoke of oxen. 12 yoke of oxen is how many bulls? How many oxen? That's 24.

A yoke is two oxen, you know, equally yoked together. A yoke is two. I did some fascinating research this week looking at, you know, they still do a lot of this today.

I had no idea. I thought, well, nobody uses yokes anymore. It's all tractors and, you know, spraying from airplanes and stuff like that.

No. There are treatises being written and research being done on how best to design and implement yokes because in Africa and a lot of places where you don't have a gas station and you haven't got diesel down at the nearest corner, they still use oxen to plow and they have to design the yokes based on the species, the breed of ox or bullock or water buffalo or whatever it is they have in their locale. Some of them have that hump on their shoulders.

Well, you've got to design the yoke a different way and they were talking about these crude yokes that the Africans had been using made out of a pole, put pressure in the wrong places, and the ox couldn't pull as hard and they couldn't plow as well and it took longer and the oxen got sores rubbed on them. And they were showing how going back to the North American design where there's much more contact between the shoulders and neck of the ox with the yoke, this makes it so much more efficient. But there are studies done on this and they're over there.

People are not just showing them how to purify water and prevent AIDS. They're showing them how to plow with yokes of oxen still today. It's a science and an art and they're teaching how to modify with the existing materials the yokes that they have so that they can do a better job of plowing.

But it's always two oxen, a yoke, and a guy with a plow. They don't double them. They don't triple them.

They certainly don't string 12 in a row and try to, you know, can you imagine trying to steer 24 cows with a plow? I mean, what kind of a stump or a rock-strewn field have you got that you need 24 cows to pull your plow? So this is important. Why? Why does it tell us that there were 12 yoke of oxen? Twelve, of course, is a significant number to begin with, but there are other people in the field. There are other servants out there.

Maybe Elisha has got some brothers. We don't know who these other individuals are. But each yoke is being controlled by other people.

But it says Elisha was plowing with 12. Why? Because he is the son that is out there in charge. But he's not standing there with a fan telling 12 guys how to plow.

He's got one of them himself. He is a pitch in, get with you and help you do it kind of guy. And there are 11 other individuals or groups of individuals working with these oxen, and he's got a team himself.

And he's got two oxen. This is why there's not some kind of massive overage of beef at the feast. He doesn't slaughter all 12 yoke of oxen because he wasn't using all 12.

He was using a pair, and that's what he takes and slaughters. One yoke, one pair of oxen. The other 11 are still out there to provide for the needs of the family, to accomplish the work.

But somebody else is going to have to take over the oversight. He has a new mission. But when we first meet Elisha, what is he doing? He is supervising work that he is also actively engaged in.

And there are 12 yoke of oxen. There are 12 doubled oxen there. And when you think about those two oxen, you keep coming back to this number two.

You've got Elijah and Elisha. You've got a yoke of oxen that he's plowing with, one pair out of a total of 12 in the field. He is going to separate from his father and mother, and instead of cleaving to a wife, he is cleaving to Elijah.

And he is going to serve him. The estimate is that he probably was Elijah's companion and servant for as long as a decade before the fiery chariot incident that we read of later. And this is why the school of the prophets says, this is Elisha who poured water on the hands of Elijah.

He spent some time with him, apparently a period of years, learning, being taught, and this is voluntary on his part. He is not mesmerized. He is not a robot.

He is not under a divine compunction. This is a choice he made to recognize and submit to this authority, just as he did in his father's world, in his father's field. He is now doing that with Elijah.

So after the episode that we just reviewed there, Elisha turned back from Elijah in verse 21 of chapter 19, 1 Kings, took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh using the oxen's equipment and gave it to the people. These are his fellow workers. This is his family.

This is everybody involved. By the way, if you have 12 yoke of oxen, he is not from a poor family. They are not scratching out a living from a half acre of land.

Remember, in fact, the definition of an acre, you know how they figured out how big an acre is? That was the average amount of ground that a man with a yoke of oxen could plow in a day. That was how an acre developed. So in one day, these 12 teams are going to cover 12 acres.

So how much land did Elijah's father own? Apparently, a substantial estate. This is one day they're doing 12 acres. Just one day.

And if it's the planting season and they're out there plowing, they could be out there a couple of weeks. He could have had hundreds, hundreds of acres. He is well off.

He's got 12 yoke of oxen. He owns a minimum of 24 oxen. Who knows what else he's got.

But this is not a poor guy that's just wandering around bumping into things. This is a family estate of some size. And this is what Elisha leaves to go spend time with Elijah, a man who he knows is hunted by the royal authorities, is at the risk of his life, is sleeping in caves and holes in the ground.

The schools of the prophets know that Elijah can show up almost anywhere. He apparently gets spirited away and is cast on mountains and valleys in the past. That's why they think that's what happened on his final appearance.

So when you move over now to look at Elisha, you see that he is a worker. He is involved. And this is going to be his signature, unlike Elijah, that you find almost always in isolation.

He's by the brook Cherith. He's living with the widow and so on. But Elisha, we constantly find him associated with the schools of the prophets, with groups of guys.

Your axe head, your pot of poison stew, and so on. He seems to be much more involved at a personal level with people. As I pointed out a week or two ago, Elijah's public miracles are at a national level.

You've got the drought for three and a half years. You have this enormous spectacle at Mount Carmel, witnessed by hundreds if not thousands of people. I mean, there's 40 prophets of Baal there.

How many people are witnessing this all-day contest? And then the rain that comes later is all at a very national level. Other than the widow and Elisha, you don't really see Elijah doing that much at an individual level. Of course, he faces the king and queen.

But Elisha, over and over again, you see him. Here's a guy that lost a borrowed axe head. Here's some guys trying to cook some food.

Here's some guys that their water is bad. Here's people in need. And he's much more in and among groups of people and working at an individual level.

What nationally staged miracles does Elisha do? Where do you see Elisha at the level of spectacle of Mount Carmel or the drought? He's not really known for that, is he? His miracles are much more piecemeal and individual. Individuals in small groups seem to benefit. And he's traveling in their midst.

And this is significant because if you think about Elijah in connection with the Old Testament age and Elisha in connection with the New, if you think about Elijah and the time of judgment and confrontation as the Lord Jesus in his first advent, and you think about Elisha in connection with the Lord Jesus in his second advent, and as a preview of coming attractions at the second advent in the Millennial Kingdom, his dealings with us. God deals at a national level in the Old Testament. He's dealing with us at an individual level in the New.

And you can kind of see this in the contrast between Elijah and Elisha. This is sort of backdrop for our study of the specific miracles that Elisha is going to do. Let me just, in the few minutes we have remaining, let me just give you a sample of what's coming in the transition.

There's one more thing we've not really talked about in the transition. I alluded to it briefly. But the time of transfer here in 2 Kings 2, it came to pass when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

Now, again, this tends to make us think, okay, Elijah's going to disappear and go to heaven and be up there in the angelic realms and so on. This still only means that he is formally taken away and separated. Everything in this scene is about separation.

When is it time to cling and when is it time to separate? Watch for that. It's introduced here at the beginning of Chapter 2. This is a pretty good chapter break. The rest of the Acts of Ahaziah are in the previous verse.

And then here, it came to pass when the Lord was about to take Elijah up into the sky by a whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Elijah with Elisha. They seem to have been operating as a team for some time now.

From Gilgal. This is a place. And as you recall, we've actually got four place names.

Why doesn't he just say, you know, and they went to the Mount of Olives and behold, you know, a cloud came and received Elijah out of his sight. And then he goes on and now he's the prophet. Why do we have this long, drawn out, agonizing chapter of details and information and prophets coming and saying things, and stay here, no I won't.

Why do we have all of this? Well, part of the clue is where it happens. So place number one. There's going to be four places.

Place number one is Gilgal. Now, what do you remember about Gilgal? What's the first time you ever knew of a place called Gilgal? When's the first time it really shows up in Scripture? I'll give you a clue. Elijah, Elisha, Moses, Joshua.

When do we first see Gilgal coming up? Why does it even have its name, Gilgal? What happens as soon as Israel crosses the Jordan, the Jordan, ding, ding, ding, Jordan, crosses the Jordan. What do they do before they march on Jericho? Why do they have to wait a few days before they go to Jericho? Circumcision. Gilgal means that which rolls, this round thing, this cycle, this circular idea, and circumcision.

You have the word circle in the name of the act itself. Gilgal was the place where Israel was circumcised. It's no accident that they start out at Gilgal.

Gilgal is the place where the foreskins were separated from the people. And they were separated from the Canaanites and from all of those around them by this mark of the covenant with God going all the way back to Genesis and Abraham. Separate unto me a people.

And they are marked by this special right. And it's representative. The males are circumcised, but it represents all of the people.

It's a representative ritual. Now, what else happened at Gilgal? Keep your place here in 2 Kings and turn back to Joshua 4. Joshua 4. It came to pass when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, and command them, saying, Take for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place where you lodged tonight.

You know where the lodging place is where they lodged tonight? Gilgal. So where is the pile of twelve stones? Gilgal. That pile should still be there in Elijah and Elisha's day.

Those stones that were taken out of the bottom bed of the river Jordan are stacked at Gilgal. So Joshua called twelve men. Look at verse 6. That this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, What do these stones mean? You shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off, and these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel, Laolam, unto the ages forever. So they did so, just as Joshua commanded. How many times does it say twelve stones in this passage? Twelve stones, twelve stones, twelve stones, twelve stones.

Carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood, and they are there to this day. So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord had commanded.

It came to pass that all the people had completely crossed over the ark of the Lord, and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people. The men of Reuben, Gad, half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, armed before the children of Israel as Moses had spoken to them. Forty thousand prepared for war crossed over before the Lord for the battle to the plains of Jericho.

On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they feared him as they had feared Moses. How many common elements do we have here? The waters of the Jordan being stopped, the place, Gilgal, you've got Elisha with his twelve yoke of oxen, which is actually twenty-four oxen. How many stones are involved in this ritual? There's twelve that were taken from the dry land and put in the middle of the Jordan, twelve from the middle of the Jordan taken onto dry land, so you've got twenty-four stones, right? And they're in sets.

And what was the purpose? What happened? What's the so that? On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they feared him as they had feared Moses. What is taking place in our passage? The Lord is exalting Elisha, and they are going to fear Elisha the way they feared Elijah. It's just blindingly, emphatically connected, isn't it? This is the place.

This is the river. This is the passing on of authority. So back in our passage, Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal, and Elijah said to Elisha, Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel.

What do we know about Bethel? Is that a significant place? How did it get its name? Somebody laid their head on a stone for a pillow and had a dream, and said, Surely this is the house of God. This is the gateway to the stars. This is the stairway to heaven.

And it had formerly been called Luz, and Jacob renamed it Bethel, and made a covenant there. So we start with Gilgal, which has the idea of the cycle of things, and one thing separating from another. You leave Moses and move forward with Joshua.

You leave Elijah and move forward with Elisha. This idea of separation. They're going to go across the Jordan.

The waters are going to be separated. Elijah and Elisha are going to be separated. Elisha is going to return and separate the waters, and he's going to come back across.

God is separating the people from their reliance on Elijah as prophet, and putting them in the care of Elisha. There is a separation, in the same way that God separates the dispensations, and separates the people of God. Well, I only managed to cover the first city, so we're going to have to come back and do the other three places in this story next time.

But here's the thing. Does God have a definite plan and purpose for you and for me? Or is it just sort of a general, do what you're supposed to, a blessing will come, wander around anywhere within the purview? It is explicit. It is definite.

God has made specific provision. He has designed specific personal relationships. He chooses the family we're born into.

He chooses the time and the place where we meet people who are our friends, people who will be our spouse, people who will be important in our spiritual journey, in the legitimate sense, through this life. It is a pilgrimage. We are strangers and pilgrims on this earth.

Our citizenship is in heaven. And all of the things that people want to say, the sappy, sugary things they say about a journey, you and I are on a genuine journey through this life. We are genuine strangers and pilgrims.

And we are headed for a destination. And there is a reason we go to the places we go to. There's a reason we're at Gilgal.

There's a reason we're at Bethel. There's a reason we are at Jericho. And there's a reason we are at the Jordan.

There is a reason and a purpose and a time in God's plan. There is a time to stick and to stay and to cleave. I will not leave you.

Naomi told Ruth, go back. Ruth says, I will not leave you. Your people are my people.

Your God is my God. Where you dwell, I will dwell. And where you die, that's where I'm going to be buried.

There is a time to stick. And there is a time to separate. There is a time for Gilgal.

There is a time for a line to be drawn. There is a time to put distance as a heathen and a tax collector. God gives us that knowledge.

He gives us that wisdom. He gives us that guidance. How does Elisha know that he's supposed to disobey Elijah and stick with him no matter what? How does he know that? How did Ruth know when Naomi says, turn back, that she's not to turn back? How did Joshua know what he was supposed to do? How did the Lord Jesus know what he was supposed to do in his humanity? I think he got the vast majority, if not the totality, of his knowledge of where to go and what to do from studying these very Old Testament Scriptures in the illuminating ministry of God's Holy Spirit.

And the Lord Jesus spent time, quality time, thinking about, pouring over these Scriptures, much of which he had committed to memory. And I think the Lord Jesus figured out when it was time for the Galilean ministry, when it was time to go to Jerusalem, when it was time to pass through Samaria, when it was time to hit the Transjordan. I think he figured these things out.

He knew when God would enable miracles and miraculous demonstrations, and when he should and could do no mighty miracle in a town because of their unbelief. He knew these things because he was steeped in, he was immersed in the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures. We are his body and we are his bride, and we can have that same understanding, that same perception, that same knowledge, not just of what's good for us, but of what is most beneficial and most reflects the glory of God in our lives, which is the only reason we're here.

We're not here to have a good time. We will have blessing and prosperity beyond our wildest imagination when we quit looking for it and dedicate ourselves to reflecting God's glory. When we begin to understand the things that Elisha understood, this notion that he was blinded by the light, Elisha threw the mantle over him and he was, oh, I've got a compelling call to be a prophet.

Elisha, you look at his character, you look at his dedication and his understanding of the things of God, that's no accident. He pursued that. He chose that.

He made daily decisions to cultivate that, and that's why he is going to be so incredibly important in God's plan and purpose for Old Testament Israel. We can be the same. We need to be the same.

We are called to be the same. It's not casual. It's not part-time.

You and I, every one of us, are in full-time Christian service. You are in just as much service as any missionary, any pastor, any evangelist you want to name. Full-time Christian service.

We are called. We are chosen. We are equipped.

We are given potentials and opportunities, and it's up to us to exploit them, to avail ourselves of

them, to make them count. This life is short compared to eternity, and every day that passes is a day we can't get back. So it's inspiring to see Elisha and to see how he takes this double portion and what he does with it.

And it all begins here on this day when the transfer of office is made, and that's what we'll look at. We'll see how significant these four places are. Why does God tell Elijah, you've got to go to Bethel, you've got to go to Jericho, you've got to go across the Jordan? Why? Because it is highly significant.

We'll look at it next time. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the communication that it serves, the impartation of Your truth, the understanding that we can gain from it, the equipping for our souls and for our service.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will find us ready pupils, that He will remind us of it, and it will make a difference. We will find it motivating. We will find it challenging.

We will find it interesting enough to spend time, that we have love enough for You and concern enough for Your plan and purpose to make these things count in our lives in the days ahead. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.