

Kings and Prophets 13-11-01a

This is Friday, the 1st of November, 2013. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets, and I've just slain one of the little minions of Beelzebub here. If you heard the smacking noise and expression of satisfaction, that was one less and all of his descendants from now until the Lord comes back.

We're in the book of 2 Kings. We will be in Chapter 2. We're looking at the launching of the career of the prophet Elisha. Let's take a moment to dedicate our time and our attention to the Lord through prayer, and then we'll begin.

Father, it is such a comfort and encouragement to us to know that it is not by our strength or our power that the life that pleases you is lived. It is through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit and the presence and power of your Word we are privileged in this age to have virtually unlimited access to both of those sources of strength. We thank you for those.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who made it possible for us to enjoy these provisions and to share in his destiny and his privileges bought for us at so great a price on the cross. We thank you for the passage that is before us. We know that it is not merely a record of Old Testament history or of happenings and circumstances in ancient times, but it is a powerful form of communication from you to us, and we pray that each of us will ascertain that meaning and your purpose in communicating to us so that we can live more effectively and more fruitfully in the time that remains to us on this earth.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. You will remember that we have been looking in great detail at this nexus point, as I think of it, in the early part of 2 Kings, which is really the middle of the book of Kings, one book in the Hebrew Bible. The transfer of prophetic function and authority from Elijah to Elisha, symbolized in the mantle and in the episodes that take place on this day, recorded in 2 Kings 2. We have seen these events lead up to, a bit grammatically awkward, but the lead up to these events is the travel from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, to the Jordan, and we've seen that there is significance in each of these locations.

They are not otherwise unmentioned cities. They stand for something. They mean something.

They evoke and suggest things, not just in this context, but for us. We have talked about Gilgal, the place of separation, the place of dedication, the necessary preliminary steps required before God can bless, before God can grant victory. The history of Israel coming into the land with Joshua, the problems that are detailed in the book of Judges, of failing to maintain that separation and that dedication, and therefore the loss of blessing, being given over to oppression and to hardship in the land, crying out to God, He sends a deliverer, and they return, and it is Gilgal, Gilgal, Gilgal, all the way through the book of Judges.

You would think after a time, this historical experience and knowledge would inform subsequent generations in Israel, and they would not repeat the mistakes of the past, but they

do, and we do. You would think that having been exposed to so much from God's word and seeing so many examples, we would avoid the mistakes of the past, and so often we don't. And so it is our challenge and our task to take the things that we see here and say, I don't want to repeat these tired mistakes.

If I'm going to make mistakes, I want to invent new, creative, innovative ones that will in some way be useful in God's plan. They're not just going to be a repeat of things that He's already got recorded in His word. We will be striving to grow and to function in a way that reflects God's glory and is pleasing in His sight, that is a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and shows us to be part of His body and His presence on this earth.

And these failures of the past and shortfalls remind us of how difficult it was in Old Testament days without the gifts that we have of the ever-present Holy Spirit and the fully revealed plan and purpose of God in that which is complete, that which is perfect, that Paul talks about in Corinthians. We know in part, we see in part, when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part is done away. And that Old Testament system limited, designed to show the limitations of the flesh, has been superseded and replaced in our time and in our age and what a tremendous privilege to live now unhampered by an absence of divine power and presence.

We have those things. And how much more grievous is it, read Hebrews 10, we who have been given so much, if we fail, there remains no more sacrifice for sin but a fearful expectation of judgment. Go to Hebrews 6, what kind of a field, the rain falling upon it and it brings up only briars and thorns is fit only for burning and is near to a curse.

Well, cursing comes into our study tonight in the earliest episodes in the prophetic career of Elisha. He has been the assistant, he has been the companion, he has accompanied Elijah now for something that apparently measures in years. But this is the day on which his master will be taken from him as he is repeatedly informed.

So on this day there is this excursion, leaving Gilgal, passing by Jericho and Ai, all the way to Bethel, leaving Bethel, returning to Jericho and we have this drawn out, expanded account of conversations and members of the schools of the prophets coming out and saying virtually identical things. And we typically encounter stories like this where there is a group of three. It will happen, it will happen a second time and then the third time is the punchline, the third time is where the emphasis is.

So Elijah says to Elisha, stay here please, for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel. And Elisha says, as the Lord lives, this is chapter 2 verse 2, I will not leave you. I am not going to stay in Gilgal.

I am not going to remain and sort of sit on my good record. Where you go, I will go. And you see this dedication.

Joshua accompanies Moses up the mountain as far as he is allowed to go. Ruth accompanies Naomi and she will not be denied, she will not be turned back by any argument the way Orpah

is. You see the disciples who are asked to accompany the Lord Jesus and cannot continue.

They fall asleep. Could you not continue with me one hour, Jesus says to Peter, James and John. And they are just overcome.

But remember, it is still the age of Israel. They have not yet received that apostolic full-orbed presence and power of the Holy Spirit that they will have within two months. And it is just a reminder that in the Old Testament age, the law of Moses and many of the events that take place in our Old Testament were designed to demonstrate the need for God's constant presence and power.

It is not doable in the flesh. We cannot accomplish, we cannot obey in the flesh. And bless Israel, they gave it the college try in many of their generations and they could sustain short bursts of enthusiasm.

They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. And they did not have the sustaining presence and power of God. What does this tell us? If we stop right now and say, well, wonderful review, but I am going to fall asleep in the next five minutes, so tell me something I can use.

All of human history going back to the original fall of Satan and his contention that he and the other fallen angels ought to be able to dwell and exist and go their own way apart from God. We cannot function apart from God. To be separate from God, to be distinct from God, to be disconnected from God is inevitably, irrevocably to trend toward defilement, corruption, disintegration.

Separation from the power of God, the presence of God, the life of God can only result in. This is what happens with any part of your body that you cut off. Separation from the source of life and strength and nourishment.

An arm doesn't lay there for weeks and continue to live and try to crawl around at movies to the contrary, Halloween movies especially. You do not have severed appendages that can live on their own. We must be connected to the source of life.

So Israel is a demonstration. God says, all right, I will give you the standard. I will give you my presence ensconced and separated from you behind the veil in the holy of holies.

I will be there. You can come and worship, but there are these layers of insulation between my holy presence and you. Only under certain conditions can you even come near.

And only if you are a priest can you get a little bit nearer. And only if you are the high priest once a year surrounded by, covered with, and carrying the blood of a sacrifice can you enter as a representative. And that's just a quick visit as a temporary shadow of good things to come.

I can tolerate your presence just that long and no longer. Look at us. Look at what it says in

Hebrews chapter 10.

The Lord Jesus Christ has made a way for us through the veil. The veil has been rent top to bottom. God tore it and made a way.

We as God's children can go in any time. Let us come before him with our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us approach by the new and living way that Jesus Christ has made for us through the veil.

We have that Holy Spirit sanctifying us, translating our prayers. The Old Testament saints never had that. So this transition is hugely important.

The double portion of the spirit that we enjoy compared to that sort of separate and temporary and occasional manifestation of God's presence in Israel, it's so different. We are so privileged. And naturally, as with any privilege, we just take it for granted.

Look at Americans today and all of the things we take for granted. We walk into large big box stores and just take for granted the plenty and the abundance and the availability of anything we can imagine. You need a particular model of battery, they've got it in abundance.

You can order them by the dozens for a few dollars. You need a kind of grocery, a particular exotic fruit or vegetable, they've got it. Anything you want in our urban centers particularly, anything you can imagine, you can obtain.

And you don't even have to have money. Get a piece of plastic, wave it in front of people, and you can carry things off. We take it for granted and we don't count the cost.

We don't remember that these things have come at a price. Well, in looking at this, in looking at the days of the Old Testament prophets and the importance of maintaining presence, maintaining fellowship, the Spirit of God is with Elijah and Elisha knows it. And if Elijah is going to go somewhere, Elisha wants to be where the presence and power of God are.

And he says, you're not going to leave me behind. I'm not going to take some excuse to kick back and wait for a more convenient season. If you're going, I'm going.

And he's going to Bethel, the house of God with all of its rich history that we've reviewed in the last few weeks. He leaves Bethel and heads for Jericho with its rich history of a completely different kind. The curse that was pronounced by Joshua and the curse that was flaunted by Helel, who by the way is from what town? Helel that set up the gates and lost his son when he poured the foundation and lost his other son when he set up the gates.

What town is he from? Bethel. Helel of Bethel, repopulated, refounded, and went through the curse of Joshua. Helel of Bethel so the sons of the prophets do their thing.

There's so many things we could cover. I could literally spend the rest of this year and into next spring reviewing all of these things, the parting of the Jordan and all of that significance, the

rolling up of the mantle, the role of the mantle in parting the Jordan in each direction. Elijah does it in one direction.

Elisha does it in the other because it is not by might nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord. And that mantle represents the spirit of God. It's the spirit of God that parts the waters, not the prophet.

And men can be interchangeable. It is God and His presence and His word that makes the difference. But we must necessarily leave some of these things unexplored if we're going to finish the study in my lifetime.

So it happened in chapter 2 of 2 Kings, as they continued on and talked, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire and separated the two of them. And Elijah went up, Allah, by a whirlwind into the sky. Into the sky.

I will not take time to review the hugely important notation we have from some years later when Elijah sends a letter to the then reigning king. We know that Elijah did not disappear. He didn't pull an Enoch at this point.

He didn't go to heaven to join the dead Old Testament saints. This was a frequent occurrence and we've seen it. You remember Obadiah when Elijah says, I tell Ahab I'm going to come see him.

And Obadiah says, look, I'm going to get killed because I'm going to go tell him you're coming and then some wind is going to come up and carry you off somewhere and you won't show. This was known of Elijah. He was frequently whisked away in a supernatural fashion.

This is why the sons of the prophets look for him on this occasion. It wasn't ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into the heavens? These people who had witnessed this from the other side of the Jordan figured, well, that whirlwind has done what it always does. It's cast him around someplace.

Let's go find him. He's still around. They didn't see some miraculous fiery chariot ascending up into the solar system someplace.

They witnessed and observed this from a distance and figured he's around here somewhere. And he was, but not where they could find him. Just like when God buried the body of Moses, nobody could find it.

Doesn't mean it wasn't there and wasn't buried. It's just not findable. God doesn't want them to find Elijah because it is time for Elisha.

He's got the mantle. He's got the double portion of the spirit and it's his time. So it's retirement home for Elijah.

Elisha saw it. He cried out, my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. Now this

is interesting because what got mentioned previously, chariot of fire and horses of fire.

Elisha says, my father, the chariot of Israel, which is the fiery chariot we saw preceding and its horse men. This is not an unattended chariot. Countless biblical paintings of this event show the fiery chariot, fire all around.

And here's Elijah standing there by himself. Elisha says it has got horsemen. There are at least two individuals running this chariot because it's not and its horse man and its driver.

He didn't show up like a taxi. And Elijah jumps in and says, home James or Yaakov or whatever the guy's name might have been. You know, there is no James.

It's Jacob and that's a bow to the king in 1611 that they re-translated in the New Testament. It's Jacob and John, the sons of Zebedee. We've gone through that before.

Anyway, I digress. So there are three elements here that are visible. Two of them are detailed in the previous verse and Elisha gives us the third.

There is a fiery chariot. There are fiery horses and there are horsemen. Now I ask myself, why? Are they angels? I would assume so.

How does Elisha know that this is the chariot of Israel? Why doesn't he say the chariot of God? Fiery chariot, why didn't he say it's the chariot of Gabriel or the chariot of Michael or the chariot of Ariel or the chariot of the Seraphim or the chariot of anything heavenly? If this is the heaven taxi, why wouldn't it be the chariot of God? Why wouldn't it be the chariot of heaven? What does Elisha say it is? It's the chariot of Israel. You know why? Because it travels in Israel. It doesn't have a stop in heaven.

It's the chariot of Israel. It's the horsemen of Israel because this is transport in and around Israel. This may not be the first time this thing has showed up.

How does Elisha know it's the chariot of Israel? So it takes Elijah somewhere else in Israel, the chariot guided by the horsemen of Israel. People say, well, you know, Eric von Daniken chariot, this is flying saucer, aliens came. There's a whole book that translates everything in the Old Testament into flying saucer terms.

Moses, the force field holding the flying saucer in the air was lighting up the burning bush. Moses is about to walk into the force field and get zapped. So they get on the intercom loudspeaker and they say, Moses, we got to stop this guy somewhere.

Moses, take your shoes off. We've got to delay him long enough to turn down the watts so that he doesn't get zapped when he walks into the, you know, that was the aliens, you know, and he hears the voice and the bush is not consumed because it's just the spotlight. It's all flying saucers.

This is a flying saucer. Well, excuse me, if it's a flying saucer, it's a horse-drawn flying saucer. I'm

just saying.

Elisha saw, and it has a bucket seats on the outside because he sees the drivers, plural. So this is like a tank where, you know, their heads are sticking out and their horse is in front. So it's not a flying saucer.

It's not a wheel within a wheel. It is a chariot and chariots traverse the ground. Notice it says a chariot of fire with horses of fire.

It just says suddenly appeared is in italics. It doesn't say it landed. It doesn't say it descended.

It just appeared. Remember this, the shepherds watching their fox flocks by night and suddenly, you know, the angel says peace on earth toward men of goodwill. And suddenly there were with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God saying, remember that? And they give the glory to God deal.

They just appear. It doesn't say they descended. They didn't parachute in.

They didn't fly in on their feathery wings. Suddenly they were there. It is my contention that this chariot was invisible one moment and visible the next.

It was sitting on its wheels with its horses. These aren't Pegasus horses. They don't have any wings that are mentioned here.

It's sitting on the ground. He steps in and what happens? Elijah went up. It doesn't say the chariot, you know, they put it into first and peeled out and went up into heaven.

It says a whirlwind lifted the chariot and its occupants. Now what happens in a whirlwind? You got to wrap your head cloth around your face and you can't see what's happening. There's a big whirlwind and it disappears and it says he went up.

He Allah. Allah, by the way, doesn't just mean to go up, although that is one of its meanings. It means to go.

We're going to see that here in a few minutes. It means to go. And from this location, there basically is nowhere to go but up.

Where are we? The north end of the Dead Sea where the Jordan River flows in very near Jericho and any place you go on land, you will go up. It's one of the lowest if not the lowest spots on earth. You can't go anywhere on the land without going up.

We're going to see this word used three times for a guy walking very shortly. So there's a whirlwind and it says into the sky, into the air. This can be a very low altitude traverse.

A whirlwind is necessarily in the air. So if he's absorbed in this whirlwind, that's the first heaven. That's the sky.

That's the atmosphere around you. It can be six feet high. It can be 60 feet high.

It just means he went up into, he's now in the wind. This is what people say. Well, I've got to get in the wind.

I've got to go. I've got to leave. Elisha saw it and he cried out, my father, my father, the charity of Israel and its horsemen.

He saw him no more, took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. No accident, two pieces. This is a division.

This is a separation. He commemorates the separation. He and Elijah have been a unit where Elijah goes, Elisha goes.

Now God in the same way that he has torn the kingdom from the hands of David's grandson, the same way that he tore the kingdom from Saul, he has torn these two prophets apart, has separated them. And Elisha knows exactly what's going on. And that's why he doesn't just shred his clothes.

He doesn't just tear them partially. He tears it into two pieces, one piece here, one piece here, separation. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan.

God made sure that the whirlwind, the chariot, the prophet, everything else, the mantle does not go. The mantle stays. That's the office symbol, symbol of the prophetic office.

He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him. Notice we have this twice now that had fallen from him. It isn't that he dropped it or that he left behind or that he handed to Elisha.

And this is significant. Elijah doesn't say, this is not like a change of command ceremony where you hand off the baton or pass a sword or salute about face and change places. God causes the mantle to fall from Elijah.

This is a God thing. It's not a place and time of Elijah's choosing. It isn't a transfer of authority by Elijah's hand.

The mantle fell from Elijah. God did this. God separated the mantle from Elijah in the same way that he separates Elisha from Elijah.

It's all of God. So he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, we have this emphasized in 14, struck the water and said, where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that, division, separation. How many times are we going to see it here? What has not been separated? What accompanied Elijah here and what accompanies him back? It is the presence of God.

Where is the God of Elijah? Still here. Elijah has left. God has not.

If he struck the water and nothing happened, you can answer the question, where is the God of Elijah? He's wherever Elijah is. But the point of this story is not Elijah being taken into heaven to the presence of God. The point is Elijah has been separated and removed.

God is here. God is present. Answer the question that Elisha asks here.

Where is the God of Elijah? I'm right here. Watch these waters. I'm the same God that was in the Ark of the Covenant when these waters parted for Joshua and the priests and the people to come across.

It is the presence of God that makes these things happen. And it is a wrong-headed idea to think, oh, boy, that must have been a fun ride, going up to heaven. Elijah goes to join God.

The whole point, God is here. God is present with Elijah. When Elijah leaves, where is the God of Elijah? Still here.

Waters part just as completely, just as firmly. Ground is just as dry going across for Elijah as it was for Elijah, because it is not the man. It is the God who commissions the man.

It is not the man's words. It is the message of God that the man carries. And God is present.

Men come and men go. Generations come and generations go. Nations come and nations go.

Kingdoms come and go. Kings come and go. God is present with His people, for His people, and He will accomplish His purposes.

Well, when you get to verse 15, the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw Him. They said, the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. Does this not answer the question, where is the God of Elijah? His spirit is present.

The sons of the prophets who were from Jericho have seen this whole thing. You cannot help but see it. You are in a dish.

The ground rises on each side of the Jordan, and you've got a stadium seat. You just can't get over there, because you've got the Jordan that's not going to part, if you're a son of the prophet, it only parts for Elijah and Elisha. But they're watching this.

It's not that far on the other side. Easy walking distance. They observed this whole thing.

That's why they want to go look for Elijah. They saw where the whirlwind went, and they didn't see it go straight up. They saw it go laterally.

It took him away. North, most likely. So, they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

They saw him coming. They saw him part the waters. Then they said, look now, fifty strong men with your servants, let them go search for your master, because the Spirit of the Lord has taken

him up and cast him upon a mountain or into some valley.

In this area, as you go west from Jericho, you have the valley that is called and known as the Valley of the Shadow of Death, as you head toward Jerusalem. They thought he might be in that valley. Maybe God took him up, dropped him on this side of the Jordan, and he's in that valley, or in some other ravine, or some other valley, or some other hilltop.

They searched the whole area for three days, and they did not find him. So, they came back. He had stayed in Jericho.

For once, he stays. Elijah said stay, and he didn't stay. When Elijah is not there to tell him to stay, he stays.

Why? Because he knows it's a futile search, and he's got something else to do in Jericho. We're going to pause here and take our break. In verse 19, we're going to see why Elisha stays in Jericho.

Critically important episode here. Everything that follows is explained by it, and we'll see it when we come back.