

Kings and Prophets 13-11-01b

We pick up our study now in 2 Kings, looking at the onset of the career of Elisha, we're in chapter 2, verse 18, after the search for the now missing and invisible Elijah, the team of men comes back, the 50 men that search for three days, they came back to Elisha for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, did I not say to you, do not go? And there is in this a little harbinger, a clue of things to come. There is a self-willed idea, philosophy, pattern, attitude in Jericho. The prophets, the sons of the prophets in Jericho have seen the obvious transfer of prophetic office, prophetic power, presence of the Spirit of God to Elisha.

Elisha says, you shall not send anyone in verse 16, we want to go look for Elijah, no, don't look for him, don't look back, look ahead. What does Paul tell several different congregations in the New Testament? Don't go back under the law, don't be looking back, you've got to look forward, there is a new economy, there is a new opportunity, there is a new dispensation. Elisha symbolizes and foreshadows that idea, and they're wanting to go find the old guy.

Yeah, yeah, we know that there is something new happening, but we still want to keep the old guy, too. We see that Christ is the Savior and the Messiah and all that, but we want to do the law and Christ, we want to have them both. This is the first generation church difficulty, and Paul constantly addresses this, no more powerfully than in the book of Galatians, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Are you going to go back under the law? You're dead to those things.

He talks about it in Romans, he talks about it extensively, because it was a big problem. They just couldn't let go of the old ways. Even Paul himself is going to run afoul of this eventually, and go make a vow and shave his head and pay for some guys and go to the temple, he wants to go back to Jerusalem and show that, well, I'm not against the law, and he winds up getting entangled in it, and he is the foremost proponent of separation from that old way, but it's very, very difficult.

That's what happens in Jericho, these prophets, he says, look, I told you don't go, you wasted three days times 50 guys, that's 150 man days, and if you add the days and the man days, you get 153, that's an increasingly significant number to us. But then in verse 19, the men of the city said to Elisha, all right, well, since we burned three days looking for Elijah, and we can't really get him to address this problem, we'll go to you. Please notice the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord sees, and by situation is talking about the site, the topography, it is a well-sited, a well-situated city, as my Lord sees, but the water is bad, and the ground barren.

Great place for a city, except we got no water and we can't grow anything, which in an agricultural economy, it's like, well, I've got a wonderful garage, but I've got no car and no house. You know, this is a great place for a city if only we had water and a place to grow something. So Elisha says, bring me a new bowl and put salt in it.

Where are we now, geographically speaking, practically on the shores of the Dead Sea? Is it difficult to find salt? Salt, what did Lot's wife turn into near this location? Plenty of salt, no lot, lots of salt. So he says, bring me some salt, we're going to put it in a new bowl. Why a new bowl? Why not just bring me some salt, bring me a handful, put it in a leather sack, or why a new bowl? Not just any bowl, a new bowl.

What does salt do then and now? It serves as a seasoning and a preservative, right? Not a curative, it isn't a purifier. And the problem with the water they have is it's already salty. This water that comes up through the ground, their springs are coming up through this mineralized soil.

The soil is mineralized, the water is mineralized. So the water is bad and the ground is barren. Part of the problem with the ground is when they try to water, the water is very alkaline and it kills the crops.

You don't water your garden with salt water. And so he says, well, the answer is salt. It's very counterintuitive, but they obey.

It doesn't make sense, but for once they do what Elisha asks and they bring him a new bowl and they put salt in it. So he went out to the source of the water and cast in the salt and said, thus says the Lord. He is not a water purifying guy.

He's not a well witcher. He's not an expert in filtration or anything else. Thus says the Lord.

This is the mission of the prophet, to point the people to God, to the power of God, the presence of God, the provision of God, the promise of God. Thus says the Lord, I, the Lord have healed this water from it. There shall be no more death or barrenness, no more death, no more barrenness.

So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha, which he spoke. Now, there is a city there and has been a city for ever since Heal set the thing up, right? Which was in the days of the long ago, but the water is foul. So how have they lived up to this point with the source of the water being, being unusable to, to alkaline, to mineralized? What have they been doing for water? Well, what are they close to? The Jordan.

And they can, they can get water. They can collect rainwater. They can go to creeks and wadis in the time of the rains and so on.

They can store water in jars. They can, they can get water hauled into the city, right? It's the native water. It's the, it's kind of like Jerusalem before they had the spring Gihon piped in.

You've got to go out to the spring and get the water and haul it in. Now, just in the abstract, let's say you were in that situation. You had a population of many hundreds of people living in this town and you need water and there is no water nearby.

Who would go fetch this water? Old women, tiny children, your, your businessmen and your, your property owners. Who is going to do this menial job of hauling water? Young people to whom you can pay minimum wage, they'll go haul it on their strong young backs and bring it from wherever it has to come, right? And this is going to be a nice little income for them. I'll pay you by the skin full or by the jug full.

Maybe you've got an ox cart and you go and load it up with ampule of water or whatever they were using in the day. Pottery jars, pottery jugs, containers of all sorts of descriptions. They go and they're haulers of water, right? What do you think happens once the spring right there at the city is suddenly healed and fresh water is flowing in abundance? Who's now out of a job? These young people who formerly made a lot of pocket change and became, you know, fairly well off hauling water.

This is the rabbinical explanation for the next episode. The gang of youths. They are not children and they are not little children.

They are not are. This is the word that is used to describe Solomon back in First Kings when he becomes king and he prays to God and he says, who am I to lead this people? I am but a youth. He doesn't say I'm but a child.

But the exact same phrase is used. It means he feels young and inexperienced compared to the sort of gray headed wisdom that one would imagine would be necessary to run a kingdom. Well, that's the word that is used here.

These are not little children. They are. This word is commonly used to people all the way up to the age of 30 in Israel.

It just means they're not old. Young men is a good translation. And the word little or small here that is appended to it in verse 23, he went up from there to Bethel and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city.

Some youths. Many commentaries that you read on this say that the youths come from Bethel. And I can tell you unhesitatingly, conclusively, dogmatically, they are not youths from Bethel.

They are youths from Jericho. How do I know this? Context, context, context. How do I know this? I am reading what the word of God says.

What is Elisha's direction of travel? From where to where? Where is he leaving? Jericho. Where is he going? Bethel. So his direction of travel is west.

Correct? We saw this when the two prophets went and made this very same journey. He has stayed in Jericho. He has seen the water situation.

They come and mention it to him. By God's power, the water is healed. And he announces, thus saith the Lord, I heal this water.

And God does it. And we will return to the significance of this in a bit. But, verse 23, Then he went up from there to Bethel, and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him and said to him, Go up, you baldhead, go up, you baldhead.

Now what does it say at the beginning of verse 24? So he turned around and looked at them. Now, if they are coming out from Bethel, what is he doing? Is he walking backwards and he has to turn around to look at them? They can't be from Bethel. He has to reverse, he has to turn around to see these youths.

Because as he is going to Bethel, he hasn't even gotten out of Jericho yet. Why are these youths mocking him and angry? The rabbinical explanation, which is plausible, although not sufficiently documented in scripture, is they've just lost their livelihood. Remember what happened when Paul cast the demon out of the gal that was telling fortunes? And remember when he turned everybody to Christianity and all the silversmiths lost their livelihood in Ephesus? Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

When people lose their livelihood because of God's grace and God's provision, they get angry. We've got several New Testament examples of this, and I think it's not implausible that the rabbis got this one right. These youths have been making a living hauling water.

It's a well-populated city. We've got a wonderfully situated city, but we've got this huge water problem, and we're tired of paying these kids to haul water day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. So Elisha says, well, God has healed the waters.

Well, these guys are all out of a job now. And so a great throng of them, and there are way more than 40. This is a mob of young men that follow him out of the city and begin to call out.

Now, there is a double insult here. When they say, go up, this is from the Hebrew verb alah, which means to go or go up. Now, from Jericho, there is nowhere to go but up.

It is sometimes called the lowest city on earth. Ancient Jericho was the lowest city in the ancient Near East. It's about 3,000 feet below Jerusalem, and it's 900 feet below sea level.

Jerusalem is 2,500, 2,500, somewhere in that area above sea level, Mount Zion. Jericho is 900 feet below sea level. So when you're leaving there, in any direction, you are going up.

So he's going up from Jericho, and he's going out from Jericho. He's leaving. Many times in the Old Testament, it'll just say, and they went up from there and headed to some place, and they're not really concerned about elevation.

It just means you've left. But that verb is used in verse 23 two previous times before they use it to mock him. He went up, alah, from there to Bethel.

And as he was going up the road, ascending the road, he's climbing from Jericho up in a westerly direction. He's going up the east side of this slope so that he can get up and head on

over there. So he's climbing upward.

He is gaining altitude by traveling in a westerly direction. So he's going up from Jericho. As he's going up, these youths come from the city, that's the city of Jericho, and mock him.

They didn't mock him when he came in. They didn't mock him when he came with Elijah. He's been in the city several days, and they weren't mocking him.

They don't mock him until he leaves. Why? What has changed? The waters have been healed. Something about the healing of the waters ticks them off.

This expression of God's grace. Another New Testament example. Remember the swine? Jesus cast the demons into the swine.

And what do all the pig farmers say? Depart from our region. We don't want you here. They don't celebrate the elimination.

They've had to dodge this guy and his companion living in the tombs and gashing themselves and harassing people on the roads. But God expresses grace and deliverance. They want no part of it.

And this is a significant expression of a rebellious attitude toward the grace of God, unearned and undeserved, in providing water. The water that will enable them to grow crops. The water that will enable them to conveniently drink and slake their thirst.

Jesus will stand up on the last great day of the feast and say what? O him that is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who comes to me out of his inward parts will flow rivers of living water. Because of this mocking attitude, does God revoke the healing of the water? No.

It says that it's been healed to this day according to the word of Elisha which he spoke. What happened when Moses struck the rock? What happened when the people complained? God still gave them water. And that is an occasion for an expression of attitude.

These young people express this attitude. So look at the nature. They really think they're clever here.

Who has just gone up by means of a whirlwind? Who has just gone up and away? That was Elijah. The real key though is in the second thing they say. Go up thou bald head.

I did a lot of work on that word bald head this past week. It's intriguing. Were they just mocking him because he had lost his hair? I don't think so.

We need to look at this word. And in Hebrew this is the word kereah. Q-E-R-E-A-H.

Q-E-R-E-A-H. This is a hard H. It's the hate. Kereah.

And the verb is kereah. Q-E-R-E-A-H. A hard, a rough breathing H. And this is a fascinating word.

Because it is used several times in scripture. They say it means bald. And I don't have time to take you through this.

If you get a strong concordance and want to follow this. Look at the places where it is used. But here's the short answer.

It doesn't just mean bald. It means shaved. This is not natural baldness.

This isn't male pattern baldness. This has happened by some unnatural means. It's used in Leviticus talking about diseases of the skin.

And if the hair has fallen out in an unnatural manner. But that's kind of rare. In most cases it is used in the causative stem to make bald.

Or make yourself bald. How do you do that? You get a razor and shave. And in the same context it is often accompanied by slashing the skin.

You will not make yourself bald. You will not cut yourselves to mourn for the dead. You don't develop male pattern baldness because somebody in your family dies.

You shave your hair. You make marks in your hair. You disfigure yourself with a razor by cutting it.

With all respect to the lexicons and to the interpretations that have been based on it. It doesn't so much mean to be bald or to make bald. It means to shave.

To make bald by shaving. To make bald by actively doing something to remove the hair. Now, why does this matter? What is one of the signature features of Elijah's appearance? What does Ahab say? He's a hairy man.

Ahab says, what did he look like? They said, well, they didn't say he wears camel's hair. They said he's a hairy man. He's very hairy.

These youths, these young hooligans are shouting at Elisha. Go up, you shaving. Go up, you piece of hair that has fallen off of Elijah.

To Elijah, what are you? He left, you're just a shaving. You're just a piece of hair that fell off of Elijah. It's hugely denigrating.

Many people are bald all the time. When the elders in Israel were bald, nobody went around mocking people for being bald. That's ridiculous.

What are they saying to Elisha? Remember the senator from here in Texas that was mocking Dan, what was his last name? Quayle. Dan Quayle as the vice presidential candidate. Dan Quayle rather unstrategically made a remark about John Kennedy.

And so our senator was mocking him and saying, well, I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a

friend of mine. You're no Jack Kennedy.

Well, that's what they're saying. You're no Elijah. You're a piece of hair that fell off of Elijah.

Elijah shaved and you're what fell off. Go up, hairball. Go up, piece of hair that came off of Elijah.

You're just a pale leaving. You're a shaving. You're just a chip from the big block, so to speak.

I think that's what they're saying here. There's too many bald people in Israel for this to be any kind of a valid way to mock someone. But what is he doing? Well, the real prophet, Elijah, went up in a whirlwind.

You're going up by climbing out of our city. So, yeah, show us what a big prophet you are, climbing one that is a piece of hair that fell off of the one that could actually lift off. They're mad at him, perhaps because he healed the water and they're all out of the water hauling job.

There's a huge group of them. Huge group. Because when the bears come, only it says of the group, 42 are mauled.

You see people all the time saying 42 were killed. Scripture doesn't say they were killed. What does it say? They're saying, Allah, Allah, keep climbing, keep climbing, hairball.

Keep climbing, pale shadow of Elijah. Elijah brought fire down on Mount Carmel. What did you do? You fixed the water? That's a pain for us.

All you've done is cause trouble. Yeah, go on up. Get out of here, you know, piece of shaved hair.

That's what koreach is, is the result of shaving. The result of shaving. This is used, by the way, and it says you will not do this between your eyes.

In one of the scriptures, if you look up all these strong things, it says you will not make a shaving between your eyes. You don't go bald above your nose. You don't go bald on the front of your face.

But what would you do? You might disfigure your eyebrows, you know, and make yourself look strange between your eyes, somewhere in this vicinity of your face. But it's to shave. It is to cut away the hair.

So they're saying, yeah, go up, hair clipping. You know, you are to Elijah what a piece of his hair is to him. So they're mocking.

So he turned around and looked at them. This is not anger. This is careful consideration.

He turns back, facing Jericho, and he looks at them. He analyzes them. He considers them, recognizes in them this attitude of rejection and rebellion, and he reviled them.

This literally, it doesn't mean to curse. Remember when Samuel said God will honor those who honor him and the others he will lightly esteem? Actually, God is speaking to Samuel about himself. And he says, I will honor those who honor me and those who disregard me.

I will lightly esteem. That's basically what this verb means. It means to treat as a light thing, to dismiss as unimportant, to trivialize.

He turned around and looked at them and pronounced them trivial. Well, you don't want the prophet pronouncing you trivial, just like you don't want God treating you as a light thing or lightly esteeming you. That's all he does is he says, you, I declare to be insignificant.

That's all he did. He turned around and looked at them. Huge gang, one guy against probably well over 100, could have been as many as 200 or 300 of these youths.

Big gang there. He looks at them and he dismisses them as unimportant. Even revile is stronger than the verb.

It just means to treat as a light thing. That's all he does. In the name of the Lord, as far as God is concerned, you are off the map.

You are meaningless. In the name of the Lord, I declare you unimportant. And he turns around and keeps going toward Bethel.

Well, at that point, two she bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths. It says they tore them. It doesn't say they killed them.

They were injured. They were scratched. They were bitten.

They suffered injury of some sort. It doesn't say they were killed. Why do we have the number? What about the number 42? Well, this number is significant, and it shows up a couple of different places.

In mathematics, what are the factors that will give you 42? How many sevens are there in 42? There's not seven sevens. There's six sevens. Six is the number of man and his insufficiency.

Seven is the number of God and His completeness and perfection on the seventh day He rests. So six times seven, 42, this is the contrast between God's completeness and perfection, His ability, and man's shortfall. Man, at his very best, can only get to six.

He can't make it to seven. This harks back to the healing of the waters. You cannot understand the bear incident without looking at what has just preceded it in the town of Jericho.

In the town of Jericho. That town was demolished and declared off-limits. Nobody should inhabit this again, and if they ever do, there's going to be a curse.

Well, remember when Israel wanted a king, and God said, I'm your king, you don't need a king.

But they insisted, and God said, okay, I'll give you a king. And you're now going to have a king from now on.

But it wasn't God's perfect best will. It was supposed to be a theocratic kingdom. And ultimately, He's going to convert the perpetual king because it will be God the Son who is the king.

But they insist on a king. He gives them a king. Jericho has been rebuilt.

These people insist on dwelling there. It's beautifully situated. The water's a big problem.

We can't grow anything, but we really want to live here. Notice this. Do something about this.

And so God heals the water and says, all right, you want to settle for next best? You don't want to be in Jerusalem. You don't want to be in Judea. You want to be up here in Benjamin and you want to dwell in Jericho by the Dead Sea in this low spot, surrounded by the history and reminders of failure and Lot's wife and so on? Okay, fine.

I'll heal the water and you can dwell here. And God's grace allows them this second best. And even that grace, they want to spit in His face.

They want to reject. And they mock the prophet by whom this deliverance comes. It foreshadows what's going to happen when Jesus stands up and offers them living water.

And they're going to spit in His face, literally. And they're going to put Him on the cross. And they are going to raise Him up.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up. What are they going to say to Jesus when He is lifted up? Come down. Come down, O cursed one.

If you're all that you claim to be, come down. Well, if He had, there would have been no more regretted words in the history of humanity than this mocking and jeering that they're throwing at the Lord Jesus when He is lifted up, when He has gone up on their behalf. And it is not without significance that Elisha's destination here is Beth-el, the house of God, the place where the ladder goes up to heaven.

Jesus is on route to return to His Father when He is lifted up, when He provides deliverance to people who want to live in a bad place. And you cannot get from Jericho to Beth-el without going through the Valley of the Shadow. It's on the route.

So these things are just hugely significant. What do we take away from it? What does it say in Romans 1? When they knew Him as God, they did not glorify Him as God. What's the next phrase? Neither were they thankful.

When God expresses His grace toward us, when God provides for us, when God heals the

poison waters in our lives and even allows us to dwell in the second best place and provides for us and makes promises to us when we're living in Jericho instead of Jerusalem, if we are not thankful, if we continue in an attitude of rebellion, if that dwelling in Jericho is actually the first stage of rebellion and mocking the deliverance and provision of God follows hard on, beyond it, you can expect the bears. You can expect that God is not going to tolerate that for long. Not only that, but if you look at... I love going to Bullinger for things like this.

You look up his summary of Bible numbers on the meaning of the number 42. 42 is a number connected with the Antichrist. An important part of his career will last for 42 months.

How many months is there in 3 1/2 years? 36 months is 3 years. Six more is 3 1/2, 42 months. How many separate stops were there in the 40 years of wandering when Moses details their travel log from the time they left Egypt until the time they arrived and were ready to cross over into the land? You know how many separate stops there are in that 40-year sojourn so that everyone drops in the wilderness? There are 42.

There are 42 separate episodes, separate locations, separate encampments for Israel that are detailed in the Word of God, and the stages of Israel's wandering come to 42 when you total them up. So it becomes symbolic of man's intransigence and opposition to God. God wants it to be seven.

He wants there to be a day of rest, and we insist on doing six. We want to pick up sticks on the Sabbath. We want to gild the lily.

We want to add to it. We want to improve upon it. We want to build an Orthodox church on the site.

We want to do more, add more, modify it to suit ourselves, and we end up rejecting God's Word, God's will, God's way, and that is 42. No accidents in Scripture. It's a caution for us.

You go back to the early chapters of Romans. Let us not fail to enter into that rest, that seven. Don't stop at six.

Enter into that rest. There remains a rest for the people of God. And looking at the short view, this looks like a setback.

I've lost my job. I've lost my livelihood. I've lost an opportunity.

Things were going well as far as I was concerned, and now it seems that God has set me back in the unfolding of His plan. We want to be careful. We want to be grateful.

We want to be trusting that God knows what He's doing. When things change, new prophet, new unfolding of the Spirit, new activities, we want to be ready. We want to be looking and not resenting God's action in our lives.

You don't know what God is doing. You don't know. It's also possible that these youths had the

attitude that the people had when Jesus fed the 5,000.

Well, let's make Him king. Let's make Him stay. Don't let Him leave.

He's the goose that lays golden eggs. He's a source of bread. Maybe they figure, well, if Elisha can make the water pure, he can make the crops grow.

Let's ensconce Him. Let's keep Him here. And when He's going and leaving, maybe that's an element.

It doesn't tell us what the source of their resentment is, and the reason it doesn't tell us is it doesn't matter. There is resentment that causes them to actively express their rebellion and their hatred, and that is what God judges. And that's what we want to watch out for in ourselves.

Well, we'll close here and pick up in Chapter 3 next time. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word and the instruction and correction, the rebuke, and the doctrine that it imparts to us. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will teach us, help us to see the personal meaning and application of these truths.

Your Word is living and powerful, cuts to the very heart, cuts to the quick. We pray that it will do so in us to improve us, to purge us and cleanse us, that washing of water by Your Word can purify us and sanctify us and set us apart for service and reflecting the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name.

Amen.