

Kings and Prophets 13-12-13a

This is Friday the 13th of December, 2013. We resume after a hiatus of a couple of weeks, what's it been, three weeks? We missed two weeks, but I think it's been a total of three since we last met, but Kings and Prophets, we're in the book of 2 Kings. We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to dedicate our time in our study and our fellowship to God's glory and our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then we'll begin.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your Word. We thank you for the privileges that belong to us because of our standing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the truth that is contained in your Word and the power that it has to transform us and to energize us and to draw us close to you in a way that goes beyond anything in the natural realm.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word this evening, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. It has been a time since we saw the Scripture to which we address ourselves in 2 Kings, so it might be good for us to review the end of chapter 2. We saw that there is this tremendous emphasis and chiastic structure that centers around verse 11.

It happened as they continued on and talked that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire and separated the two of them, Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into the sky, into HaShemayim, and Elisha saw and he cried out, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. So he saw him no more, and he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan.

Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had struck the water, or had struck again the water, it was divided this way and that, and Elisha crossed over. As I read these verses, hopefully things are returning to your mind that we have observed in terms of the doubling, the twice mentioned nature of things, because the double portion of the Spirit of God, the identity of Elisha as sort of a second coming of Elijah, if you will, is being emphasized to us in the literary structure, in the repetition of phrases, in the reintroduction of ideas, and we have seen that in some detail, and I'm not going to go back through it since we have looked at it in such detail. Hopefully this is resonating a bit just as we read it.

The water was divided this way and that, and Elisha crossed over. And you remember that in addition to this emphasis on who it is that comes back across the river, the two of them go across. One of them comes back to be seen by the sons of the prophets and eventually by the rest of the northern kingdom of Israel, but the value is the same.

Elisha coming back across, one Elisha now is worth an Elijah and Elisha that left. He has the

mantle, he has the commission, he has the office and the power of God, and it is undiminished. And one of the things I have not mentioned up to this point that I would like to in thinking about our bereavement on this earth of loved ones who are here for a time, the grass withers and the flower fades and the generations turn over and the baton is passed, the mantle drops and falls to us to continue the representation of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth and so on.

But think about this, it is undiminished. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, His witness, His representation on this earth is undiminished as the generations pass. We tend to think, well, there was no age like the apostolic age, there was no age like the first few centuries of the church where there was the vitality, there was the spread of the gospel and so on.

Looking at this passage, even in the Old Testament day, what do we recognize? Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. And it is not the genius of people, it is not the experience of people, it is not the eyewitness accounts of people that constitutes the witness of Jesus Christ in the earth for us. It is the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, which is undiminished.

You don't need the Apostle Peter, you don't need an apostolic succession, you don't need some sort of special magic to represent the Lord Jesus Christ as effectively as you can and as powerfully as He has ever been represented in this earth. What does it require? It is God's Spirit and God's Word, both of which we have in an undiluted and undiminished presence. The Holy Spirit that indwells you and me, the Holy Spirit that is capable of and hopefully is filling you and me, is just as great as He ever was.

And you and I, in this generation, on this earth, are empowered through the Spirit and through the Word to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in the holiday season now, and I'm always of a mixed mind when it comes to this. Not that I'm of a mixed mind any less the rest of the year, I can be as mixed up as anybody, but does it not seem a little bit schizophrenic that we celebrate Christmas in December at the time of the winter solstice when there's not a shred of biblical support for celebrating Christmas? There's not a verse, there's not a passage, there's not an example.

The Apostles didn't get together at any time of year and celebrate the Lord's birth. It's not in any of the epistles of Paul or Peter or John, it's not in the letters that Jesus wrote to the Revelation crowd, the letters to the seven churches, Revelation 2 and 3. There's nothing in there about an annual celebration of the Lord's birth. So I ask myself, and I was talking to Elizabeth about this just earlier today, how is Christmas different from Halloween, All Hallows' Eve, where it's the spooks and goblins and toothy toothless pumpkin entities? Is there any biblical warrant for that holiday? No, there's not.

Well, there isn't any more for Christmas than there is for Halloween. So what is the holiday? And am I scrooging here and saying, you know, bah, humbug, boo, forget celebrating Christmas, no trees, no decorations, not at all. But here's the point.

What is it that makes Christmas a worthwhile celebration for you and for me as God-fearing, Bible-believing, fundamentalist Christians? What is our warrant for celebrating Christmas? Do we have one at all? And if we do, what is it? Look at Elisha coming back across the river. What is his mission and what is his commission? Has he, has anybody seen him anointed with oil to fulfill the office of prophet? What is it that qualifies him, that justifies his coming back across and speaking for God and representing God? People could make a similar argument in the sense that, well, you knew Elijah, and Elijah might have been a friend of yours, Elisha, but you're no Elijah. He was a wild, hairy man, and you're bald.

He was, you know, a few years old, and maybe you're young. He was experienced, and you're a neophyte. What makes you think you can come across here? Well, look, we've got a school of the prophets in Bethel.

We've got a school of the prophets in Jericho. We've got, we've got guys that are sort of professional seminary graduate, card-carrying, diploma-waving prophets here, and who are you? You've been kind of hanging around, but what makes you qualify? What was the bona fide for Elisha? It's the Spirit of God, right? The Spirit of God that rests upon him. It's not even the mantle.

It's convenient, and it's helpful, and it's symbolic that he's got the mantle, but the power is not in the mantle. He was a companion of Elijah, but the power is not in the companionship. This is why I say we don't need the apostles with their eyewitness account today.

Why? Their eyewitness account has been set down in the Word of God, and it is the Word of God and the Spirit of God in every generation, in every age. This is what made Elisha qualified. Not so much his time with Elijah.

It's the Spirit, and it's the Word that qualifies him. So back to Christmas. What qualifies Christmas as a holiday for us? Well, in and of itself, it is a day like any other day.

Paul talks about this. Some people want to observe times and seasons. Other people esteem every day alike.

If we esteem every day alike, then what are we doing celebrating Christmas? And how can it possibly be valid when there's nothing in Scripture about it at all in terms of an observance? Jesus didn't say, see this little miniature manger and a little representation of my mom and dad, this do in remembrance of me, for as often as you set up this manger scene, there's nothing. So how does it work? Things have significance and meaning to the extent that we invest them with it in the light of God's Word and in the power of God's Word. We as a church could pick July the 17th and say, we are going to celebrate on this day the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not that we think He was born in July or that we think He was born on December 25th, but Scripture records His birth, records the grace of God and the juxtaposition of times when God chose to bring Him into this world and any day that we choose to celebrate is a good day to

celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus. Since there is a traditional celebration, that's a good day for us to pick. Any other day we pick is a good day to celebrate, to observe, to appreciate.

But what gives that celebration its power? Not December 25th on the calendar being read. Not holly and berries and music and presents and trees and lights. What gives the celebration its meaning and its power? It is the Word of God and the Spirit of God and people who live in that power.

That's what invests the holiday with meaning. It doesn't matter what day Jesus was born, that's why we're not told what day He was born. No idea what day Jesus was born, not the first clue.

But the holiday is significant because people with the Spirit of God and the Word of God in their hearts and souls choose to express appreciation on that day. So if your town, if your community outlaws public displays of Mary and Joseph and the baby in the manger on the courthouse lawn, I don't care. If they say we're not going to say Christmas, we're going to say winter season celebration or whatever other circumlocutions they choose to use for Christmas.

And they don't want to say Merry Christmas, they want to say Happy Holidays, and they don't want to play any songs about Jesus, they just want to play Let it Snow and Rudolph and Frosty. I don't care. It isn't a sacrilege in the sense of how dare you not observe the birth of the Lord Jesus.

The holiday only has meaning because in our hearts, in the light of the Spirit and the Word, we choose to make it so. And they can't outlaw the Spirit of God and the Word of God in my heart to decide in the traditional fashion I'm going to celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus. So you see my point.

This relates directly to the example we see of Elisha. Elisha doesn't have a prophet hat. He doesn't have a prophet diploma.

He doesn't have anything to wave in front of somebody's face and say, look, I'm the prophet. I don't know how long this mantle lasted, this piece of cloth that he got from Elijah. Is it mentioned as a constant, is this like Aaron's rod that budded? It's just a symbol.

It is the Spirit and the Word of God that count. So as we approach the holidays, the holy days, is it actually a holy day? What does Scripture say? Sanctify the Lord God in your heart. The holiday is in your heart.

It is the Spirit and the Word that make any day you choose to think about these truths. It's convenient to do it because it's traditional to do it. It's nice that the secular world has to give some recognition to the fact that so many thousands of Christians appreciate the Lord Jesus and His coming in incarnate form.

But there's nothing inherently holy, special or otherwise powerful about the day. It is the Spirit and the Word. So we're reminded of this as we look at the example of Elijah coming back across

the river without his mentor, without his previous generation prophet, teacher.

What does he come back with? It is the Spirit and the Word of God. And this is going to mark the transition. And you may remember when we talked about this three weeks ago, there is a pattern that this falls in as an example.

It is one example of a pattern that we see throughout Scripture of a replacement a substitution, a progress in God's plan. Elijah is replaced by Elisha. And there's something new and different about Elisha.

Elijah was a prophet that delivered a message of judgment. We saw the altar crumbling. We saw the king rebuked.

We saw the house of Ahab cursed. We saw the heavens dry up and give no water. But what is the first thing that Elisha does? He goes to a town that's got bad water and fixes it.

It is a complimentary and fulfilling and positive balance to the largely negative and rebuking and judgmental message and presence and power that Elijah represented. And so most of the things that you see Elisha do from now on are going to be of that rebuilding and restorative nature. And it begins here in chapter 2. So as soon as Elisha crosses over in verse 14, the sons of the prophets in the next verse who were from Jericho saw him.

Jericho is the historic town. It's the town of the past. It's the town that had been destroyed and had been cursed and had been rebuilt, still under the curse.

And you think about the nation of Israel who had to live under, the law is holy, righteous, and good. It is from God and yet the curse of the law was its revelation of sin and of shortfall and of inability. That was the role of the law.

So when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho, it's no accident that they're, we know that they're from Jericho, but we're reminded of that again because this is their paradigm. This is the way they think. When they see Elisha they say, the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.

And they came to meet him and they bowed to the ground before him and they said, look, now there are 50 strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master. What does the number 50 always make you think of when you're thinking about Israel and thinking about the law? What is the number 50? That's the jubilee.

That's the seven sevens and then your next year. This is kind of like circumcision on the eighth day. It's a full week of seven days and then the next day.

That eighth day is a day of renewal, of new life. You go to Leviticus 14 and the cleansed leper and you see that eighth day symbology. Well here, 50 strong men with your servants, let them go and search for your master.

So they're looking at Elisha. They have some notion of what has transpired on the other side of

the Jordan. But as they look at Elisha, he doesn't seem sufficient to meet the need.

We still want to see if we can't find your master. Isn't there a way the two of you can't continue forward? What happened in the first generation of the church? This Jewish component that was blessed on the day of Pentecost with the falling of the Holy Spirit upon them, what did they immediately start wanting to do? Well can't we resurrect the law? Can't we combine this new age with the law? Let's go look for it. Even in this year of jubilee as it were, this year of fulfillment and release, what was the jubilee? All debts are forgiven.

All transfers of land are reversed. You're back to your inheritance. You get a fresh start.

It's a reset. It's a reboot. And what do these prophets want to do? They want to reboot the ministry of Elijah.

Let's go look for him. And not insignificant, it's a three-day search. Three days is sufficient to establish that he's not coming back.

Three days would normally have been sufficient to establish that Jesus wasn't coming back, but he did. So they had to go do this exploration. And there is this time of tension and this time of searching and trying to reconcile and bring together Elisha with Elijah.

And after three days when Elisha at first says you don't need to, but he has to allow them the latitude. It reminds you of what Jesus said about divorce. You know, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives.

It was necessary, but from the beginning it was not so. And it's basically, all right, you've got to do this the hard way because you couldn't figure out how to do it the easy way. And the first generation, generations actually of the church, had to work their way out of the law.

They were in the age of grace and didn't know it, and they had to be cajoled and taught and had to have an experience of here's what happens when you mix the law with grace. It fails. Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? You're enemies of the cross.

You've fallen from grace. You're cut off from Christ. Trying this.

If you go back under the law. But they had to give it a try and a lot of this is incipient and it's nascent and it's foreshadowed in this pericope. This is why the book of Kings at this point, single book in the Hebrew text, makes such a concentric ring emphasis around this episode.

And it's why we have taken our time going through it because it is so pregnant with truth that the wise believer could see and understand in the days of the Lord Jesus and the time when the law and John the Baptist as that Elijah who would come and prepare the way and encourage the hearts to change. And isn't it interesting, if you keep your mind in this pericope but think about the ending of Malachi. What is it that the prophet Malachi, my messenger Malachi, what is the last thing he leaves the Old Testament people with? Elijah will come and what will he do?

It doesn't even say that he's going to announce the Messiah.

What does it say he will do at the end of the day? He will turn the hearts of who? The fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. What is this father-son business? Why doesn't he say he will announce the Messiah, he will go the way of proclaiming, hear ye, hear ye, here's the Messiah. That's not what Malachi says.

Malachi says Elijah will come and what will he do? He will turn the hearts of a previous generation to the next generation. Fathers under the law to children under grace and the hearts of the children under grace after Pentecost to appreciate and understand the value of the law. But that father-child thing is Elijah, Elisha.

It is important for us to recognize. We're seeing this in our Ephesian study in chapter 2 of Ephesians when Paul talks about you who were dead in trespasses and sins carried away by the forces of this world apart from God without hope, without God in the world and we who were under the law who had the benefits. It's the same idea.

Can the Gentiles appreciate the stewardship and the heritage and the examples both positive and negative that are contained in the Old Testament? Can we as church age believers learn copious amounts perhaps even more from the Old Testament than we do from the New as we study it? Of course. We are the children looking back at the fathers. Those fathers not only in the age of Jesus Christ, not only in the age of Pentecost, but these people are all going to be raised.

They're coming back. Remember what Johnny Carson said he wanted for his epitaph? I'll be right back. Well, the whole Old Testament age, all of those fathers they are coming back.

At the second coming of Christ and the inception of the Millennial Kingdom they're coming back and their hearts are going to need to turn to and learn from the children, the Gentiles, the church that will have now been recorded historically and be available for them. Our Testament is going to be something they turn their hearts to in the same way that we now turn to the Old Testament and learn so much about the work and purpose of God in Christ, empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit. It's the Word and the Spirit.

It's the Word and the Spirit over and over again. So these prophets, Elisha says, okay, I didn't want you to go looking, but you've got to go look. You've got to satisfy yourself that Elijah really is gone.

Okay. Spend your three days so that he can die in your mind. He can be off the scene in your mind.

And they urged him until he was ashamed and he said, send. Go ahead, send the 50 men to look for Elijah if you must, if this is what it's going to take, if you've got to exhaust this. And that's what the first generation of the church did, those Jews who couldn't imagine life without the law, life out from under the law.

So they sent, they searched for three days to not find him. When they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he waited for them to learn the hard way, what he tried to tell them, the easy way, he waited for them. He could have left.

He could have said, you guys are going to learn. He could have advanced his journey, but he waited for them in Jericho. Why? What you don't learn the easy way, you learn the hard way.

But the man of God, with the message of God, given in the power of the Spirit of God, is still waiting when they return to teach them what they could have learned three days earlier. What is the Spirit of God doing with Israel? After two days, you will live again. On the third day, you will rise.

The Lord Jesus is emblematic of what's going to happen for the people of Israel. After their 2,000 years, perhaps, their two days of being in the grave, on the third day, early in the morning on the third day, that nation is going to be raised. And they will be satisfied after this three-day period that the law has well and truly served its purpose.

And the Spirit of God is going to be ready to teach them. You have no need that any man teach you, John says, because you've got the Spirit. What is the New Covenant to Judah and to Israel? What is the New Covenant? I will pour out My Spirit on all your flesh.

Your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. The Spirit will be there to teach. And after these 50 come back after the three-day delay, and they recognize that the days of Elijah are over, here's Elijah ready to restore, ready to teach in that double portion of the Spirit.

And they're going to have the double portion of the Spirit, the nation of Israel, in the Millennial Kingdom. These things are so resonant with future significance, these little simple details. So they come back to Him.

He had stayed in Jericho. He said to them, Did I not say to you? What do you think the Lord Jesus is going to say to the generation that rejected Him and put Him on the cross, when they're all raised at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom? Did I not say to you that the Father had sent me, that the Kingdom time is here? Didn't John tell you, change your mind, the Kingdom is at hand? Did I not say to you? What about that first generation of the church when they come back? Didn't the apostles tell you it's the age of the Spirit, not the age of the law? Did I not tell you, don't waste your time in this? The Kingdom was presented to Israel by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ, and they had to go the three-day route. They had to waste the time wandering in the wilderness, in the wilderness, looking for something that the law could never provide, but they come back, where? To Jericho, to the city that is rebuilt on a curse, and Elisha is going to reverse and eliminate the curse.

The Spirit of God in Elisha is going to reverse it. Did I not say to you, do not go? What is the very next thing? The men of the city say to Elisha, verse 19, 2 Kings 2, please observe, please look at

our situation. It's pleasant.

Our city is in a wonderful place, as my Lord sees, but the water stinks and the ground is barren. We're all set up for prosperity, but nothing will grow, and the water that ought to be providing and sustaining and nourishing life is bad. We're just barely functional here.

He said, bring me a new bowl and put salt in it. What does salt universally represent in the Word of God? It is the salt of the what? Covenant. Salt of the covenant.

Salt of the covenant. It's not, this salt has no magical power to make bad water good. Salt usually messes up water.

On a hot day, you've been out working, mowing, weeding, whatever you come in, you go to the refrigerator now, smash the glass under the spout, nice cold water comes in, and you say, ah, boy, all this needs is a little bit of salt. Right? You go get the salt shaker, dump some salt in, now this is really going to be a refreshing beverage. Who does that? But Elisha, in the presence and power of God the Holy Spirit, says, bring me a new bowl.

A new bowl. Something that hasn't been seen before. Something that hasn't been used before.

The bowl exists, but it's unused. Put salt in it. So they brought it to him, then he, now, who puts in the salt? Does Elisha put in the salt? They put in the salt.

Why? In typological, symbolic terms, what does this mean? These people have got to lay hold of the covenant of God for themselves. What is the new covenant? I will pour out my Spirit. I will take out your heart of stone, which cannot learn and cannot grow and cannot appreciate, cannot worship, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

Right? Isn't that the new covenant? Now, is everybody in Israel going to exploit that promise and that covenant in the Millennial Kingdom? Are all of the raised Israelites going to be wonderful, God-fearing, narrow road, straight gate believers? No. Who is it that will benefit? Who is it that will avail themselves of this wonderful blessing and wonderful covenant opportunity? Those who lay hold of it for themselves. They will take the salt.

They will put it in the bowl. And by taking the salt, this is a step of obedience. This is recognition and acceptance of God's way and God's plan.

And when they take the salt, Elisha says, you put the salt in the bowl. You bring me a new bowl. You go get the bowl and you put in the salt.

There is a requirement for response on the part of the recipient of this blessing. And they do respond. This is like the uncleaned corners of the field.

If you want the benefit, you've got to go reap that grain that has been left for you. You thresh it. You grind it.

You mix it with flour. You bake your bread. You have got to participate in this gracious provision.

You bring me a bowl. You put salt in it. So they brought it to him.

Then he went out to the source of the water. He went out to the source of the water. Who does Elisha represent here? This is the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

He cast in the salt and said, thus says the Lord, I have healed this water. The Lord says, I have healed the water. You brought me a bowl.

You brought me the salt. I will use these fruits of obedience. But it's the power of God that heals the water.

From it there shall be no more death or barrenness. What is the condition for these Israelites who live in the kingdom in the millennium? A man that dies at the age of 100, they say, well, he was just a baby. He was just a kid.

He only lived to 100. What happened? Death and barrenness are removed. The fruitfulness of the millennial kingdom is well documented in Scripture.

So the water remains healed to this day according to the word of Elisha which he spoke. That condition will persist and prevail throughout the kingdom age. Then he went up from there to Bethel.

And as he was going up the road, youths came from the city and mocked him. Go up old bald head. What is also going to happen in the millennial age? Those who are not interested, who are not appreciative, who are not obedient are going to be revealed.

And their mocking derisive attitude toward God and toward the covenant is going to be exposed. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths, pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And you remember how many times have we studied the sheep and goats judgment, the separation of the good and bad fish, the wheat and the tares, the casting into the fire and the gathering into the barn that takes place at the end of the millennium.

And it is based on works. It is a judgment of works. Because faith is no longer the issue.

It is obedience. It is acceptance. It is relationship with God who is near, not far, who is available.

The Lord Jesus Christ will be visible in the millennial kingdom. The sons of David will rule. Resurrection and the facts of God's provision in and around that kingdom nation of Israel will be open and viewable by the world.

Faith is what you don't see. This will be visible. And now it's a matter of response.

This is taking souls and placing them in front of the throne of God. What's your response? Are you going to have the reaction of Satan and the fallen third that went with him when they see everything? Satan isn't guilty of lack of faith, lack of acceptance, lack of obedience, lack of humility and appreciation for God. And that will be the case.

Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see where this all leads. What is next in terms of 2 Kings 3 and the son of Ahab coming to the throne? Is this the end of our concentric pattern or does it continue? We saw how it extends into the earlier part of the book.

Does the other side extend into chapter 3? We'll see that when we come back.