

Kings and Prophets 14-04-04a

This is Friday, the 4th of April, 2014. We are in the book of 2 Kings. We are looking at the episode found in chapter 6 with regard to the floating iron, the floating axe head.

Let's take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to the Lord and then we'll begin. Father, once again we find ourselves at the end of a busy and task-filled week and we thank you for your grace in providing for us and sustaining us and using our circumstances to provide opportunities to apply the things that we learn as we spend time in study and in fellowship centered on the truth that you impart to us in your Word. We thank you for the passage that is before us.

We thank you for its preservation and the multiple ways that it is a benefit to us. We ask your blessing on us as we study it together. Each one of us find encouragement and strength and an opportunity for growth and the application of these things in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Well, in the career of Elisha, we have seen that the miracles that he is the agent of, he doesn't actually possess supernatural power of his own, but God through Elisha provides blessings. Stepping back and remembering sort of the big picture, Elijah suggests to us the Old Testament economy.

He is the law. He is the judgment side, there will be no rain, where Elisha sort of suggests to us the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, taking the place of Elijah and where there was no water or where the water is bad, he makes it good. Where there is a lack of provision, he multiplies food.

Elijah, of course, does some beneficial things as well, but he is symbolic of the age of the law and relationship with God through that first covenant. Elisha suggests to us the benefits that come through the Lord Jesus Christ and the double portion. If you count them, there are at least twice as many episodes involving Elisha as his predecessor.

So we find ourselves in chapter 6. We saw this idea of the sons of the prophets wanting to move. This wasn't something that the prophet himself suggested. God didn't say it is time to move.

You remember there are times when God will tell people to move. He comes to Joseph and says you need to go to Egypt because there are people who are seeking the child's life. I am talking about Joseph, the husband of Mary.

There are times when there is geographical guidance that is specifically given by God. This is not one of those times. And Elisha doesn't think it is time to go because when the men suggest they want to leave, he says fine, go.

One of them asks him if he will come as well. And this is the one who has the borrowed axe head that we saw last time. So just by way of quick review, then we are going to do a little bit of

a category or a topical study real quick on one of the elements in this story.

Sons of the prophets said to Elisha, look now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. So we beseech you. Give us a good answer to this problem.

Now what it says is they don't ask, they tell. And this is not the key to a successful prayer life, to tell God what he should do instead of asking God what should be done. I am just sort of a master of the obvious here, but apparently it wasn't obvious to them.

Please let us go to the Jordan and let every man take a beam from there and let us make there a place where we may dwell. So he said, knock yourselves out. Then one said, the one said, please consent to go with your servants.

Elisha answered, I will go. So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees.

But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron fell into the water. And he cried out and said, alas, master, for it was borrowed. So the man of God said, where did it fall? And he showed him the place.

So he cut off a stick. This is the same word that is used up in verse four and verse five as what it is they cut down. Very same word.

He cut off a stick and threw it in there and he made the iron float. Therefore, he said, pick it up for yourself. So he reached out his hand and took it.

There are two previous miracles that we noted last time where there is a problem and Elisha adds something to the problem that solves it. In the first case, we had the bitter water of Jericho. What did Elisha add? What did he throw in? Salt.

In the second case, there was poisoned stew from somebody trying to make it better by his own efforts and adding his own ingredients. Found a gourd, chopped it up in there, made everybody sick unto death. There's death in the pot.

What did Elisha add? Flour. This time we have a situation where this is going to cause hardship not only by indebting the son of the prophets, the one, but it is going to until he can figure out a way, which he evidently does not have, of paying back this very expensive piece of equipment, the person who owns it is going to be without it as well. And so there are two people who are going to be at the very least greatly inconvenienced and possibly very seriously harmed by this.

What does Elisha add? What does he throw in here? It is the stick. It is the etz. This is E-T-S.

And there is the reoccurrence of this idea, the use of a stick or a rod or a staff, many cases in Scripture sort of alluded to this last time. And what we want to do is take just a little bit of a few moments of time to look at this because it brings us to a very important feature and central feature in Israel in terms of worship. So let's take a quick look at this.

These willowy trees, these small trees, they are going to cut these down and they must be of different sizes because they talk about each of us are going to take a beam from there. And beam is a different word. This is korah, Q-O-R-A-H.

And these evidently are roof beams. What they want to do is maybe create an overhead shade. And so you find this word used for that in its five occurrences in the Bible, four times it is translated beam and one time as roof or rafter.

So you get the idea that they are not necessarily constructing log cabins. And if each man is going to take a beam, what they are figuring is, let's say there are 40 sons of the prophets. If they get 40 reasonably sized rafters, they can construct a shelter with overhead shade, something they can perhaps create in sort of a tabernacle fashion that will shelter them in this, if you know the Mediterranean climate, then as now.

It's not particularly harsh. You're not going to freeze to death in the, particularly probably not at this time of year. They just need something to keep off the occasional rain, to shade them, give them a place to put their stuff out of the way.

So this is sort of a booth situation, a communal booth. Each of us, if we all contribute one roof beam, we'll have a communal shelter. So these are not gigantic mighty oaks that they're chopping down.

They're just substantial enough to support a roof. Well, so trees furnish wood for various uses, anywhere from sticks, rods, staffs, to heavier construction materials. All of this broadly comes under ets.

Even in the New Testament, the Greek word, when it says, he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, the Greek word there just means wood. It may be a tree. It may be trimmed up and processed into lumber.

It just says wood. And this has given rise to your Jehovah's Witnesses who believe that Jesus was crucified on a stake, that he didn't have a cross piece. If you see their version of the crucifixion, Jesus' hands are over his head with a single nail through both hands, just as through both feet.

And they'll argue with you ad infinitum that there's no proof that Jesus died on a cross. And you think, how is that even possible? Well, talk to one and they'll tell you. The fact remains that wood is an essential part of that picture of the Lord Jesus and the curse that preceded that particular punishment.

Cursed is everyone who hangs on the wood, on a tree. Let's, as we have been sort of doing lately, let's just step back for a minute and think, how did sin enter this world? What was involved? You can use any rock in the garden except this rock. You can drink of any stream available except this stream.

What was it? It was a tree. What was it that sustained their lives? And after they fell, God said, we've got to take them out of the garden, otherwise they will stretch out their hand and take from what? The tree of life and live forever. At the beginning, at the beginning, the wood, the tree is a primary feature.

Even before that, when you have your covenant theologian saying, well, here's the covenant of works that was in the garden and God said, I will keep you alive as long as you don't disobey and they make this into a covenant. It's not stated in scripture. They have to sort of assume that.

But what did God tell Adam? Of every tree, it wasn't shrubs, it wasn't cereal grains, it wasn't cabbages. These were of every tree you may eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not.

In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die. It doesn't even mention the fruit of the tree. It says the tree.

Do you ever notice that? Just flip back. Keep your, you don't really even need to keep your finger. I'm sure your Bible falls open to 2 Kings 6 by now.

Go back to Genesis chapter 3. There is a set of instructions after God puts the man in the garden. And in chapter 2, verse 16, the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.

For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. So then he makes the help meat. Then in chapter 3, as God indeed said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden.

And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden. But of the fruit of the tree, which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, you shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. You know the story from there.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, in verse 6, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise. It doesn't say fruit, it says tree. It's a tree desirable to make one wise.

She took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Eyes are open and so on.

And in verse 11, when God comes to the garden, he says, who told you you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat? Why doesn't this just say fruit all the way through? Why does it make an issue out of the tree? Because there is a symmetry in God's unfolding revelation, I think. You have the tree at the beginning, which is a choice. It's the tree of life or the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The choice is made. At the culmination of human history, you have the Lord Jesus Christ solving the problem created by that curse and that sin on a tree. And then at the close of history and into the eternal future, what do you have? You have the tree and the trees on each side of the river of life.

It's tree, tree, tree, beginning, middle, and ending. So I would think that whenever we see trees or parts of trees as a prominent feature in a story, this is going to have some potential significance in terms of that overall pattern. What does a rod represent or signify in Scripture? It is, in fact, the Hebrew word.

Two different Hebrew words for rod also mean and are actually more often translated as tribe. Why would the word rod be translated tribe? You have the word *mateh*, M-A-T-E-H, is the word that is used for Aaron's rod that budded in Numbers 17 and 23 or 17, 8. But this is also translated tribe. There is a second word that is used, and it is *sebet*, T-S-E-B-E-T.

And it is also often translated, and properly so, as tribe. Why? What kind of society do you have in the ancient Near East, the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob days? It is a patriarchal society. What defines a family? What defines a clan? What defines a tribe? It is the leader.

The tribe takes the name of its sion, of its originator. You are the sons of Israel. You are the children of Israel.

You are the tribe of Judah. And the scepter, the rod, will not depart from Judah. Judah pledges that scepter and loses it, his rod, when he gets tangled up with his daughter-in-law.

Remember that story? But it comes to symbolize the future life of that line. This is the rod, or the tribe, of Judah. This is the rod, or the tribe, of Simeon.

This is the rod, or tribe, of any one of those actually 13 individuals. When you count Ephraim and Manasseh as getting the double portion, there are 13 tribes in Israel, right? And yet, in Revelation, you are back to 12. God double-portioned a tribe, knowing that he was going to lose one, in the same way that he double-portioned an apostle, knowing that he was going to lose one.

So you end up with 12 apostles. You end up, again, with 12 tribes. The tribe of Dan seems to be vanished by the time you get to the 144,000 servants of God.

So, back to this idea of wood and tribe. Because it is really important that this is... There are three times Elisha throws something at a problem. And this third time is really our key.

So we are looking at this concept of a rod. There are a lot of things you can look at in the Word of God. If I had time, I would just take you through them.

There is a good article in your International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ISBI. It took me a second to deconstruct that. You call it ISBI so much.

There is an old and a new. But the new International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, I think it is under Rod. And they have all the Hebrew, show you the passages where they are used, what it means, and so on.

We don't have time for that and it is not all pertinent to our point. Here is what we want to get to. Why does Elisha throw a stick in the water? Why does he throw a stick in the water? What are the two things that define the Garden of Eden at the beginning? Streams and trees.

What defines the work of the Lord Jesus Christ? What did He say on the last great day of the Feast? Oh, let him who is thirsty come to the water and drink. Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water. Why is that possible? How is that possible? Because he is going to be wounded and bruised for our iniquities and transgressions.

And by his stripes we will be healed. That takes place on the tree. There is the water and the tree.

What happened when the soldier stuck the spear into his side? Out of his side came forth what? Blood and water at the tree. What characterizes the New Jerusalem? What comes out from under the throne of God and what grows on each side? It is the river of life on each side the trees. When you see sticks in water it is time to pay attention.

Remember the inception, the beginnings, the building of the nation of Israel begins when Jacob is still up with Laban. And how does he amass his fortune? Sticks and water. Sticks and water.

That is where the nation begins. So, when we find sticks and water here, I am interested. Now, if you were going to guess out of the entire existence of the Old Testament nation of Israel, what is the single most valuable object associated with the Old Testament nation of Israel? If you could only pick one, what would it be? What is more important than God's earthly throne, the two cherubim, the mercy seat, the Ark of the Covenant where the high priest comes in once a year? I would cast my vote for the Ark of the Covenant and so do the movie guys.

You know, it wasn't Raiders of the Lost, you know, tablets of stone. It wasn't Raiders of the Lost lamps and pictures of Gideon. You know, it is the Ark of the Covenant, right? I mean, you would have a hard time topping that one, I would think, in terms of an object.

Now, what is inside the Ark of the Covenant? Aaron's rod that budded, manna, and the tablets of the law. Now, what do the tablets of the law, let's just work the other way around, what do the tablets of the law contain, symbolize, represent? The covenant, right? Those are the tables of the law, that's God's covenant written in stone, right? What did the salt represent? Covenant. The manna is called what? From heaven.

Bread from heaven, right? What did Elisha throw into the pot of poisoned stew? Flour. What's the third thing in the Ark? The rod that budded. What does Elisha throw in here to float the iron? A stick.

So, here's what I'm thinking. It is not an accident that these three episodes are recorded. Now, the challenging part is, it's an interesting observation.

Where do we go from observation? Interpretation. What does it mean? Let me ask one more question. We're back to the Ark of the Covenant.

I'm thinking about the Ark of the Covenant. We've got the Ark of the Covenant right here. Let's go through the objects again.

The covenant is contained on what? Is this natural or supernatural? How did those marks get on those stones? Supernaturally. What wrote those? Finger of God, right? God says, Moses, you make the tablets. I'll write the stuff back on them again, right? The manna, natural or supernatural? Supernatural.

Comes down from heaven, right? The rod, normal rod, special rod. Because it's dead and it buds anyway, right? Each of these has got the touch of God upon it, right? Now, the things that Elisha uses, the salt, supernatural or natural? Supernatural. Still represents the covenant, but this is a natural.

You get this right out of the ground if you're in the right place, right? The flour, natural or supernatural? Supernatural. And who digs up salt and makes it available? People do. Who grinds grain to make flour? People do.

How did we get this stick? Where did the stick come from? Did it drop out of heaven? Did an angel bring it and say, here, Elisha, use this? Elisha cuts it with evidently a non-iron axe, by the way. He says, anybody got a bronze axe I can borrow here? We've got to get the expensive piece of equipment out with the cheap piece. But he cuts the stick, right? So isn't it interesting, if you put these two things side by side, this is what I'm thinking, you put them side by side in the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, the throne of God, the place where the hem of His garment is, you've got divinely touched emblems and symbols of these three concepts.

And by the way, we understand the concept of the tablets and the covenant. This is God reaching down and reaching to mankind and graciously entering into covenant relationship that we don't earn or deserve, right? The manna, so this is relationship, I would say. Covenant, this is a means whereby man can have a relationship with God.

You've got the old covenant, we live under the new covenant, which we love. But it's a means for relationship, right? The manna, what does that symbolize, represent, what is it emblematic of? Provision, right? The rod, what is that? It is life and it is also the means of preserving life, which is authority. Authority is what keeps people from running amok and taking each other's lives.

If man sheds blood, by man shall his blood be shed. There is, you know, God ordains kings and those that have the rule over you, pray for them because they keep the peace. Life is preserved through authority.

So it's kind of a double, in the same way the manna is double and in the same way that the covenant is, there's a lot going on there. It's a multiply faceted thing. But you've got those three things and it's the touch of God on those things in the Ark of the Covenant.

They're all supernaturally associated. So, observation, interpretation, application. This is my suggestion and believe me, the more you think about this, you'll think of things that I have not thought of and they'll be good.

But here's my suggestion. Notice that for Elisha, this is where his sandals hit the gravel. He's on earth.

He's not in the tabernacle or the temple. He's not near the heavenly precincts of God. Elisha is a man trying to live in the light of God's provision, in the light of God's grace, in the light of God's revelation, but he's living an earthly life just like you and I do.

And so what does he do? The salt is an earthly remembrance of covenant. And so he's making practical, earthly application of the same truth that is symbolized and reminderized, if you will, memorialized in the Ark of the Covenant. But you don't have to go to Jerusalem and stand outside the temple and imagine what the priests have talked about in terms of, well, inside the Holy of Holies, it's far removed.

This is practical. This is a practical use of the concept of the covenant. I can trust God for the water that brings life, that brings reproduction, that will restore and beautify and help fulfill God's promises that the land will be bountiful.

You've got to have good water for that. And Elisha throws the salt of the covenant into this bitter water. And this is what we do when we pray and we remind God of His promises.

Father in Heaven, You have promised. And I am asking, and I am seeking, and I am knocking, and I am claiming Your promise. This is the promise I am claiming.

And here is why I think it is legitimate to ask You to answer this prayer. Because You have promised. This is what You have said.

And we invoke from the ground, from the salt, the benefits of our covenant. We come up from the ground to God. Thus Thou art.

Unto thus Thou shalt return. But we bring that salt out of the earth and say, Lord, we're earthly, but we've got the covenant. And it is that on which we rest.

It is that that we claim. What about the poisoned stew and the flour? Elisha doesn't have access to manna. He can't say, well, oh Lord.

I mean, he might have been able to, but he didn't. He didn't say, oh Lord, look at these hungry sons of prophets. Please drop manna from heaven on them as You did in days of old.

You know, asking God to revisit and reproduce miraculous provision of the past. But the concept is there with this application of who is going to ultimately be the bread from heaven? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. I am the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

He's the ultimate manna. But Elisha says, well, he's not here yet, and I'm not living in the days of Moses, but I know that God makes provision for His people. And if we do our part, which is to harvest, to thresh, to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to grind, if we do as much as we can do, God will provide.

And that flour goes into the pot. But it is a remembrance, I think, and an invocation of God's ultimate expression of provision, which is that manna, which foreshadows the bread from heaven, the Lord Jesus Himself. This is my body, which is broken for you, and He hands them bread.

Then in this case, this one individual who requests the presence of the man of God, which is much like us requesting the presence of God in our lives, and the presence and power of the Word of God in our lives, this guy asks, and when he hits a difficulty, that he immediately turns. The first word out of his mouth is, Master, alas. He doesn't say, hey, Ahab, did you see where that axe head went? He turns to Elisha and calls out.

And that's what we do. And then Elisha cuts that stick because this is the life and the provision for the preservation of life that God has promised, that is symbolized in the ark. God has put these idealized and supernatural emblems in the ark of the covenant.

We don't go and pray to the ark. We don't invoke the ark. We don't carry the ark down to the creek to get the axe head to float.

We don't carry the ark down to the pot of stew to make it well. We don't carry the ark to accomplish the healing of the waters of Jericho. It's what we have on hand.

We lay hold of those things by faith. It doesn't have to be the same thing. It's the same concept.

It's the same principle. It's the same faith in the provision of God. So, say all of that to say this.

When we think about these episodes in the word of God, on a surface level, when you tell this Bible story to children, they say, isn't God great? Here was a guy that had a problem and God fixed it. And that's great. But for us, we want to strive to reach that Elisha level.

How did Elisha know that in the first case, at the waters of Jericho, to call for salt? How did he know, in the case of the poisoned stew, to call for flour? And how does he know, in this case, to go and cut a stick? This is spiritually savvy behavior. This is what we're after. We want to be able to do this.

To know not just that God will provide, but how he will provide. To know which tools to lay hold

of. This is advancement.

This is moving toward maturity. And we don't just stop thinking. We start thinking.

When there's a challenge, we start thinking. And we think, I know God's going to provide. Let me see if I can make one step further.

How will he provide? What specific part of God's promise can I lay hold of? And that's why I think these things are split out for us. This was the touchstone for all Israel. At the very heart of their worship in the Holy of Holies, this is what was put there.

And there's a reason for it. They know what's in there. And they should know why it's there.

There could have just been a holy glow coming out from behind the curtains. Well, any time you've got a problem, go to God. But there are these specifics.

The challenge, I think, for you and me, is when it is time for application. Good times, bad times, challenging times, blessed times. When there is a time for application, we want to move up a level in our sophistication.

It's not just the Shekinah. Is it the rod? Is it the covenant? Is it the heavenly provision? Which part of this do I need to go to promises? Should I go to principles? Or should I go to doctrines? And which ones? When I pray, how well can I anticipate the thinking of God? How well can I deduce what it is God is doing in this situation and pray and act accordingly? This is where we really begin to move down that narrow road and through that straight gate to life. This is the difference between a child and the standard of a mature man that we're going to be seeing in Ephesians.

And I think this is the way to do it. This is our example. This is an object lesson for us to go beyond just the knee-jerk, oh, God, help, and to really think it through.

There are aspects. There are purposes. There are definite details that God has taught us through His Word.

And we want to start implementing those, thinking in a more detailed and sophisticated way. Well, we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll finish up this section.