

Kings and Prophets 14-05-30a

This is Friday, the 30th of May, 2014. We continue our study in the, which is titled actually, Kings and Prophets. I've come to discover that even though that title occurred to me ex nihilo, others have used it.

I was disappointed to find that there are other things called kings and prophets. Who knew that it wouldn't be original to me? At any rate, we're in 2 Kings, chapter 8, and we will pick up at the end of the story of the lady and her son having her land restored, and then we'll move forward into Hazael, Ben Hadad, etc. But let's take a moment, as we always do, to prepare ourselves, ensure that God the Holy Spirit is at work in the delivery and the receiving of the observations that come forth tonight, and that we're ready to address ourselves to God's Word.

Father, how thankful we are, as always, for the many ways you've expressed grace toward us over the preceding week, providing for us, blessing us, challenging us, giving us opportunities to think about the things that we have learned from your Word and to put them into application. We thank you for this portion and the fruitful resource that it can be for us as we try to live our lives in a way that pleases you and that glorifies the Lord Jesus. We pray that as we study together that your Holy Spirit will superintend, that the Lord Jesus will be present in our midst, and that we will come away from the things we look at tonight better equipped for every good work and for understanding our place in your plan and purpose for the ages.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Well, if you remember, we're in the days of Elisha. The times of famine have come and have now gone.

This section is more or less chronological. We know that the things that took place in chapter 4 are during this time of famine. And he had told her at the beginning of this time of lack to go and stay wherever she could.

He was not specific. He just said, wherever you can. He didn't say, go to the land of the Philistines.

He didn't say, go to Moab. He didn't say, go any particular direction. He just said, stay wherever you can.

And I find this very interesting because there are many times in Scripture where we're not given specific guidance. The church age is a prime example in terms of organization of local churches. How should they be organized? What should their structure be? What should their constitution be? And so forth.

I was reading a website the other day. It almost hurt my feelings because the guy has a lot of categorical doctrines that he's accumulated, I think, from Bob Thieme and forward posted. And so if you want Bob's doctrine of this, that, or the other, it's all up there.

But he's also got some other things that he thought was helpful. One section of the website, he's got his own church constitution. And he said, every Bible church has a constitution or should have.

And if it doesn't have a constitution, there's something wrong with it. Well, sorry, we don't have a constitution. And I don't see one emerging anytime soon.

I'm sorry. You know, that's on me. We have no church constitution.

And, you know, we've suffered apparently horribly for it over this last 20 odd years. But anyway, the Bible doesn't specify. The New Testament broad brushes, as you know, and leaves it up to our discretion.

Well, this is a compliment. This is a good thing that God can turn us loose on our own recognizance and doesn't have to dictate to us specifics the way the law of Moses did. I was digitizing a sermon of Dr. Griswold earlier today.

Ken might have heard a little bit of it where Dr. Griswold was recounting all of the rabbinical extensions and clarifications of the law of Moses and what you could and could not do on the Sabbath. And if there's running water, you could collect it on the Sabbath, but if it was running down a wall, you could not. You know, all of these weird interpretations.

But what strikes me here is when Elisha speaks to the woman whose son he had restored to life, he says, Arise and go, you and your household, and stay wherever you can. Now, he gives this instruction to the woman because the Lord has called for a famine, and furthermore, it will come upon the land for seven years. So the woman arose and did according to the saying of the man of God, and she went with her household and dwelt in the land of the Philistines seven years.

She had a choice of places to go. Apparently, she had some connections there, whether they were business connections or former associates of her husband or who knows what. But she had some kind of inn and went to the land of the Philistines seven years.

The land of the Philistines is no longer the great threat that it was before David essentially wiped out the military strength of the Philistines. They have not been a factor in terms of harassing Israel since that time. You remember Saul fought the Philistines all the time, and David had war with them.

But after he wiped out Goliath and his brothers, Ishbi-Banab and the rest of them, the guy with the long bed and the spear, they just haven't been a threat. It came to pass at the end of seven years, the woman returned from the land of the Philistines. But that was her choice.

Apparently, it didn't matter. God was going to provide for the woman wherever she went, and that's where she chose to go. So she came back and made an appeal to the king for her house and for her land.

There actually is some support for this in the Law of Moses. During a time when someone finds themselves dispossessed, they can come back and make an appeal under the Law of Moses and have their property restored. Oddly enough, she goes to the king, who is one of the least of the law-following kings that have ever been.

But this is legitimate under the law to appeal for the house and land to be returned. So the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, please, all the great things that Elisha has done. These two things are not initially related.

It's kind of like in the days of Esther when the king will say, I can't sleep, read me the annals, read me the archives, read me the chronicles of my reign. Surely that will put me to sleep. Read me the old dusty stuff.

And they get along to the part where Mordecai had apprised the king of a plot against his life. And he says, Oh, well, what shall be done for this guy? But that had nothing to do, that episode initially was not related to the fact that Esther was the queen and so on. Haman was plotting.

In the same way, the woman has already brought this appeal and it hasn't been acted upon yet. And in other news, the king is talking to Gehazi, saying, Tell me the things Elisha has done. Now, the king knows some of the things Elisha has done because he has done them in his presence.

Right? He wouldn't be asking Gehazi about things that he himself has witnessed. So he's asking about other things. Now, when the king says, Well, hello there, Gehazi.

I understand you're the guy that has been pouring water on the hands of Elisha, so to speak. Tell me some hot ones. Tell me some good stories about what Elisha's been up to.

Gehazi is not going to choose the ones the king already knows about. He's going to choose ones that the king had not observed. So, of that set of stories, which one does Gehazi tell? Does Gehazi tell the story of Naaman, the Syrian leper? Apparently not.

We don't have any indication that he told that one. Of course, Gehazi is now a leper as a result. If he tells the full story, he's not going to put himself in a good light.

Now, what he does say is he tells the story of the woman whose son was restored to life. And coincidentally, not so much in the providences of God, this is the woman that has just placed her appeal before the king. Gehazi says, My lord, O king, here's the woman.

This is her son whom Elisha restored to life. When the king asked the woman, she told him. It's interesting that she did not present that information herself.

Hi there, king. I'm the woman Elisha gave a son and restored to life. She didn't lead with that.

She just said, I've been gone during the time of the famine, and now I've returned, and I would like my land back. So the king appointed a certain officer for her. The word translated officer

here is saris, S-A-R-I-S.

As translated here, officer, more often this word is translated eunuch. Seventeen times in your King James, this is translated eunuch. Twelve times it's translated officer.

Thirteen times it's translated chamberlain. But it is from a root, a verbal root, that means to castrate. So chances are, this is an officer slash eunuch.

What's particularly interesting about this is that this word is translated in other places as officer. For example, in Genesis, where it's talking about Potiphar, and it says he is an officer, a pharaoh, he is a saris. And just as an aside, if you think about the situation with Joseph coming to work in Potiphar's household, and the wife getting all romantically inclined toward Joseph, one possibility might be because she was in fact married to a guy who was a eunuch.

And this explains the absence of any indication of a son or an heir in the house of Potiphar, and sort of an adopting of Joseph in that role. But then the wife getting interested in him and wanting him to get physically involved with her, this may in fact be part of that equation that Potiphar is described as a saris more than once in the latter chapters of Genesis. At any rate, the king appointed a certain officer slash eunuch for her, saying, restore all that was hers and all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now.

And her husband appears nowhere in this scenario. He doesn't make an appeal. He doesn't appear to be in the picture anywhere.

Did he die? But there is sort of a resonance in this story with Naomi, who goes away from the land in a time of famine, and her husband dies during that time, so do her sons. And this is why she then returns to Israel with Ruth and potentially with Orpah, but Orpah turns back at the border and remains in Moab. Ruth comes back.

And then there is the issue of property. What do you own and what do you not? But it was in some ways a deferential or a beneficial act that the king in some ways is protecting the lady by not sending a lusty young officer with her, but a eunuch who poses no threat in terms of taking advantage of her. At any rate, the king appoints this and says, restore all that was hers, all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now.

And as I mentioned last time, this perhaps is a picture of Israel during the time of the 70th week, the seven years of the tribulation, and perhaps the entirety of the church age losing possession, so to speak, of the land and then having it restored later on. But that brings us to verse 7, and it says, Elisha went to Damascus. And I mentioned last time that this seems to be a pattern in the ministry of Elisha.

He turns up in places that you wouldn't expect, just as the Lord Jesus does. During his life and ministry on this earth, he went places and you kind of wonder why. Sometimes he goes to Jerusalem, sometimes he doesn't.

He must need to go through Samaria. Sometimes he's there, sometimes he isn't. He even ends up in the region of Tyre and Sidon, and you wonder, why is that? He goes to the Transjordan.

He goes to the far side of the Sea of Galilee and ends up in the area where the demon-possessed man is, Gerasa or that whole area. Elisha goes to Damascus. One possible explanation of this is that he is fulfilling the commission that was given to Elisha, which Elisha himself did not fulfill.

You'll recall that the Lord came to Elisha and told him to anoint Hazael as king, and there's no indication that Elijah ever did this. So, it may have been on Elisha's mind that it needed to be done. At any rate, he goes to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, is sick, and it was told to Ben-Hadad that the man of God has come here.

So, the king says to Hazael, who was mentioned in 1 Kings 19, verse 15, the Lord says to Elijah, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Elijah never did this.

So, here's Elisha. The king says to this Hazael, Take a present in your hand, and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover from this disease? And again, this reminds us of Ahaziah falling through the lattice and inquiring of Beelzebub, if he would recover from his injuries. Ben-Hadad has a little bit more sense.

Shall I recover from this disease? So, Hazael goes to meet him, and took a present with him of every good thing of Damascus, 40 camel loads. He's got a caravan, 40 camels. Not 30, not 50, 40.

What is 40 the number of in Scripture? Testing. Jesus goes 40 days into the wilderness. Moses, 40 years in Midian.

Israel will be 40 years in the wilderness, tested by God. So, in the same way that Naaman the Syrian came with a lot of loot, Hazael comes from Ben-Hadad, overburdened with every good thing of Damascus, 40 camel loads. Now, he's inquiring of the Lord, saying, Shall I recover from this disease? And you would expect that, accompanied by 40 camel loads of loot, he's sort of trying to influence the answer, right? I'm just guessing here.

40 camel loads of wealth. Am I going to recover? And you hear the camel noises in the background, with all of this stuff. Your son, Ben-Hadad, your obedient servant, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, has, your son, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria.

So this makes you, what? The king's father? Has sent me to you, saying, Shall I recover from this disease? And Elisha, in verse 10, said to him, Go, say to him, and at this point, your Bible is wrong. The Hebrew text here says, You shall not recover. It's right there in the text.

Lo chayim. It's, you will not recover. What the Masoretes did here is decide that Lamed Aleph should actually be Lamed Waw.

And they changed the negative to a preposition and a personal pronoun. In other words, see where it says, Go, say to him? To him is L-O. Lamed, to, and then the personal pronoun, him.

Say to him. Well, scratch out to him and replace that with not. Go, say, you shall certainly not recover.

That's what Elisha said. Go, say, you shall not recover. Those are Elisha's words.

It's in the Hebrew and it got altered. There are 15 places where the Masoretes decided that Lamed Aleph should be Lamed Waw. And there's Matris Lectionis.

This is a long story. Well, gory, uninteresting to anybody except Hebrew aficionados. But they goofed.

This is not one of those cases. But what happened is, the scribes felt like Elisha was telling a fib or something here. And it gets complicated.

But Elisha said, Go, say, you shall not recover. And it says, however, this is just wow. All he's saying is, For the Lord has shown me that he will surely die.

You shall not recover, for the Lord has shown me that he will really die. And he said his countenance in a stare until he, Hazael, was ashamed. Elisha stared at Hazael until Hazael got uncomfortable, got nervous.

And the man of God wept. Hazael said, Why is my Lord weeping? He answered, Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. Their strongholds you will set on fire, their young men you will kill with a sword, and you will dash their children and rip open their pregnant women.

Hazael said, What is your servant, a dog that he should do this gross thing? Elisha answered, The Lord has shown me that you king over Syria. And God had actually shown this to Elijah. So he departed from Elisha and came to his master, who said to him, What did Elisha say to you? And he, Hazael, answered, He told me you would surely recover, which is a lie.

Elisha said, He would not recover, but Hazael is a rascal. Elisha said, No such thing. Elisha said, The Lord has shown me that he will die, and you need to go tell your master he's not going to recover.

But it happened on the next day that Hazael took a thick cloth and dipped it in water. This is actually a twisted cloth. The word means twisted, and it's significant that it is a twist of cloth.

This is a large piece of cloth big enough to twist. This is a twist, a log of cloth, if you will, a thick twist of cloth that he got wet and put over his face and smothered him, drowned at him basically. Drowned slash smothered.

He couldn't breathe through it. This is, he got waterboarded with no relief. And, you know,

when they waterboard somebody they put a wet cloth over them and they put them into a panic, I can't breathe.

But then they take it away so that you can. Well, he put it on there and didn't remove it. And so he in fact died according to the word of the Lord that he would not recover.

And Hazael reigned in his place. Now, you remember back in 1 Kings 19 God told Elijah anoint Hazael king. Elijah did not anoint Hazael and Elisha does not anoint him either.

But Elisha is on the scene and tells, talks to Hazael and tells him that his king Ben-Hadad is not going to recover. Hazael takes this occasion to ensure that the king does not recover. So what do we make of this? Well, these two incidents are told together for a reason.

Jehoram restoring the widow's goods and Ben-Hadad being assassinated by Hazael and Hazael taking his place. Jehoram is a bad king. He's a wicked king.

He is an unresponsive king. God makes direct appeal to him direct witness to him through Elisha and gives him the opportunity to be a responsive and obedient king. Turn ye at my reproof.

Turn ye at the demonstration of God's power. Jehoram does not do that. And yet, it is through the king that the widow has her land and the proceeds from that land restored to her.

The point of application there is that a system that is inherently godless and faithless, a governmental system, is nevertheless under the control of the Lord God. And God uses that wicked king to essentially ensure the rights and the property of the widow. He doesn't have to be a good king to be a conduit of security and justice for the widow.

He's an evil king. He's an unrepentant king. He is an insensate spiritually despite demonstration after demonstration.

And by the way, Gehazi tells him the things that Elisha has done in the power of the Lord. And it is not something that changes his mind in terms of his policies, but it is sufficient to guarantee the security and the property of this widow. The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, regardless of whether he's a righteous king or an evil king.

Jehoram is an evil king. This is the king that wanted to take Elisha's head off. But he cannot go beyond what God allows in terms of his treatment of God's people, especially of this widow and of the widow's son.

So we know that there's a lot wrong with our government. We know that the people who are in the government are in many cases faithless, unregenerate, unrepentant if they are believers. And yet we still make our appeal to the legal system, to the justice system in this country and expect it to deliver justice to us.

And whatever the verdict is from that government, we figure that the heart of the king is in the

hand of the Lord. This is an example of that principle. It does not always mean that we are going to receive justice, but that is our first resort.

We see that God expects us to fear Him and to honor the king. Pray for those that have the rule over you. Men everywhere ought to lift up hands in prayer for the government.

And we are not to go revolutionary until all other means have been exhausted. In this case, she makes an appeal to the king and the king grants the appeal. It is just.

It is right. And he details an officer to ensure that it is carried out. And she was right to go to the king instead of taking matters into her own hand.

So there is an illustration here and an example of God blessing the widow through what is largely an evil regime. In the second case, God told Elijah, and this is an expression of the will of God, that Hazael be king over Syria. He is going to be a scourge in the hand of God.

And Elijah can see the suffering and the misery and the destruction that is going to come through this Syrian king. The Israelite king, who is an evil guy, ready to slay Elijah, is nevertheless the means of blessing and protection of her rights and her property. This Syrian king, who is also authorized by God and is foreseen.

Elijah doesn't call down fire from heaven to slay Hazael because he is going to murder his master and take over the throne and be the means of destruction. Pregnant women and children and cities in Israel are suffering horrible consequences. Elijah sees this guy and stares at him and there are tears running down his face as he sees the future, but he knows that this too is the will of God.

This evil king is going to cause havoc for people who need havoc. The widow needs blessing and restoration and she receives it through an evil king. Other people in Israel are going to suffer chastisement, judgment and destruction from this Syrian king.

It's all in God's plan. It is a part, God sees it coming, God knows what is going to happen and ensures that it does happen. The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.

All of this is known to the prophet, overseen by the prophet, predicted and declared by the prophet and it's a part of the will of God. These things must come, woe to him by whom they come. We are going to see when we come back the fulfillment of the foresight that Elisha has that causes the tears to flow down his face.

I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. This is coming up later on in our book. In fact, I'll just tell you now before the break.

2 Kings 10, verse 32. We're going to see in those days the Lord began to cut off Israel. Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel.

That's 10.32 of this book. In 12.17, Hazael king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and

took it. Then Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem, southern kingdom.

In 13.3, the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, all their days. 13.7 of 2 Kings. He left of the army of Jehoahaz only 50 horsemen, 10 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.

Amos 1, verse 3. For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not turn away its punishment because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael which shall devour the palaces of his son Ben-Hadad and his predecessor Ben-Hadad. Ben-Hadad is like the title Pharaoh.

It's a title for the king. But Hazael in particular is in view. You will also find the descriptions of the women and the children and what Elisha predicted coming to pass.

So God supervises history. God determines the course of nations and the fate of people within those nations. It is based on response or rejection to the word of God.

The widow is an example of someone who was responsive. And because of that even in an evil regime she is blessed and she is provided for and she is secured and her property is safe. For others it is the opposite.

But it is all determined and foreseen by God. So it is sobering to realize that as this nation's fate hangs in the balance we are in the nation, we are in the world but not of it. And even as the nation declines God is able to secure us and to provide for us.

And we can be cared for even as those around us and the conditions around us deteriorate. Well, let's pause here and take a break. When we come back we will resume our study.