

Kings and Prophets 14-11-21a

This is Friday the 21st of November 2014. We're continuing our study of Kings and Prophets. I happen to look back to see that this is pretty much the second anniversary, give or take, of the inception of our study, How Time Flies.

We've already been doing Kings and Prophets for two years. Way, yes, two years. We started in November of 2012.

According to the stamps on the files, am I wrong? That's when I looked at the, I went to review, and it had a November 2012 time stamp on the earliest lessons. I could be wrong. You can check your notes.

Well, I guess my credibility is now intact. At any rate, we've been in this study for two years, but I have really enjoyed it. I've learned a lot.

And I appreciate everybody's enthusiasm and continued interest in it. And if you think about it, we finished all of 1 Kings, and we're well into 2 Kings, and we will soon be encountering the times of the prophets that are functioning in the latter part of the days of the monarchy. So we'll be able to put them in their historic context as we continue through the narrative portions in 2 Kings and in 2 Chronicles.

But tonight we will be resuming in 2 Kings 13 at verse 14 with the death of the prophet Elisha. And this is really quite a milestone, and we'll pick up the story where we left off last time. But let's take a moment and go to the Lord in prayer, ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our study of his word.

Father, how thankful we are for your provision, your gracious watch care and supervision of our lives, the great attention that you have paid to every detail of our circumstances, where you have positioned us in time and in geography, placing us here at this time with the opportunities that we have to grow in grace and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We thank you for our blessings. We thank you for our challenges.

We thank you for these occasions that enable us to put our faith into practice, to lay hold of your righteousness as we rest in your promises and trust in your word. We thank you for this portion of Scripture and the truth that it holds for us, the compelling and stimulating picture that it gives us of your involvement in human history and in our lives in particular. And we pray that as we look at it together, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, that each of us will find it meaningful and helpful and something to think about and to be motivated by in the days ahead.

And we ask that our fellowship, our conversation, our study of your word will reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. And we ask it in his name. Amen.

You will remember that we are looking at the kingly reign, the kingship of Jehoahaz, or let me get my Bible open here, to Jehoash or Joash in the north. And this is another in that pattern of kings that repeat the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. We saw that back in chapter 13 verse 2. And we saw that in the dying days of Elisha, he visits the king.

Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die. We saw all of this last time. And I'm just going to breeze through it real quickly because there are one or two points we need to visit before we pick up our formal study tonight actually down in verse 20.

But you remember the story. He repeats the very words that Elisha had spoken when Elijah was about to retire. Oh, my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen.

And Elisha said to him, take a bow and some arrows. So he took himself a bow and some arrows. He said to the king of Israel, put your hand on the bow.

So he put his hand on it and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. Now you remember what we have observed and deduced about Elisha. Elisha in many ways symbolizes, represents, foreshadows the Lord Jesus and the dispensation of grace that the Lord Jesus would initiate where Elijah is much more in the mold of the Old Testament law.

This is why John the Baptist, quote, unquote, Elijah, would come before and as the forerunner to he whose sandals he's not worthy to unloose and so on, the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist, Elijah, he is Elijah if you will have him. He is the predecessor to the Lord Jesus who by very simple deduction, if John the Baptist is Elijah, who is the Lord Jesus? Elisha.

So these hands on the hands of the king, this is a picture of divine assistance and not just a general picture but a picture of the means. How is God going to bring his grace down to man? How is he going to span that mighty gulf at Calvary? How is he going to do it? It's through the Lord Jesus. And so this is just a bit of a picture here.

The prophet places his hands on the king's hands. And when you think about the nation in the Old Testament, the believer in the new, what does this tell you and me? Just right off the bat, we're not even five minutes into our study and we have a great point of application here, an observation that helps us and that is that in our souls, what would the analogs be? Who is the king of the nation representing when you transfer that by interpretation and application to the soul of the believer? This is our command center, right? This is our thought processes. This is where we reason, where we initiate and integrate our priorities and our goals and our values into our daily decisions and actions, right? That's the king.

Your conscious thought processes, this is what I'm going to do. This is how I'm going to do it. This is how much time I'm going to spend.

This is how much money I'm going to invest. This is what I will not do. This is my attitude.

This is my approach. This is my reaction. This is what I think about what I hear on the news.

All of that, that's your king. That's your man on the throne, so to speak. Now, there is a crisis.

And we know there's a crisis because this is why the king is crying out to the prophet and he says in almost a superstitious way, Elisha is obviously sick unto death. If you've ever seen somebody that is very close to death, it becomes apparent. You just realize this person doesn't have long to live.

If you see them when they are asleep, it's almost scary. Somebody that is within a few weeks of death, when they are asleep, you wonder if they have already checked out. There's just the instinctive recognition that the time is short for this person.

Well, this is what the king experiences when he sees Elisha. He says, this guy is about to go. Well, why does he make this exclamation in verse 14? Because this is like, now he's not a faithful king.

This is not his confidant and spiritual father in the operational sense. But sometimes you don't know what you've got until it's gone. And when you realize, hey, this is about to leave, suddenly you get alarmed that it's going to be gone.

There are people who aren't necessarily close to their parents in adult life. They move away. They get busy.

They send a card on Father's Day and maybe get together at Thanksgiving or Christmas. But most of the rest of the time, weeks can go by and there's no communication at all. Then they find out, oh, the doctor says, mom's only got so long to live.

Well, then all of a sudden there's all these histrionics and, oh, my goodness. And they go and sit by the bedside. Well, you know, why didn't you do that when they were alive and healthy and you could actually enjoy the time instead of sitting there waiting for the last few grains of sand to run out of the hourglass? Well, that's the king here.

He begins to realize what's going to happen when Elisha is gone. He is the prophet in northern Israel. Where is the mystical presence of God? This isn't practical for him.

This isn't an oft-used resource. But it's kind of like somebody who doesn't really go to church, but then the church in their neighborhood burns down and they think, well, but where are we going to have murials and burials? What if I needed to go pray? Now the church is gone and people get all nervous over something they really haven't been using. That's why he says, oh, the chariots and horsemen of Israel, you know, when you leave, where will our last resort sort of spooky belief that God will somehow come through, where is that going to be? So Elisha puts his hands on his hands and says, draw this bow.

Shoot this arrow. And you remember all the details out the eastern window. What does that all mean? And so he does that.

What does that mean in our lives? What does it signify? The one who has my words and keeps them, he's the one who loves me, Jesus said. And I and my Father will come to him and make our abode with him. I will be with you.

If I go away, I will send you another comforter. He will be as I have been, Jesus tells the disciples. He will be your comforter.

He will lead you into truth. He will give you insight into situations. He will be with you when you need to speak.

He will put the words in your heart and in your mouth when it is time to do a thing. This is over in John, beginning in 14, 15, 16 of John, 14 and 15 especially. Several sections in there about the paracletos, the paraclete, the comforter, the Holy Spirit.

But this is represented by Elisha. Now look, who is alive and healthy and who is feeble and about to die? King, alive and healthy. Prophet, old, feeble, and about to die.

But who is strengthening whose hands here? The weak and feeble and about to die prophet is strengthening and guiding the hands of the hale and hearty king. And why is that? Because this isn't a picture of physical assistance. It is a picture of spiritual presence, spiritual guidance, right? So they shoot the arrow.

You must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them. So then in verse 18, take the arrows. So he took them and he said to the king, strike them on the ground.

He struck them three times and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him, angry with him. You should have struck five or six times.

Then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it, but now you will strike Syria only three times. Now, we talked about that last time. Here's what we did not observe or really draw out.

This seems like sort of a genie of the lamp kind of thing and three wishes and wish I had a sausage and oh, wait, I didn't really mean it. There's a current commercial on where, you know, did you know that genies can be really literal? The guy rubs the lamp. Genie pops out.

What do you want? I want a million bucks. And there's a million male deer all over the place. And this episode looked at superficially seems to partake of that kind of, well, if I had only known, I would have done something different.

You know, if you had told me, now be sure and strike a number of times with the arrows because this is what it is going to do. And it seems like kind of a cruel thing to do to the king to say, well, you didn't strike enough times. The king says, well, how are we to know that striking the ground was going to determine how many battles we would win? You know, if you had told me I'd have done it differently.

Do you catch my thought here that this seems like kind of an unfair situation to put the king into? Here's the thing. The number of times that the king strikes the ground is not what is directly determining how many battles they are going to win. It is the attitude that prevails in the country and the attitude of heart in this king that has been detailed throughout the first part of the chapter, continuing the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, causing Israel to sin.

That is the problem. Because of that pre-existing condition, the heart of the people is going to be weak. They will tire of fighting the Syrians after three battles in the same way that this king so quickly tires of doing what the man of God told him to do.

Do you see my point? These are two expressions of the same thing. As goes the striking with arrows, your lackadaisical, half-baked, half-hearted obedience to this word, that has been characteristic of your entire reign and that is characteristic of the people. And because of this, you are going to only win three battles.

Do you see what I mean? The causative link is not arrows hitting the ground equals number of won battles. They have a common ancestor in the heart of the people, in the nature of their attitude toward God and their obedience to the word of the prophet Elisha. Look how old he is and how long he has been prophesying and look at what the status of the nation is.

They have not responded to the word of God and this is emblematic. It is symbolic of this apathy and half-heartedness and lack of understanding. And when Elisha gets angry at him over the arrows, this is his anger at the king.

Do you think that Elisha was really okay with the way he was running the country and just upset about banging the arrows on the ground? This anger is a reflection of not only Elisha's but of God's disenchantment with this king and these people, two expressions of the same problem. This is a symptom, not a cause. It is a symptom of a weak-hearted attitude toward God, of almost superficial and casual obedience to the word of God instead of the prophet of God has spoken.

I mean, you think about it. If we were like the disciples that went up on the mountain with Jesus, Peter, James and John, and Moses and Elijah suddenly walked into this room and said in English, Greetings, members of Grace and Truth Bible Church. God has sent us here with a word for you.

Well, after we revived each other with smelling salts and Elijah or Moses said, Fill glasses with water. Fill some glasses with water. This is Moses and Elijah back from the dead, sent by God to our assembly saying, Fill some glasses with water.

How many glasses would we find and how full would we fill them? How quickly would we do that? With what enthusiasm and alacrity would we want to do the expressed will of God from a prophet of God in our midst? I would like to think that we would find anything that would even remotely qualify as a glass, coffee cups, dog dishes, toilet bowls, anything of a content, you

know, dinner plates, anything that would hold water and fill them because this is the word of God. Do you see my point? This is the word of God from the prophet of God. Very, very noticeably and obviously one of the last words you're going to get.

Wouldn't you, if you had any respect for God and his word, wouldn't you do this to the maximum extent? Here you are going through histrionics about, oh, the chariots and horsemen of Israel, but when it comes to doing something, you've got no starch, you've got no get up and go, you've got no motivation. This is why Elisha is angry. Now, who does Elisha represent? What do you think is going to happen at the judgment seat of Christ, whom he represents, when those who have received the word of Christ only paid superficial, apathetic attention to it, strike some arrows on the ground and we've, well, we've done it a couple of times, you know, we obeyed, we're not disobedient, we're not, there's no lack of compliance, but how wholeheartedly and how enthusiastically, how avidly did we respond to the word of God that was presented to us? Limited response, limited reward and result.

It is proportional. If you love little, if you obey little, you are going to inherit little and serve little in the future. It isn't just one instance of, wow, you should have smacked those arrows on the ground more.

In his entire reign as King of the Northern Kingdom, this is typical and emblematic of his lackadaisical attitude and his half-hearted, grudging, only at the point of a gun obedience. You notice when he shot the arrow out the window, that was with Elisha's guidance, but when it comes time to smack the arrows on the ground, it doesn't say Elisha put his hands on his hands, right? Why? Why? Because the result depends entirely on the king's choice. He's been given the instruction, he got a previous example, he didn't even ask, how many times should I strike? That would have been a nice question to ask.

He wasn't interested enough to ask. Well, think about the application. Do you think there are people who believe that, well, God is just unfair because he's not being more specific about the instructions? That is the answer of a heart that has already gone in the direction of apathy and is now looking for excuses.

And that's exactly the objection that someone would find in this passage. Oh, well, how can you blame the king? How was he to know that if he had only struck more times, he would have won more battles? He would have known if he had a heart for God. He would have known if he was responsive to the word of God as a pattern of life.

And he's not. Well, this brings us now to verse 20. Then Elisha died, and they buried him.

And the raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year, so it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders, and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha. And when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet. I would like everyone to take out a small piece of paper and tell me why this is in the Bible.

I would just give you a pause to mentally compose your answer. This is in the Bible. Why? Observation, interpretation, application.

Well, and I think you can probably use what we've gone over several times this evening already. Who does Elisha represent? You can say it out loud. The Lord Jesus.

And by making contact, as it were, with his death, one can live. However, that would be about as far as you could take it, because this guy didn't say, I'm about to die, I will fall on the bones of Elisha, and I know believing that I will live. This guy is already dead.

He's just dropped on the bones and comes back to life. So it kind of breaks that picture, doesn't it? Unless you're a Calvinist. Calvinists would love this.

Oh, well, look, you know, he's dead through no fault of his own. You know, God just chose him to be the one that got dropped on the bones of Elisha. He sprang back to life.

Hooray for John Calvin. I don't really, even though I think there is an echo and there is a general foreshadowing of that, I don't think that's why it's in here. And it certainly wouldn't speak to the Old Testament people who heard of this, who read of this in all of the days before the Lord Jesus even came.

So what would it mean to an Israelite who heard this story right after it happened? What would it mean for the generations afterward who went into the captivity, who came back from the captivity, who lived in the centuries between the close of the Old Testament canon and the coming of the Lord Jesus? What would they get out of it? Well, I would like to offer you a couple of suggestions about it. Elisha died and they buried him. No more would have been said or known about this except for this episode where the guy comes back alive.

Why does it even happen? There are raiding bands of Moabites. If it weren't for the raiding bands of Moabites, these guys would have taken their dead corpse to the place they wanted to bury him, which was in a different plot in a different part of the cemetery. Obviously, this is a burial ground that holds more than one dead person.

They are at some sort of cemetery. Somebody just took Elisha out in the middle of the wilderness and put him in a hole and he's the only guy out there. And these guys just happen to be in the same place with a dead body.

If Elisha's buried there and these guys are bringing a dead body, this is a cemetery. I think we can safely assume there are a lot of corpses around here. And when they buried Elisha, everybody else in the graveyard didn't stand up and go home, right? So there's something about this situation and it is brought on as what appears to be an accident.

Who knew that as we were trying to have a funeral, a Moabite band would come and attack and we'd have to interrupt the funeral, drop the corpse, and flee. Well, they need to put this corpse somewhere. They don't want to just drop him in the hot sun.

So you can imagine what would happen if you could just walk into the mausoleum and there's Elvis laid out or there's John F. Kennedy laid out or there's some other celebrity, some other well-known person. They wouldn't just leave it open and unguarded where you could just walk up and touch the body, right? And normally, people are superstitious. You know about collecting artifacts, collecting bones of apostles that has gone on in the Orthodox Church in the Near East for centuries.

The Catholics, they want relics. And they think that they have some kind of magical properties. Sites in the Holy Land have largely disappeared until they started posting guards because people wanted to chip something off the tomb of Jesus.

They wanted to take a piece of rock home and they thought it had magical powers. Why is it that Elisha is laying there undisturbed? Nobody has any inkling that the dead prophet's grave might be a holy site. People don't come there to pray.

They don't come there. They haven't built a shrine. They haven't said, you know, maybe God is still listening.

Does it seem odd to you that Elisha is out here buried in pretty much a publicly accessible grave and nobody thinks anything about it? Nobody's visiting. It just seems a little bit outside of normal human nature if you assign importance to such things, if you have any notion that maybe God is listening. And what this suggests to me is that northern Israel is in such a state that the prophet Elisha isn't honored among his own people and in his own country.

He's just another burial in another cemetery. Nothing special. It's not a tourist attraction.

It's not a place people visit. It's just happenstance that these guys are ready to drop somebody else's corpse down into his grave. And, you know, these were cave burials.

They would have like hollowed out places, and that's how it says they let him down because it's sort of an underground cave, kind of probably down and in. So it indicates to me that nobody is treating Elisha as anything special. Notice in verse 20 there are a couple of details that don't really get a lot of attention.

Elisha died and they buried him, and burial basically means placing in a cave. We think of burying meaning dig a hole, put him in, cover him up with dirt, and they're pretty much landlocked in the dirt. This is an interment more than a burial, interred in an open cave.

Otherwise they didn't say, wow, here come the Moabites, let's dig a six-foot deep hole and drop this guy in. It's already open. But notice the other detail.

What's the detail there that we wouldn't really need for this story, but it's there anyway? What's the last part of verse 20? In the spring of the year. Why is this detail included? Why do we need to know this? When's Easter? When is death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Spring feast time, right? This is in the spring of the year, and it isn't difficult for someone such as the

Lord Jesus, looking in the Old Testament. By the way, here's a trivia question for you before we go to the break.

And see how quickly you can answer this question. This is like a timed test. This is one of those things where the buzzer is going to go off after about five seconds.

How many people are raised from the dead in the Old Testament? Go. Buzzer. How many people are raised from the dead in the Old Testament? Elijah raises the widow's son.

Elisha raises the Shunammite's son. And this guy. That's it.

Nobody else raised from the dead in the Old Testament. You can say, Samuel, why have you brought me up? That's more of an appearance. He's not raised to go home and have a bowl of Wheaties, right? In terms of resuscitations, coming back and living life, those are the only three in the entire Old Testament.

Now, what was Elisha's request to Elijah just before Elijah retired? Double portion. How many people did Elijah raise from the dead? How many people does Elisha raise from the dead? There you go. So it's interesting that it is as though even after he died, the spirit of Elijah is determined to double everything, including the number of resuscitations, and death doesn't stop the power of the spirit to accomplish that double portion blessing, which, if you think about the Lord Jesus, is a powerful thought.

We are saved by his life, and we are saved by his death. There is a double portion, and that is spoken of in the New Testament. Remember, if by the death of Christ we have been reconciled to God and redeemed and so on, much more shall we be saved by what? By his life.

So the fact that it takes place in the spring is a harbinger. And here's my final thought. If I ask you to pick one other person in the Old Testament that is a very strong symbol, foreshadowing, archetype of the Lord Jesus, who might you pick? Joshua is a good one.

But I'm thinking of Joseph. What happens at the end of Joseph's life? Bones. Bones of Joseph, right? Bones of Joseph in a coffin in Egypt.

It's the last phrase in Genesis, right? And then in Exodus, when Moses is leading the people out, they get the bones of Joseph, and they take him to the land to be buried with his people. Here's what I would suggest to you is the reason for this being here. Think about the bones of Joseph.

He consciously said, don't bury me, leave these bones here as a reminder of the promise. Context is always helpful. Just read the next two verses.

Hazeal, king of Syria, oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. Now we've got Moabite raiding bands, and we've got the Syrians coming down and harassing them, right? Lots of trouble, lots of oppression and problems, which was the promise of God. If they were not faithful, and if they were not obedient, what would happen? I will bring on you the afflictions that I am

sending you to put on the nations in Canaan, right? If you are faithful and obedient, I will bless you seven times over.

One of you will put to flight a thousand and so on. But if you are apathetic, indifferent, disobedient, depart from my words, then it will be the reverse. One of them will put a thousand of you to flight.

You will be harassed. You will lose your hegemony. You will lose your possession.

You will lose your blessing. You will lose your fruitfulness, and you will eventually lose your land. Remember the cycles there? Well, notice their borders are being trampled.

Their possessions are being taken by Moabites and by the Syrians. All the days of Jehoiachin. But look at verse 23.

But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them. Why? Read it out loud. Because of his covenant with the dead bones, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

These men are dead, but God has not forgotten his promises to them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Death does not abrogate the promises of God.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are now just bones. But the promises of God made to the men who own those bones still stand. The promises made to northern Israel through those men, and all the way down through David, and down to and through Elisha stand.

If you go to the old landmark, if you remember the hole of the pit from whence ye were digged, if you remember your heritage, if you remember the covenant of God and return to it, it doesn't matter how bad things have gotten. There is life, there is fulfillment, there is power and divine, supernatural response if you claim the covenant. This guy gets dropped on the bones of Elisha.

He is dead. He had nothing to do with it. But not only does he come back to life, what is the last thing it says there in verse 21? What does he do? He comes to life and does what? Stands on his feet.

Stands on his feet. He's not just opening his eyes and saying, I'm feeling better. Right? He stands on his feet.

Remember the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel? When he prophesied to the bones, what happens? When he prophesied the second time, what happens? Then he prophesied again and what do they do? They stand on their feet. They are ready for function. They are ready to resume productive service.

That's the promise. That's the picture. And this story would have spread like wildfire throughout the Northern Kingdom.

Even after his death, the testimony of Elisha and God's power manifest in and through Elisha is

still speaking a word. God is still holding out his hands to a stiff-necked and disobedient people saying, turn ye at my reproof. Why will ye die, O house of Israel? If you will return to the promise made to your fathers, go to the bones, ask the bones.

The bones will tell you that God is faithful. The bones will tell you that God has promised life. That's what I think this speaks.

Certainly to those people and even more so to us because we see the fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ in the spring of the year. And the spring is the time of new life, new growth, new opportunity, sowing seed that will bear a 30-fold, 60-fold or 100-fold harvest. Let's pause here and take our break.