

PostExilicProphets 22-06-15a

Okay, I think we're about ready to begin. Good Wednesday evening. Welcome to Grace and Truth Bible Church.

We're wrapping up our study in the book of Malachi. We're in the closing verses of chapter 4. We have come to verse 5. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Interestingly, our two studies side by side in Malachi and in Matthew are both currently giving us the words of God.

Here, God who inspired the Old Testament prophets and in Matthew, the words of the Lord Jesus about this same time and this same prophetic future. So we're going to pick up where we left off last time. We've got to take a look at Elijah the prophet and why on earth is he coming before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our fellowship, on our understanding and our grasp of these things and we'll begin. Father, we are humbled at the privilege that we enjoy to address ourselves directly to you through our high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, through the ministry of your Holy Spirit. We have been enabled and granted this tremendous access to be able to speak to you, our heavenly Father, and to express our gratitude, our appreciation, our requests, our intercessory prayer as well as the prayers on our own behalf directly in your throne room, standing before you and what a wonderful privilege it is.

We thank you for the opportunity to spend this time together looking at your word and we pray that your Holy Spirit will help us to understand it, see what it means and how we can put it into application in the hours and days that remain to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. The prophet Elijah is introduced at the 17th chapter, actually the end of the 16th chapter of 1 Kings.

And we have his ministry recorded there. You remember the great drought. You remember Mount Carmel.

You remember the confrontation with the king in the first chapter or two of 2 Kings and then his interaction with Elisha and departure from the scene in the fiery chariot. Basically four pericopes, if you will, that address his time. We find the first in 1 Kings 17-19.

This focuses on Elijah and the time of judgment. The second one is the Naboth's vineyard episode and his interaction with Ahab and Jezebel in that regard. The third is King Ahaziah and Elijah's confrontation with him.

And then fourthly, the episode crossing the Jordan with Elisha, the sons of the prophets looking on, the mantle, the double portion, the chariot, and so on. And it's important, I think, when we have this culminating prophecy of the Old Testament that I will send you Elijah the prophet

before the coming of the great and dreadful day. Why Elijah? Why not Moses? Why not Joshua? Why not any number of people who we might think would qualify for this job? Why is God going to send Elijah the prophet? To answer this question, it's sort of like understanding the gospel of the kingdom being preached throughout the world.

We've got to know what the good news of the kingdom actually is. And in a similar way to understand this prophecy and therefore to anticipate its fulfillment and to see its foreshadowing and some of its partial fulfillments, if you will, it's good to understand just to do a quick review of who Elijah himself was. What his purpose was in God's plan for Israel.

So if we begin by looking at this appearance out of nowhere in 1 Kings, you might turn back to 1 Kings. We find out a little bit about Ahab and Jezebel in the preceding chapter. When you look at the reign of Omri beginning in verse 21, and then in verse 25, Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, did worse than all who were before him.

He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols. That just as a concomitant as we review Elijah, don't forget what we have just seen in the book of Malachi. What is God's issue that he addresses through that prophetic message? There has been a problem in the priesthood and there has been a problem in the Judahite leadership of the nation.

And people are rapidly falling back into the same thinking, the same ways for which God drove them out of the land in 721 with the Assyrians for the Northern Kingdom and in 586 with the Babylonians in the Southern Kingdom. And you remember the Amorite kings, the Amorite dynasty, the dynasty of Omri beginning here with Omri and extending through Ahab and Jezebel. And this infects the Southern Kingdom via Athaliah who goes down there and marries Jehoram.

And this infection just spreads. So that's our backdrop. And it is one of the reasons that Elijah is mentioned in Malachi is the symmetry from the beginning of the prophetic age with Elijah to the end of the prophetic age with Malachi and then John the Baptist, the message of repentance, of change of mind, a call to fidelity to the covenant is in view.

This is the emphasis. So there is a symmetry. Why did God have to begin sending these prophets? Primarily starting with Elijah with these very deliberate and dramatic messages illustrated in miraculous fashion.

Why did God do that? To shock people awake. That's why Elijah was sent the very first time. So if you skip down here to verse 29, in the 38th year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel.

Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria, 22 years, 22 years. If you go back to Y2K and you think how long ago that was, that's how long from that time to this, that's how long Ahab was king in the Northern kingdom. A lot has transpired from the days of George W. Bush

and his first and second terms.

And then Mr. Obama's first and second terms. And then Mr. Trump's single term. And now Mr. Biden's halfway through his term.

That's a lot of years. That's a lot of water under the bridge, a lot of changes, a lot of multi-layered effects. And you could imagine in Israel, the same period of time, Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.

He surpassed his father in surpassing all who were before him, which wasn't an easy thing to do. Came to pass as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He took his wife, Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians.

And he went and served Baal and worshiped him. Set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria, made a wooden image, did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. It is an unprecedented level of evil that sparks the sending of Elijah to the Northern kingdom.

Make sense? So in Malachi, when God says, "'Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, I'm going to send Elijah,' this is some of the freight that that carries. Why was Elijah sent the first time? It was the most horrific day that Israel had ever seen. There had never been a level of sin.

There had never been a level of overt commitment to and practice of the worship of Baal in God's nation, among God's people, as there were in Ahab's day." I ran across an interesting factoid. I don't think I knew this when we did Kings and Prophets and went through this section of 1 Kings, but it tells us here that Jezebel, whom Ahab took to wife, was the daughter of Ephbaal, king of the Sidonians. Well, Josephus, in recounting Old Testament history, scoured around to find historical references outside the Bible that would authenticate and support his review of biblical history, of the history of the Jews.

You know, his great work is called Antiquities of the Jews or History of the Jews. And he wanted to try to demonstrate to the Roman world that the Bible wasn't a book of myth, that these things had been documented and were synonymous with or coordinated with and were harmonious with secular accounts. So where he could, he would find these Greek historians or Roman historians or others and say, this guy wrote about this.

One of the historians that he quotes is a Greek author named Menander. Now there's a famous Menander who was a comedic playwright born in about 342 BC. He wrote 108 comedies and they must have really been comedies because the titles themselves, most of his works have been lost out of these 108 plays, but there's a list of the titles.

And one of them is Woman Getting Slapped, Ladies at Lunch, Anger. If you look up this playwright, Menander, he's got very pithy titles. They're usually one word in Greek, but they're compound words.

And when they're translated into English, the titles themselves are pretty funny. He won a prize eight or nine times for his comedies in Athens, I think. This is not that guy.

Josephus is quoting a different Menander. This Menander is otherwise unknown. He's either from Pergamon or Pergamos or Ephesus or both, but he is an otherwise unknown.

He only survives in quotation by Josephus, but he wrote a history of the Phoenicians. A history of the Phoenicians. Phoenicia includes Tyre and Sidon.

This was part of the Phoenician world. So this Menander had dug up and recorded records of these kings, including Itho Baal. Itho Baal, who is Itho Baal, who is Jezebel's father.

And Menander, coming to us via Josephus, says that Itho Baal was not only the king of Sidon, but he was a priest of Ashtart. He promoted the worship of Baal and the worship of Ashtart. Is it any wonder that the worship of Baal and the worship of Ashtart is promoted by Jezebel because her daddy is not only the king of Sidon, but he's the high priest of Ashtart? Now think about this.

And I mean, pause and just reflect for a moment. Here is a king in Sidon who is both a priest and a king. He has an unusual double identity in that sense.

He promotes false worship and his daughter becomes twofold the devotee that he himself is. She exports this religion via marrying Ahab down into the very heart of the nation of Israel. I mean, in the palace, in Samaria, right? And she is going to then export it via her daughter, Athaliah, into Judah.

And there's this strong kingly, priestly, false worship system that is embraced in the very capital city of Northern Israel and will eventually be invading the capital city of the Southern kingdom, Jerusalem. But isn't it interesting? Here's a little pop trivia quiz question for you. Do you remember the names of the children associated with Ahab and Jezebel? You've got Athaliah, right? You've got Jehoram, who is in that mix.

And these are names that have the divine name in them. Athaliah comes from an unused Hebrew verb, at least it's not used in scripture. Atal, A-T-A-L, and then Yah.

So something about Yahweh, something about the Lord, but it's got that divine element in her name. But then Atal, Yah, Atal means to lift up. And we don't know this from biblical Hebrew because there's no such verb in the Bible, but it has an Arabic cognate, which means to be great, to be elevated, to be lifted up.

And so Yahweh is lifted up. If you think about Jehoram, Jehoram, Yeho, that's your Yahweh element. And Ram is a biblical word that means to lift up.

So whether it's Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, I think I got Jezebel and Athaliah momentarily confused there. Athaliah was born in Israel and she's given this divine element name, right?

And the son Jehoram is given the equivalent name using a different word. Both of them mean the Lord has lifted up.

And these are the most evil king and queen in Israelite history. And they're naming their kids, the Lord has lifted up. The girl and the brother have this name.

So you can't go by what people say. You can't go by appearances. Did they do this for good luck? Why wasn't he, you know, Rambal? Why didn't they name their kids? There's some, I think it might've been a concession.

It might've been to pacify the people who still had some traditional Israelite values. And they said, well, we can't just name our, I mean, we can set up the altar, we can build the temple, we can promote the worship, but our children, you know, children are a heritage from the Lord and we better give them a name that will pass. We'd better, you know, meet people in the middle, somewhere who are still traditional.

And so they gave these divine element names to their children. It's really interesting. And what it tells you is that false religion deceives with terminology.

I will just tell you that just in the news in the last few days, some of the elements of our government have been saying, well, all of these problems and popularity is dropping and people are getting deeply unhappy and we're afraid of what's gonna happen during the election. So what we need to do is change the narrative. Stop and think about there for a moment.

We've got legitimate pocketbook kitchen table problems in this country. Women can't get baby formula. You can't afford to fill up your car.

We've got people hurting economically, genuine problems that government exists to manage and fix. And their solution is we need to tell a different story. If we tell the right story, the sheep will be pacified.

They'll, it's a good thing. Belt tightening is good. You could stand to lose a few pounds.

You could stand to drive a few less miles. You could stand to not feed your baby so much. I don't know how they think they're going to change the narrative, but think about that.

The only reason I bring it up, I don't really like to talk politics, but I am saying it is an example of people using language, terminology, telling a story that doesn't comport with truth, doesn't fit the facts. But if you can get somebody to buy the story, you can maintain power, you can exert control, you can lead people down a primrose path. How do you think the fruit got plucked off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and eaten? A story was told that wasn't entirely true.

Things were left out, things were added, and the narrative is what caused the human race to fall. Beware somebody who is going to tell you a story. We've just got to come up with a new

narrative? Yikes.

That's what Ahab and Jezebel did, I think, in naming their children. Well, anybody who asks, we're godly. Ahab, my own name means father, and here are my children, and they've got these wonderful names.

I've met people with biblical names who are complete pagan, godless, atheistic, hell-bent, people with names like David and Samuel and Daniel. You think, do you know what your name means? Well, my parents gave it to me because it was an actor, or it had nothing to do with understanding what the name means and wanting that truth to be present in the family and in this person's life and so on. Oh, it's just a name, it doesn't really mean anything.

It's such an odd fact. So in chapter 17, when Elijah the Tishbite, he just appears on the scene out of nowhere. We're not even real sure where Tishbe was.

There's Tishbe in Gilead, and there's another one, and they're not real sure. Was he from the people of the Tishbites? There's a manuscript that translates it this way. Or was he actually born and raised in Tishbe? He just appears, and it says he's of the people of Gilead.

And so was Tishbe in Gilead, or were these Gileadite people from the tribe of, the area of Gilead, but they were somewhere else? Nobody knows, he's uncertain. As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew in our rain these years, except at my word. Baal, as you will recall, is the storm God.

He's the thunder and lightning God. He's the one that brings rain. So when Ahab and Jezebel totally perpetrate Baal worship, Elijah, coming from nowhere, stands up and says, I serve the Lord God of Israel, and I'm speaking for him when I say there's gonna be no rain.

Back to Menander, quoted by Josephus. The reason Josephus quotes Menander, who is rehearsing this Sidonian history, this Phoenician history, is that in the days of Itho Baal, about which Menander is writing, there was a drought. And he says there was no rain from such a month to such a month, which is an interesting extra-biblical confirmation that there was a drought during this time, because while Jezebel is queen in Israel, her daddy is still king up in Sidon.

And at the time that Israel has a drought at the word of Elijah, evidently so does Sidon. And this fact was recorded by this Menander. So the word of the Lord came to him saying, get away from here and turn eastward and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

So evidently, you shall drink from the brook as I've commanded the ravens to feed you there. He went and did according to the word of the Lord. He went and stayed by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. And he drank from the brook. What's interesting about this is the location of the brook Cherith

east of the Jordan is he's not in the land of Israel.

He's beyond. He is being nurtured by ravens and fed from a brook that is not an Israelite brook. It flows into the Jordan, but it's east, east of the Jordan.

Every time Elijah crosses the Jordan, something interesting happens, right? He crosses it at the beginning. He's gonna cross it at the end. So the ravens bring him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank from the brook.

You remember this story, but here's the interesting part. We're trying to figure out why is God going to send Elijah in these days before the dreadful and terrible day of the Lord? There are not only these episodes in the original Elijah's life, but this prophecy of Malachi obviously carries forward to the time of the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no way you can characterize the birth of the baby in Bethlehem, the coming of the Lord Jesus as the suffering servant in his first advent.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There is nothing terrible or dreadful about that day. And yet Elijah, someone comes in the spirit and power of Elijah before that day, why? Understanding that, understanding the John the Baptist scenario helps us again, get at the answer to our question, why is God going to send Elijah before Christ's second coming? So you remember the details of Elijah's life pretty well.

So flip over to Luke chapter one. Since I say Luke one, you think Zachariah talking to Gabriel in the temple, right? Luke chapter one, it is the beginning of the John the Baptist story. And when we get to the point where Zachariah is getting the word from the angel Gabriel, we're at about verse 15.

The child is going to be born, don't be afraid, Gabriel says, Elizabeth will bear you a son, you'll name him John. And it's such a shame that they say John. I wish we could get more of the flavor of the Hebrew of his name, but you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth.

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. Now, see if this rings a bell, verse 16, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, turn.

You remember the Hebrew word for turn? Shuv, he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before him, go before the Lord their God in the spirit and power of Elijah. He doesn't say he will be Elijah, this is not the reincarnate Elijah.

He will go before the Lord their God in the spirit and power of Elijah. To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Once again, our second allusion back to Malachi.

And the disobedient, to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous. Doesn't say turn them to the Lord, turn them to the wisdom of the righteous. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Not necessarily a land, not necessarily a nation, a people who are prepared for the Lord. So, John the Baptist is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah and he is going to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. Who's the first person that came in the spirit and power of Elijah that you can think of? In second Kings, across the Jordan, getting, catching the falling mantle.

Who's the first guy that ever came in the spirit and power of Elijah? It was Elisha, right? So, here's my question. If John the Baptist is sort of an expression of coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, Jesus is going to say later, he is Elijah if you are willing to accept it. Remember that? Jesus is talking later on in Matthew chapter 11.

We saw this, when you went out to the wilderness to see John, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, and more than a prophet. We know John the Baptist is the last of the Old Testament prophets, but Jesus said he is more than that. This is he of whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.

Jesus says, quoting our passage in Malachi. I send my messenger. Jesus says, this is he of whom it is written.

Malachi was written about John. John fulfills Malachi. And among those born of women, there is not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

Because as great as John is, greatest of the Old Testament age, none greater, as great as you can be in the Old Testament age, least in the kingdom of heaven is greater. Greater how? Not more faithful, not more righteous, not more deserving. Who is in the kingdom? Anybody who is in the kingdom has done what? Even if you're the least, if you are in the kingdom and not outside it, if you are in the light and not in the darkness, which is outside, what can be said of you that cannot be said of John the Baptist? He was least in the kingdom.

We went over this when we did Matthew 11. Least in the kingdom is greater than John. Why and how? John had a ministry of the spirit and power of Elijah, but it is not the same as that spirit that is poured out, that takes out the heart of stone and creates the heart of flesh.

The fulfillment of the new covenant to Israel and to Judah. I will be their God. They will be my people.

There will be no need for someone to teach them because they will have my law written in their hearts. As great as a believer could become in the Old Testament age, the privileges in the kingdom, those who qualify. Now, do you think John the Baptist will be in the kingdom? Jesus, there's a bit of a chronological conundrum here because John is going to be in the kingdom.

And I doubt that he is going to be the least, but Jesus is saying the John that you have seen, the John of the present age, as great as he is, as faithful, as dedicated to God, as fully obedient and as powerful and as spiritual like Elijah, that John is in the kingdom. Anyone who is in the kingdom is going to have even more opportunity, even more potential, even more provision,

even more of the provision of the spirit and the power of God. The least in the kingdom will be greater than the greatest of those who have not yet entered the kingdom.

You see the timing thing here. John's going to be well up the list of those who pass under the rod and go in and receive the fulsome fulfillment of those promises. But in his Old Testament garb, in his prophetic function, as great as he was, Jesus said, you can't even, it's the glass ceiling that Solomon ran up against.

Under the sun in this age, there's only so far that we can get. I can see through the glass to this greater thing, but right now the sun rises, the sun sets, everything you build up is going to pass on to someone else. We can't achieve eternal life.

We can't enter into that which is permanent and that which is lasting and that which partakes of close proximity to God. And Solomon sought and longed for it. Abraham rejoiced to see that day come.

Abraham dwelt in tents because he knew someday there would be a city. And it would be like saying, what Jesus says about John is like saying of Abraham, the greatest tent dwellers in the Old Testament are not as great as the least of the city dwellers in the kingdom. Abraham's gonna be in the city, but in his tent dwelling days, he could never arrive at the place he is going to be granted in God's grace and as a reward for faithfulness that he will enjoy in the kingdom.

That is true of us. There's a lot that we don't achieve in this life. Remember David, the song of David at the end, how many times have we referred back to it? It's where we first really studied the word *kephets* and what it means to desire a thing.

And the desire of David's heart, as many blessings as he received as King David and saw the future coming under his son Solomon and under his greater son, the Lord Jesus. He said, there are so many desires of my heart that have not been fulfilled, but I know that they will someday receive their fulfillment. And you could say again with the Lord Jesus that the greatest day David ever had in his earthly life and in his rule over Israel will pale in comparison to the worst day he ever has ruling the millennial kingdom, because everything in the kingdom surpasses anything that precedes it in the age of Israel.

So the least in the kingdom is greater than John, but Jesus affirms, Gabriel affirms, the identity of spirit and power of Elijah with John the Baptist. So this preceded the first coming of the Lord Jesus, but that is not the great and terrible day that is spoken of in chapter four. So we still want to figure out what is this going to look like? What will the function be? And here's a quiz question for you.

When Elijah came the first time, there was an Elisha who had the double portion and succeeded in places where Elijah failed. Elijah had failures. Elijah was tested and came short.

Elijah had to be strengthened and nourished and encouraged back to function. Elijah made some mistakes. Like Joshua, there is not a single error attributed to Elisha.

Elisha never messes up. He's got double what Elijah had. So if John the Baptist comes in the spirit and power of Elijah, who is John the Baptist's Elisha? Who is John's Elisha? I'll let you cogitate on that while we pause and take our break.