

# SESSION 3

## Elijah and Elisha

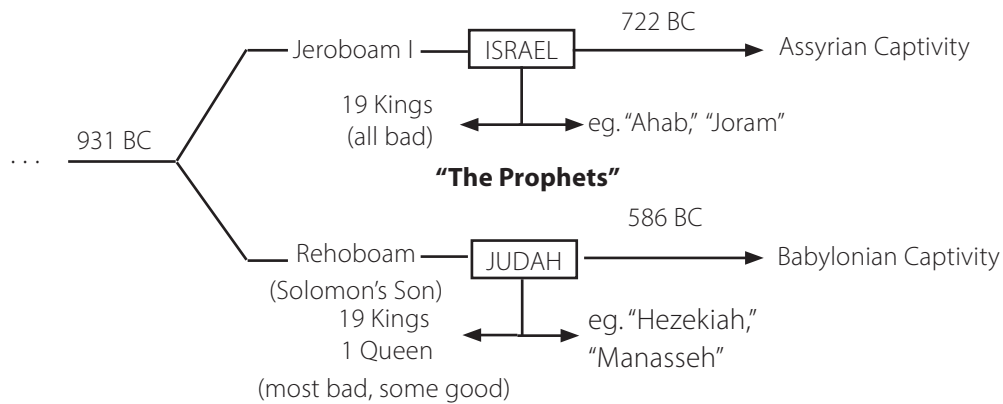
### I. PRAYER

### II. PANORAMA OF THE BIBLE

#### A. Movements of the Old Testament (9)

1. Prologue ..... Genesis 1-11
2. Patriarchs ..... Genesis 12-50; Job
3. Redemption/ ..... Exodus, Leviticus  
Wanderings ..... Numbers, Deuteronomy
4. Conquest ..... Joshua
5. Apostasy ..... Judges, Ruth
6. Kingship: United ..... 1-2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-11
- 7. Kingship: Divided ..... 1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings**
8. Exile ..... Ezekiel, Daniel
9. Return from Exile ..... Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

#### B. Movement 7: Timeline



### III. SYNOPSIS OF NORTHERN KINGDOM (ISRAEL)

#### A. Beginning

1. Split of kingdom upon Solomon's death (931 BC)
2. Led by Israel's first king (Jeroboam I)

#### B. Duration

1. From 931-722 BC
2. Nineteen kings (all evaluated theologically as bad)

#### C. End

1. Under the reign of Hoshea, a puppet-king answerable to Assyria.
2. Revolted, then subsequently defeated by Shalmaneser V (of Assyria).
3. Northern kingdom never a separate, political entity ever again.

#### D. Primary Prophets to Israel

1. Writing prophets: Amos and Hosea
2. Non-writing prophets: Elijah and Elisha

### IV. MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS

#### A. Meaning of Prophet

1. Although there has been disagreement among Old Testament scholars regarding the root and derivation of the word (Heb-nabhi), usage seems to point clearly to prophet as "one who speaks for God." The prophet declares the divine message.
2. Representative passage:  
Exodus 7:1-2  
*Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.  
<sup>2</sup>You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country."*

3. Notable examples:

a. Jeremiah 1:4-7

*The word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>5</sup>“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” <sup>6</sup>“Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” <sup>7</sup>But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ **You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.**”*

b. Zechariah 7:8-12

*And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: <sup>9</sup>“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. <sup>10</sup>Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’ <sup>11</sup>“But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. <sup>12</sup>They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.*

**Insight:**

In short, a prophet announces the message of the Lord to the intended audience. Thus, the prophet represented God before the people (often to the king); the priest, however, represented the people and mediated before the Holy God.

**B. Other Terms for Prophet**

1. Seer

a. Virtually synonymous with prophet

1 Samuel 9:9

*(Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, “Come, let us go to the seer,” because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.)*

b. Emphasizes the mode of receiving divine revelation ... “seeing as in visions.”

2. Man of God
  - a. Emphasized the holy calling, character, and divine ministry.
  - b. Examples (Deut 33:1; 1 Sam 9:6; 2 Kgs 4:9; et al.)
3. Servant of the Lord
  - a. Emphasized the relationship between prophet and God (i.e. prophet – servant before Almighty God).
  - b. Examples (2 Kgs 9:7, 17:13; Jer 7:25; Ezek 38:17; et al.)

### C. Primary Functions of Biblical Prophets

1. **Forth-tell:** to expound God’s message as revealed to them; to be moral, ethical, and spiritual preachers.
2. **Fore-tell:** to predict beforehand indicative of divine source; to announce events yet to come as it related primarily to judgment, salvation (deliverance), the coming Messiah-King, and His Kingdom.
3. **Sound the Trumpet against national apostasy:** to act as watchmen on the walls alerting the nation of the dangers of spiritual apostasy.

Ezekiel 3:16-17

*At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me:  
 17 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the  
 people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them  
 warning from me.*

## V. THE PROPHET ELIJAH

Very little is known about this intriguing prophetic figure except that which is revealed in the books of 1 and 2 Kings (also briefly, 2 Chron 21). Elijah’s name means “my God is Yahweh.” His lineage is unknown; his home was in Tishbe of Gilead. He appears during the reign of Ahab, the 7th king of Israel.

1 Kings 17-19 narrates three significant episodes in the life of Elijah. Each of the episodes taken together tell one story, the development and maturation of a prophet who fulfills his calling even as his three episodes become increasingly more difficult. (See p. 79 at the end of this session for a “travel map” of the prophet’s journeys). Additionally, further incidents in Elijah’s life are touched upon briefly.

<b>Elijah: Three Faith-Building Episodes<sup>1</sup></b>			
<b>Phases</b>	<b>Episode 1</b>	<b>Episode 2</b>	<b>Episode 3</b>
	<b>1 Kings 17</b>	<b>1 Kings 18</b>	<b>1 Kings 19</b>
<b>1. Announcement</b>	By Elijah 1	By God 1	By Jezebel 1 2
<b>2. Journey</b>	From Israel 2 5	To Israel 2 6	From Israel 3 4
<b>3. Two Encounters</b>	Ravens 6 7 Widow 8 16	Obadiah 7 15 Ahab 16 21	An Angel 5 6 Angel of LORD 7 8
<b>4. Miracle Event</b>	Resuscitation 17 23	Fire 21 38	Theophany 9 18
<b>5. Result</b>	Widow 17 24	Israel 39 40 Ahab 18:41 19:1	Elisha 19 21
<sup>1</sup> Adapted from R. Cohn as cited in Constable, <i>Notes on 1 Kings</i> (soniclight.com)			

## A. Episode One: 1 Kings 17

### 1. Announcement (by Elijah) (1)

1 Kings 17:1

*Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."*

- a. King Ahab was the 7th king of Israel who reigned from 874-853 BC, a reign of twenty-one years. Elijah's appearance likely occurred some fourteen years after the king began to rule. By this time it was quite apparent the kind of king Israel had.
- b. The phrase "whom I serve" (or "before whom I stand") is a technical one indicating that this appearance is a God-ordained, authoritative encounter. Ahab should recognize it as such and be attentive.
- c. The judgment of drought would have caused quite a stir in the palace. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, had introduced Baal worship to the kingdom. Baal was the god of fertility and rain.

1 Kings 16:30-33

*Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.<sup>31</sup> He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.<sup>32</sup> He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.<sup>33</sup> Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.*

- d. The length of the drought would be three years (cf. 1 Kgs 18:1), long enough to set the stage for a coming confrontation and conflict.

2. Journey (from Israel) (2-5)

1 Kings 17:2-5

*Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah:<sup>3</sup> “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.*

*<sup>4</sup> You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”<sup>5</sup> So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.*

- a. It was one thing to pronounce God’s judgment to Ahab but quite another to experience the expected, dangerous outcome. Yet, this is a test of Elijah’s growing faith and strength.
- b. God directed the prophet to hide (beyond the Jordan) and provided supernaturally for his sustenance. This provision would sustain Elijah’s life and continue to build his faith (in God).

3. Two encounters (6-16)

a. Encounter #1: Ravens

1 Kings 17:6-7

*The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.<sup>7</sup> Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.*

b. Encounter #2: Widow

(1) Instruction: Go to the widow of Zarephath of Sidon (8-9)

1 Kings 17:8-9

*Then the word of the LORD came to him:<sup>9</sup> “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.”*

- (a) Zarephath was located between Tyre and Sidon in the country of Phoenicia. This is the homeland of Jezebel and a stronghold of Baal worship.

- (b) This Gentile widow will be God’s instrument for provision of food for Elijah. Little does the prophet know, but the widow and her son are near the point of starvation as well.
- (2) Interview: Request (by Elijah) for water and bread (10-11)
  - (3) Inability: response by the widow: have not enough (12)
    - 1 Kings 17:12
    - “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”*
  - (4) Intervention:
    - (a) Honor the prophet of God: by feeding him (13).
    - (b) Miracle #1: material blessings—food (14-16).
      - 1 Kings 17:15-16
      - She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup> For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.*
    - (c) Trust the prophet of God: for healing (17-18).
    - (d) Miracle #2: restoring life—resuscitation (19-23).
      - 1 Kings 17:22
      - The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived.*



**Summary Insight:**

The two encounters (ravens and the widow) are placed in the backdrop of the coming power encounter between Yahweh (and Elijah) and Baal (and Jezebel with the prophets of Baal). The prophet must understand that the false god, Baal, a god of productive and fertile harvests, cannot ensure good crops much less rule over life and death (Yahweh alone is the Creator and Provider). Yahweh alone is God. Yahweh alone rules sovereignly and providentially.

## 4. Miracle Event

1 Kings 17:22-23

*The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"*

## 5. Result

1 Kings 17:24

*Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."*

Note that the widow confirmed the status of true prophet upon Elijah because of the miracles he performed. The signs were authenticators that Elijah was a prophet from God and thereby had a true message from God.

**B. Episode Two: 1 Kings 18**

## 1. Announcement (by God) (1)

1 Kings 18:1

*After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."*

## 2. Journey (to Israel) (2)

1 Kings 18:2

*So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,*

3. Two encounters (7-21)

a. Encounter #1: Obadiah (7-15)

Obadiah was a prophet of God, a devout believer, a protector of 100 prophets hidden in caves from Queen Jezebel, and also an official in Ahab's court (cf. vv 3-4). He was a man between a rock and a hard place (Jezebel and now Elijah). His life was precarious and quite risky.

(1) The meeting: Obadiah bows to Elijah (7).

1 Kings 18:7

*As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?"*

(2) The message: Tell Ahab I'm (Elijah) coming (8).

1 Kings 18:8

*"Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"*

(3) The misgivings: You're compromising me (Obadiah) (9-14).

(a) If I do, I die.

(b) Ahab has everyone looking for you.

(c) If I do, you'll probably be sent by the Spirit somewhere else.

(d) So, give me a break: I've secretly harbored and fed 100 prophets away from Jezebel.

(e) If I go, I'll be killed.

(4) The message: Tell Ahab I'm (Elijah) coming... today (15).

1 Kings 18:15

*Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."*

b. Encounter #2: Ahab (16-21)

(1) The meeting: Ahab and Elijah (16-17)

1 Kings 18:16-17

*So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. <sup>17</sup> When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"*

(2) The message: Disobedience and Idolatry (18-19)

1Kings 18:18

*"I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD'S commands and have followed the Baals."*

(3) The message (20-21)

(a) To Ahab: bring your Baal prophets to Mt Carmel

(b) To people: choose Yahweh or Baal (not both)

4. Miracle Event: Fire (21-38)

a. The test explained: fire on the altar (22-24)

Two bulls, one for the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and one for Elijah, are prepared to place on the altar. Then Elijah issues the challenge.

1 Kings 18:24

*Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."*

b. The task: Baal's prophets' effort (25-26)

Baal prophets called upon their god from "morning to noon" with no effect.

c. The taunts: Elijah's response (27-29)

1 Kings 18:27

*At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."*

d. The task: Elijah's efforts (30-35)  
Elijah repaired Yahweh's altar, made the sacrificial preparations, then surprisingly had four large jars of water poured upon the altar. He then repeated the water drenching a second, then a third time, resulting in the trench around the altar being filled with water.

e. The test evaluated: fire on the altar! (36-38)

1 Kings 18:36-38

*At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command."<sup>37</sup> Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."<sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.*

**Insight:**

"The contest on Carmel is not, as often billed, between Elijah and the prophets of Baal: it is between his Lord Yahweh himself and Lord Baal."

(A. Graeme quoted by Constable, *Notes on 1 Kings*, 73)

5. Result

a. For Israel (39-40)

1 Kings 18:39-40

*When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"<sup>40</sup> Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.*

b. For Ahab (18:41-19:1)

After the long drought Elijah told Ahab to eat, then later to leave because the drought was ending. Elijah committed himself to prayer (42-44; cf. Jas 5:17-18) and the Lord answered (cf. 1 Kings 18:1).

1 Kings 18:45-46

*Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. <sup>46</sup>The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.*

**C. Episode Three: 1 Kings 19**

1. Announcement (by Jezebel) (1-2)

1 Kings 19:1-2

*Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup>So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."*

2. Journey (from Israel) (3-4)

a. Elijah's fear

1 Kings 19:3a

*Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.*

b. Elijah's despair

1 Kings 19:4b

*"I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."*

c. Elijah's status

The formerly bold prophet ran away, far away. (Mt. Carmel is in the north. Beersheba was in the far south near the southern wilderness). Having dismissed his servant, the discouraged prophet traveled into the desert a day's journey and sat despondent under a "broom" (juniper) tree.

3. Two encounters

a. Encounter #1: An angel (5-6)

Having fallen asleep (exhaustion), Elijah was awakened by an angel who had prepared food and provided water. The prophet ate and drank, then he fell fast asleep again.

b. Encounter #2: Angel of the LORD (7-8)

1 Kings 19:7-8

*The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." <sup>8</sup>So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.*

(1) The "angel of the LORD" may have been the pre-incarnate Christ who appeared before the prophet.

(2) Mt. Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai where Moses met with God upon the mountain (cf. Ex 19-20<sup>ff</sup>).

4. Miracle event: Theophany ("God-appearance") (9-18)

Elijah though depressed and exhausted needs divine perspective. The Lord appears to the prophet and engages him in corrective conversation. A synopsis follows.

a. Lord: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (9)

Elijah: (1) I have been zealous for God.

(2) Others (Israelites) have rejected You.

(3) "I am the only one left" (10).

(4) Now, they're out to kill me.

b. Lord: "Go out and stand before the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by" (11).

Elijah: Saw and experienced... wind, earthquake, fire, gentle whisper... "pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave"... waited for God (13).

c. Lord: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (13).

Elijah: (1) I have been zealous for God.

(2) Others have rejected You.

(3) "I am the only one left" (14).

(4) Now, they're out to kill me.

d. Lord: His message to the fleeing prophet

1 Kings 19:15-18

*The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. <sup>16</sup> Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup> Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. <sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."*

Elijah: did not reply. "So Elijah went from there" (19).

5. Result: Elisha (19-21)

This marks the beginning of the story of Elisha, the servant and successor to Elijah.

#### **D. Other "Episodes" in Elijah's Life**

The anointing of Elisha did not end the story of Elijah. The Biblical account records further activity.

1. Elijah and Naboth's vineyard (1Kgs 21)

When Ahab wished to purchase a vineyard near his palace and was rebuffed by the owner, Naboth, he went home "sullen and angry" (4). Ahab's queen, Jezebel, rebuked the seemingly powerless king and announced, "I'll get you the vineyard" (7).

Jezebel hatched a plot to have accusers charge Naboth with blasphemy and enact a swift stoning to death of the man. The plan was carried out.

1 Kings 21:15-16

*As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead."<sup>16</sup> When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.*

Elijah was commissioned to speak the word of the Lord to the king.

1 Kings 21:19

*"Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!'"*

Ahab heard the prophetic words (judgment on Ahab, his sons and in particular, his wife). He "tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted...(and) went around meekly" (27).

The Lord responded.

1 Kings 21:28-29

*Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite:<sup>29</sup> "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."*

## 2. Elijah and Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:1-18)

Ahaziah was the son of Ahab, the 8th king of Israel. Having been injured in a fall, he wrongly attempted to consult Baal-Zebub, the Philistine god of Ekron. The Lord commissioned Elijah to confront the king's messengers to Baal-Zebub and deliver the Lord's anger and judgment of pending death to Ahaziah.

The king heard from his messengers the description of the man who intercepted them on their journey and who gave the unfavorable prophetic word. The king noted, "That was Elijah the Tishbite" (8b).



All attempts to send soldiers to capture Elijah failed as fire from heaven consumed the men. On the third attempt, the captain pleaded for his life and Elijah was commanded by the Lord to return with him to meet the ailing king.

2 Kings 1:16-17a

*He told the king, "This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!"<sup>17</sup> So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken.*

3. Elijah and the translation to heaven (2 Kgs 2:1-12)  
This final incident records the transition of prophetic leadership from Elijah to Elisha. When completed Elijah is translated into heaven.

## **VI. THE PROPHET ELISHA**

Elisha was the son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah (1 Kgs 19:6). He was appointed by God (and anointed by Elijah) to succeed the prophet Elijah. His ministry lasted from about 850 BC (the latter rule of Ahab, 7th king of Israel) to about 800 BC (the rule of Jehoash, 12th king of Israel).

### **A. Beginnings**

1. Elisha's call (1 Kgs 19:19-21)

Elijah was instructed by God to anoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kgs 19:16b). The prophet threw his cloak (mantle) around Elisha, a symbol of transfer of power and authority. With this, Elisha left the fields to fulfill his prophetic role.

1 Kings 19:21

*So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.*

## 2. Elisha's early ministry

Much like Joshua attended Moses before assuming his leadership role, Elisha attends the prophet Elijah ("set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant"—1 Kgs 19:21).

### a. Elijah's soon departure

2 Kings 2:1-3

*When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup> The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," Elisha replied, "so be quiet."*

### b. Elijah's test of Elisha

On three occasions Elijah asked Elisha to stay at a place while the prophet continued on to a place of the Lord's command ("stay here"... vv. 1, 4, 6). At each point Elisha refused to let his master (Elijah) proceed without him. This was a test of Elisha's calling and personal commitment to the prophet.

### c. Elijah's blessing

2 Kings 2:9-10

*When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. <sup>10</sup> "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."*

**Insight:**

The story of Elijah and Elisha is similar to a specific teaching of Jesus in respect to the cost of one's calling to follow Christ.

Note Luke 9:57-62:

*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."<sup>59</sup> He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."<sup>61</sup> Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Compare also the story of Peter in John 21. Additionally, note the sobering words of Jesus about Paul at the time of his conversion and calling:

Acts 9:15-16

*But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."<sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

d. Elijah's departure

2 Kings 2:11-12

*As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.<sup>12</sup> Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.*

By seeing the chariot and horses of fire, Elisha was assured the blessing of the **double portion** "of your spirit" (2 Kgs 2:9, 11-12). This may refer to special privileges as Elijah's successor, such as leadership of a community of prophets or it could be Elisha is asking for extra spiritual power to accomplish the tasks that would come before him.

The fact is, Elisha's ministry was characterized by unusual displays of miraculous power (i.e. Holy Spirit-enabled power). Note the following chart from Constable, *Notes on 2 Kings*, p. 9.

<b>MIRACLES INVOLVING ELISHA</b>		
<b>Miracle</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Elements</b>
Jordan River parted	2 Kings 2:8	Water
Jericho spring water purified	2 Kings 2:21	Water
Youths cursed	2 Kings 2:24	Animals
Water provided	2 Kings 2:20	Water
Widow's oil multiplied	2 Kings 4:6	Oil
Shunammite's dead son raised to life	2 Kings 4:35	Life
Poisonous stew purified	2 Kings 4:41	Flour
Prophets' food multiplied	2 Kings 4:44	Bread & grain
Naaman healed of leprosy	2 Kings 5:14	Water
Gehazi's leprosy inflicted	2 Kings 5:27	Disease
Ax head floated	2 Kings 6:6	Water
Horses & chariots surrounded Dothan	2 Kings 6:17	Fire
Aramean soldiers blinded	2 Kings 6:18	Sight
Aramean army scattered	2 Kings 7:6-7	Sound
Hazael's future predicted	2 Kings 8:13	Future

## **B. Nine Selected Miracle Stories (from the Life of Elisha)**

### 1. Parting the Jordan River

2 Kings 2:13-14

*Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup> He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.*

- a. Elisha replaces his torn clothing (anguish at the loss of his mentor-master) with the mantle of Elijah.
- b. Elisha's cry ("Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?") and the parting of the water demonstrates that Elisha is the heir-apparent. This miracle occurs in the presence of the company of the prophets (2 Kgs 2:15).

### 2. Purifying of the water

2 Kings 2:19-22

*The people of the city said to Elisha, "Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive." <sup>20</sup>"Bring me a new bowl," he said, "and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. <sup>21</sup>Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, "This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'" <sup>22</sup> And the water has remained pure to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.*

- a. The use of salt is reminiscent of a break with the past as when salt was rubbed on sacrifices to make them holy (a break from the common to the holy—cf. Lev 2:13; Num 18:19).
- b. The false god (Baal) was the god of water both above and below the ground. The miracle accentuated the power of Yahweh over Baal.

### 3. Cursing of young men (2 Kgs 2:23-24)

Elisha was confronted by some youth (not children, likely 18-30 years of age) who represented the lack of

respect for the prophet, lack of civility in general, and most probably lack of spiritual interest or covenant loyalty. When insulted, the prophet (on behalf of the honor and reverence due to God and one of his prophets) cursed the young men and wild bears effected the fatal judgment.

4. Predicting a military victory (2 Kgs 3:1-27)

The prophetic word-come-true from Elisha establishes him as a true prophet of the Lord in the presence of both the king of Israel (Joram, or the variant Jehoram) and the king of Judah (Jehoshaphat). Then follows the event that confirmed him as a true prophet.

a. The situation (1-7)

Joram (the 9th king of Israel) succeeded his brother, Ahaziah, whose evil reign only lasted two years (1 Kgs 22:51). Both brothers were sons of Ahab the 7th king of Israel and his queen, Jezebel.

Mesha, king of Moab, was required to pay tribute to Ahab of Israel. At his death the Moabite king rebelled (4-5). As a result Joram recruited both Jehoshaphat (king of Judah) and the king of Edom to form a triumvirate to defeat Moab (6-9).

b. The strategy (8-10)

2 Kings 3:8-10

*"By what route shall we attack?" he asked. "Through the Desert of Edom," he answered. <sup>9</sup> So the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. After a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them. <sup>10</sup> "What!" exclaimed the king of Israel. "Has the Lord called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?"*

(1) Desert of Edom was located in the dry, arid region south of the Dead Sea.

(2) Joram blames the Lord for their predicament of no water, perhaps an acknowledgment that God is judging them. More likely the unspiritual king is blaming God for a crisis that the king actually initiated and about which the king had not prayed, neither for God's guidance nor help.

c. The search (11-12)

Jehoshaphat inquired of the group whether there was a prophet of the Lord present. The answer pointed to Elisha, the former servant of Elijah (“pour water on the hands”–servant).

d. The session (with Elisha) (13-19)

Elisha is reluctant to deal with the king of Israel (“...Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother” – v. 13b). But because of Jehoshaphat’s presence, the prophet eventually gives instructions to follow and a prophecy of victory (16-19).

e. The sequel (20-26)

The three kings are successful as the Lord gives them victory over the Moabites. Additionally, Elisha has been vindicated as a worthy successor to Elijah in the presence of the three kings as well as the company of prophets.

5. Multiplying oil for the widow (4:1-7)

Similar to Elijah’s miracle with the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:7-24), Elisha also provides for a woman in need and her two children. The miracle is a multiplying of oil, which when sold, meets the dire financial crisis of the woman and allows her to avoid indentured servitude (Ex 21:2-4; Lev 25:39). Elisha is referred to as “the man of God” in the story. His prophetic ministry is acknowledged (validated) in the title of respect.

6. Raising the Shunammite’s son (4:8-37)

In summary fashion, the story unfolds as follows:

- a. At Shunem, a village in the Jezreel Valley, lived a well-to-do, devout believer who was childless.
- b. The woman highly respected the “man of God” (Elisha) and often entertained the itinerant prophet as he passed through; her faith in the prophet and his God led her to suggest to her husband that they build a room for Elisha to stay in as he traveled.

- c. Elisha's appreciation for this service to him and his servant led him to inquire of the woman, "Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?" (13).
- d. When graciously refused, Elisha prophesied that within a year the childless woman would have a son. The prophetic word came true.
- e. Later on the child grew ill and died in his mother's arms; the woman proceeded to travel to the prophet and personally deliver the news and her extreme disappointment.
- f. The story ends with Elisha's raising of the boy back to life (an extreme, dramatic display of Holy Spirit power).

**Insight:**

"This scene also shows that prophets not only are preachers of sin and repentance; they are also agents of God's healing mercy and kind compassion." (P. House, *1-2 Kings: NAC*, 268)

7. Purging a poison pot (4:38-41)

During a time of famine, the company of prophets prepare a stew but poisonous "gourds" were mistakenly added to the pot. When alerted, Elisha added flour and the stew was miraculously made edible.

The significance of this miracle may have been related to the sinful (poisonous) condition of the nation at this time. The need of the people was for the Word of God (bread), but instead, Baalism (poisonous gourds) had polluted the land and people. The prophets had come to Israel to provide spiritual food (the Word). Note the New Testament teaching of Jesus at His time of testing.



Matthew 4:1-4

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.<sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.<sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

8. Multiplying loaves and grain (4:42-44)

Elisha miraculously provides for a hundred men with only twenty loaves. This miracle demonstrated that God could provide richly as opposed to Baal's inability.

The miracle will be repeated in the days of Jesus whereby He will supernaturally provide for the needs of a multitude (Matt 14:16-21; 15:32-38; Jn 6:1-15). In both cases, both prophets (Elisha and Jesus) were vindicated as true prophets.

9. Healing of Naaman (5:1-27)

a. The setting (1-3)

2 Kings 5:1-3

*Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.<sup>2</sup> Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.<sup>3</sup> She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."*

<b>A STORY OF CONTRASTS</b>	
<b>Commander</b>	<b>Slave Girl</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aramean</li> <li>• “Great Man”</li> <li>• Leper</li> <li>• “Valiant soldier”</li> <li>• Helpless (in his leprosy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israelite</li> <li>• “Young girl”</li> <li>• Slave</li> <li>• Humble maid</li> <li>• Helpful (in her suggestion)</li> </ul>
<p>“If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy” (2 Kings 5:3b).</p>	

- b. The strategy (4-7)
- (1) Naaman will take a letter from his Aramean king to the king of Israel (Joram).
  - (2) Naaman will take a large sum of money.
  - (3) Naaman is received by Joram; the king of Israel is suspicious and believes this to be a ruse to start a war.
- c. The sign (miraculous) (8-14)
- (1) Elisha instructs King Joram to send the commander to him. Why? “(That) he will know there is a prophet in Israel” (8b).
  - (2) Elisha sends a messenger out to Naaman who has come to his home. As an important man, he expects an impressive reception. The command from Elisha through his servant Gehazi is simple.  
2 Kings 5:10  
*Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”*
  - (3) Naaman is incensed: (a) At the least the prophet could come out of his home and perform some religious ritual. (b) At home, at least the waters seem cleaner and more convenient than traveling this far. “So he turned and went off in a rage” (12).

**Insight:**

Sometimes the “high and mighty” must learn to become “low and humble.” Recall... “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6 NIV84).

## d. The sequel (15-27)

## (1) Naaman’s response to his healing.

2 Kings 5:15-16

*Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant.”<sup>16</sup> The prophet answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.*

## (2) Naaman’s personal testimony

2 Kings 5:17-18

*“If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD.”<sup>18</sup> But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.”*

## (3) Gehazi’s greed

Elisha’s servant secretly followed Naaman to intercept the general and take the offered reward (though under false pretenses). Elisha the prophet knows and utters a curse upon the greedy, deceitful servant: the sickness of leprosy.

### C. Other Stories About Elisha

Though time and space do not permit further discussions, other incidents in the prophet's life are listed.

1. Floating an axe head (6:1-7)
2. Warning to the king (6:8-10)
3. Escaping the Arameans at Dothan (6:11-23)
4. Predicting deliverance from Ben-hadad (6:24-7:20)
5. Predicting the new king (Hazael) after Ben-hadad (8:7-15)
6. Anointing Jehu as new king (9:1-3)
7. Raising a dead man from the grave of Elisha (13:21)

### D. New Testament References to Elisha

T.E. McComisky summarizes as follows.

"In the NT Elisha was referred to only once. Preaching at Nazareth, the Lord used Elisha's healing of Naaman as an example of the scarcity of faith within Israel; there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha, but only Naaman the Syrian was healed" (*ZPEB*, 2:292).

#### Concluding Insight:

Elisha presents a striking contrast to his master, Elijah, who was a true Bedouin child of the desert. Elisha, on the other hand, was a civilized man, preferring companionship, dwelling in cities, and often in close connection with kings. Elijah was a man whose mission was to accuse of sin or bring judgment upon men because of it; Elisha, while defending the ancient religion, came as a healer, and his miracles were those of restoring to life, increasing the widow's oil, making pure the bitter waters. There were tender sympathy for friends, tears for his country's prospective woes. And yet there was firmness in maintaining that which was right, sternness of judgment, and seeming forgetfulness of self. "In spite of all the seductions to which he was abundantly exposed through the great consideration in which he was held he retained at every period of his life the true prophetic simplicity and purity and contempt for worldly wealth and advantages."

—Ewald, *History of Israel*, 4:83

## VII. TAKEAWAYS

### A. The Prophetic Task

God's chosen prophets represented Him before kings and the people. They received God's Word and proclaimed it boldly.

Today, we have pastor-teachers who study God's Word and proclaim it boldly. Note the challenge Paul gives to young Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:2-3

*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*

### B. An Insight from Elijah

After the confrontation with the prophets of Baal (a true “power encounter” testing the reality and power of Yahweh vs. Baal), Elijah prayed for the long famine to end and life-giving rains to come. This would be the ultimate icing on the cake as the false god (Baal) was a supposed god of rain and fertility. However, Elijah prayed to the true God, Yahweh. The New Testament writer, James, speaks of Elijah as a man of prayer—one to be emulated as a prayer model.

James 5:17-18

*Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.<sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

### **C. An Insight from Elisha**

Elisha's ministry involved 15 recorded miracles, often miracles of compassion or provision. Biblical miracles were not measures of the prophet's esteem before God but rather signs to people that the prophet was legitimate and represented God to the people. Authenticating a messenger would lead to the authoritative message of the prophet. Nicodemus understood this principle as he observed Jesus.

John 3:1-2

*Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."*

The intended outcome of miracle-validated prophets was that God was present with His people, concerned about their devotion to Him (instead of false gods and idolatry), and desiring of a change in the spiritual direction of the covenant people.

Unfortunately for the nation of Israel, the signs and messages were ignored.

Perhaps there is a lesson here for today's believers as well.

D. Map of Elijah's Travels



