

LESSON VII

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

Preparation

- I Kings 17:entire
- I Kings 18:17-46
- I Kings 19:1-12
- I Kings 21:entire
- II Kings 2:1-15
- II Kings 4:entire

Markers

1. I Kings 17:1
2. I Kings 19:4
3. I Kings 19:11,12,16,19-21
4. I Kings 21
5. Luke 9:54-56
6. Mal. 4:5
7. Matt. 17:1-13
8. II Kings 2:14
9. II Kings 2:23-25
10. II Kings 3:15-20
11. II Kings 4:1-44
12. II Kings 5:1-14
13. II Kings 6:8-17
14. II Kings 8:1-6

Lesson VII

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

Elijah

Following the departure of Moses, Joshua became the leader of the Israelites. Then came the period of the Judges. After them Samuel the prophet appeared, and then came Saul, David and Solomon. Thus a period of five hundred years passed. The kingdom was then divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

In Israel the seventh king to rule was Ahab. The kings were Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab. Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre. At her request, he built a temple to Baal in Samaria. Ahab's daughter was Athaliah who married Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. As a result, Baal worship was mixed with the worship of Jehovah in both Israel and Judah.

The importance of Elijah is shown later by the fact that Moses and Elijah appeared before Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented Prophecy. Jesus was the fulfillment of Law and Prophecy. Moses, Elijah and Jesus all overcame death, the last enemy.

- (1) Elijah suddenly appeared before King Ahab (I Kings 17) and proclaimed a drought in the land because Ahab and the people worshipped Baal. Elijah then went to the brook Cherith and was fed by ravens until the brook dried up. Then he went to stay with the widow woman

of Zarephath. While there he saved her from starvation, seeing that the barrel of meal and cruse of oil did not fail during the drought. He raised the son of the widow from death.

Elijah then appeared before Ahab again and the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal ensued. Sacrifices were laid on an altar and the prophets of Baal called on their gods to answer with fire. There was no answer. Then Elijah had the people draw near. He had water poured over the sacrifice and the altar. When he called on the true God, he was answered by fire. This demonstration convinced the people. Then Elijah slew the prophets of Baal. Elijah predicted the end of the drought, whereupon a storm arose and he ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. When Jezebel heard what Elijah had done to the prophets of Baal, she threatened his life. Elijah had convinced the people that they should cease their worship of Baal and turn to the true God. The murder of the prophets of Baal was an effort to correct evil by destroying the evil-doers. This was a personalization of evil. The correct method was shown by Jesus much later in his healing work where the individual was freed from the evil belief. This saved the person and cast out the evil.

(2) Elijah fled into the wilderness and sat down under a juniper tree and said, "Oh, Lord, take away my life—for I am not better than my fathers" (I Kings 19:4). This clearly shows that he realized his mistake in destroying the prophets of Baal. Then an angel appeared to him and he found food and drink and he was able to travel forty days and nights to Mt. Horeb in the strength of the food. Mt. Horeb is Mt. Sinai, the holy mount, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. We may see in this Elijah's return to the true sense of Law. This is not the law saying "an eye for eye," or that some are saved and some condemned, but that law wherein all my find

(3) salvation. Here he learned that God is not in the earthquake, wind or fire but in the still small voice (I Kings 19:11,12). Elijah was next told to find and anoint Elisha as his successor (I Kings 19:16). He did so and Elisha followed and ministered unto him (I Kings 19:19,21).

(4) Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21), and Jezebel conspired and had Naboth killed. Elijah then appeared and predicted the end of Ahab. Then Ahab repented and consequently the evil due to come upon his house was delayed until the days of his son (I Kings 21:29).

Following the death of Ahab, his son, Ahaziah, reigned in Israel. He fell ill and sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub if he would recover. Elijah met the messengers and told them it was because they did not have the true God in Israel that they were going to inquire of Baal-Zebub.

(5) The king sent a captain and fifty men to seize Elijah and they were destroyed by fire. This was repeated with another fifty. Evidently Elijah was fearful of going with them and they were destroyed. This event was rebuked by Jesus in Luke 9:54,56 with the statement "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Elijah and Elisha went together across Jordan and Elijah ascended into heaven by a whirlwind. Elisha saw the chariots of fire and a double portion of the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha.

(6) In Malachi 4:5 it is predicted that Elijah would be sent before the day of the Lord. Since Elijah represented prophecy, we may conclude that prophecy and its completion in the final restoration of the kingdom of heaven on earth would precede the final spiritualization of all things (Matt. 17:1-13).

(7)

Prophecies of Elijah

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Drought | (I Kings 17:1) |
| 2. End of drought | (I Kings 18:41) |
| 3. Death of Ahab | (I Kings 21:17-19) |
| 4. Death of Ahaziah (son of Ahab) | (II Kings 1:1-4) |
| 5. Death of Jehoram (son of Ahab) | (I Kings 21:29;
II Kings 9:24-26) |
| 6. Death of Jezebel | (I Kings 21:23;
II Kings 9:36-37) |
| 7. Death of Jehoram (son of Jehoshaphat) | (II Chron. 21:12-14) |
| 8. Spirit rests upon Elisha | (II Kings 29:13) |

Every prophecy made by Elijah was fulfilled. His mission was to work to destroy Baal worship. He prophesied to show that the worship of false gods is fatal to the worshipper. He pointed to the one true God, the God of the Israelites. He demonstrated the superiority of his God over the false gods, yet the leaders and people were not permanently converted. On the completion of his work, he ascended and the work was continued by Elisha. We may summarize the events in his life as follows:

1. Appearance before Ahab and prophecy of drought (I Kings 17:1).
2. Fed by ravens (I Kings 17:6).
3. At Zarephath supplies oil and meal and restores the son of the widow woman to life (I Kings 17).
4. Contest with the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:21) and their destruction.
5. Storm and ride across the plain to Jezreel (I Kings 18:41).
6. Flight from Jezebel into the wilderness where he is

fed by an angel and goes 40 days on the strength of the food.

7. At Mt. Sinai (Horeb) he receives the word of the Lord and learns that God is not in earthquake, wind or fire, but in the still small voice. (Fire at the altar, wind in the storm).
8. At Mt. Sinai he is sent to find and anoint Elisha as his successor.
9. Denounces Ahab and Jezebel for the murder of Naboth.
10. Appears on the path of the messengers of Ahaziah going to the shrine to determine the outcome of his illness.
11. Destroys the fifties sent to seize him by the king.
12. Ascends.

Elisha

Elisha was the successor of Elijah and continued his work. He represented a contrast to Elijah. Elijah was a desert-dweller. He appeared in a city only to deliver a message and disappear. Elijah wore long untrimmed hair and a girdle of skin. Elisha was a city-dweller. His hair was trimmed and he wore the usual garment of an Israelite.

(8) Elisha began by taking the mantle of Elijah and smiting the waters of Jordan, which parted to let him pass (II Kings 2:14). He was invited to stay at Jericho, although they admitted the water was bad and the land barren, whereupon he healed the waters.

(9) On his way to Bethel (II Kings 2:23-25) he was mocked by some children, whereupon he cursed them. As a result the children were attacked and harmed by two bears. Here we find Elisha faced with the same problem as Elijah. How to destroy the seeming evil in man and save the person. The solution to this problem was not

properly achieved until the advent of Jesus. It depended upon the concept of God as Love as revealed to Jesus and taught by him. The meeting of evil with more evil compounded the evil, but did not heal. This problem is involved in the concept of the Law as a punishment containing no sense of mercy. Mercy is an attribute of God which the sense of God as Love unfolds.

The events in the life of Elisha are not all in chronological order. We shall discuss them in the order in which they are presented.

(10) The kings of Israel, Judah and Edom had met together to fight the king of Moab, but were prevented because of lack of water. Elisha was called and he provided them water without rain (II Kings 3:15-20).

(11) The next account (II Kings 4:1-7) tells of a certain woman, one of the wives of the sons of the prophets, who had lost her husband and whose creditor was to take her sons for bondsmen. She had nothing but a pot of oil in the house. Elisha commanded her to gather more vessels and to pour out. She did and filled all the vessels. Elisha then told her to sell the oil, pay her debt and live on the rest. This reminds us of the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath where he multiplied the oil and meal. The sense of God as the true source of substance has been demonstrated by Moses, Elijah, and Elisha and will be again shown by Jesus.

Prior to Jesus the people thought of the prophets as able to perform miracles, but did not think of this possibility as applying to themselves. The advent of Jesus changed this view, for he said, "Go and do likewise." Jesus was able to communicate to others the knowledge of how to heal. He could do this because he knew God as Love.

The state of the people depends on the people's concept of God. As long as God is thought of as Father, men will accomplish much, but women won't, and thus we

hear little of accomplishments by women in the Bible as yet.

Elisha stopped one day and ate at the house of a woman of Shunem (II Kings 4:8-37). After he had stopped a number of times, she prepared a chamber where he might sleep when he passed that way. He tried to find a way to reward her thoughtfulness and finally his servant Gehazi mentioned that she was without child and her husband was old. Elisha then promised that she would have a child, and so it came to pass. At a later time the child fell ill and died. To her husband's inquiry as to why she wanted to go to the man of God, she replied, "It shall be well." She then went to Mt. Carmel to Elisha. When he discovered what had happened, he sent Gehazi with his staff with orders to greet no one en route and to lay the staff on the child. Gehazi returned to report that the child was not awakened. We may see in the staff a symbol of human authority which was not sufficient to raise the child. Elisha then came himself and lay upon the child and he awoke. This reminds us of Elijah who raised the son of the widow woman and who also lay upon the child. Apparently it was the thought of life passing into the body of the child from the prophet that caused each to do this.

At Gilgal (II Kings 4:38-41) pottage had been seethed for the sons of the prophets and a strange vine had been put in. The plant turned out to be poisonous, but Elisha caused meal to be put in and the pottage was healed and they had no harm. A man then came (II Kings 4:42-44) and brought barley and corn. It was multiplied to feed a hundred men and they all ate and left thereof.

(12) The next story is of the healing of Naaman the leper, (II Kings 5:1-14). In this story Elisha instructs Naaman to wash seven times in the river Jordan. The washing symbolized cleansing, as a leper was considered unclean. To do it seven times signified a complete purification

as seven represent completeness. Naaman, however, turned away in a rage because he thought of the rivers of Damascus as far superior to the waters of Israel. This may have signified that his sense of nationalism was keeping him from being healed. God is not a national but a universal God. When his servants suggested that what he had been asked to do was a small thing, a sense of humility came to his consciousness and this dissolved his pride and he went down to Jordan and was healed. He must have seen that it was not the river, but his changed consciousness through which a sense of man's perfection came, enabling him to look into the river and see himself as the image and likeness of God. The following includes some of the qualities of thought which may have led to his healing:

1. Acceptance of a prophet as specially endowed by God.
2. Diligence in seeking the prophet.
3. Overcoming of a sense of nationalism.
4. Obedience.
5. Completeness in his response.
6. Acknowledgment of his healing.
7. Realization that God was the source of his healing and acceptance of the God of Elisha as the only true God.

(13) During the war between Syria and Israel, Elisha aided the king of Israel by telling him of the plans of the Syrian king as soon as he made them (II Kings 6:8-17). This ability to discern the thought of another was a striking example of Elisha's spiritual altitude. The Syrian king then surrounded Dothan where Elisha was in order to capture him. When the latter's servant saw this and was frightened, Elisha prayed that his eyes might be opened and then he saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. The

Syrians were then smitten with blindness and led into Samaria. Their eyes were then opened and they were fed and sent back to Syria.

Later Samaria was besieged by the Syrians and because of the siege there was a great famine. Elisha predicted that they would have plenty of food. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Syrians fled and left everything behind (II Kings 6:24 to II Kings 7:20).

(14) The next event was Elisha's prediction of a famine and his advice to the Shunammite woman that she go elsewhere for seven years to avoid the famine (II Kings 8:1-6). Numerous other events occurred until finally Elisha died and was buried. Another man subsequently died and was let down into Elisha's tomb, whereupon the man revived through faith in the continuing influence of the prophet.

The long succession of remarkable events in the life of Elisha covered a period of sixty years. They ranged from opening the Jordan, to multiplying the food, to raising the dead. We may list them as follows:

1. Becomes successor to Elijah	II Kings 2:13
2. Crosses Jordan	2:14-15
3. Heals the waters	2:19-22
4. Provides water for the army	3:15-20
5. Increases the widow's oil	4:1-7
6. Raises the Shunammite's child	4:18-37
7. Heals the deadly pottage	4:38-41
8. Feeds the multitude	4:42-44
9. Heals Naaman, the leper	5:5-15
10. Causes the ax-head to rise to the surface	6:1-7
11. Discloses the plans of the Syrian king	6:8-12
12. Opens the eyes of the young man to see his protection	6:13-17

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 13. Leads the blinded Syrians
away | 6:18-20 |
| 14. Prophecies plenty during the
siege | 6:24 to 7:20 |
| 15. Saves the Shunammite woman
from famine and obtains the
restoration of her property | 8:1-6 |

The works performed by Elijah and Elisha make one think of Moses and Jesus respectively. Elijah like Moses had to fight with tyranny and idol worship and each was confronted with personalized evil. Each fed the people and performed miracles in a warlike atmosphere. Elisha, like Jesus, was able to follow with more works of restoration and healing in a calmer atmosphere, like the sunshine after the storm.