

A Tale of Two Prophets: Elijah an Elisha

By David Feddes

1 Kings 16:23-34

A TALE OF TWO PROPHETS

Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. 1 Kings 16:30

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Israel's Northern Kingdom was rising to its high point of power and prosperity—and sinking to the lowest evil. As the military and economy boomed, faith fizzled. Never in the history of that kingdom of ten tribes had there been rulers as successful as Omri and his son Ahab—and never had there been any so sinful.

Earlier kings had led Israel to worship the Lord in the form of a golden calf, breaking God's command not to make images of him. Omri and Ahab continued this evil and added more: they worshiped foreign gods, breaking God's command to worship him alone.

To build a political alliance, Ahab married the pagan princess Jezebel. Her father, the king of Sidon, was a key player in international trade. The marriage brought a stream of money and a flood of evil. Jezebel brought pagan gods and pagan priests to Israel. Ahab didn't mind marrying someone who despised God and his Word. Why not worship various gods and mix different faiths together?

It was the worst of times, it was the best of times—a time of wicked kings and wondrous prophets. During the dynasty of Omri and his son Ahab came the ministry of Elijah and his successor Elisha. Never had anyone preached with greater power than these two prophets. Never had anyone performed greater miracles, even raising the dead.

When the night is darkest, the stars shine brightest.
PRAYER—Holy Lord, we live in a crooked and depraved time. By the Spirit of Christ, make us shine like stars as we hold out the word of life. Amen. (Philippians 2:15)

1 Kings 17:1-6

THE WEATHERMAN

“There will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.” 1 Kings 17:1

Weather forecasters try to predict the next few days. Elijah predicted the next few *years*: dry, dry, and dry! Unlike forecasters, Elijah didn't try to figure out future weather; he *directed* future weather. There would be no moisture until Elijah said so.

The pagan god Baal was supposed to rule thunder, rain, and fertility. But the weatherman challenged the weather god. Elijah spoke for the Creator and Ruler of all things, the living God: “As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain.”

This drought declaration didn't come out of nowhere. Elijah was applying God's ancient Word to the current situation. Centuries earlier the Lord took the Israelites as his own people and told them not to reject him for other gods. If they broke his covenant, God warned, “The Lord will strike you with... scorching heat and drought... The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder” (Deuteronomy 28:22-24).

The Lord carries out his threats against covenant breakers. He also keeps his promises to covenant keepers. The Lord made sure Elijah had food and drink throughout the drought, even using birds to deliver meals.

Outside God's covenant we wither and die. Within his covenant we live and flourish forever.

PRAYER—Living God, seal on our hearts your new covenant in Jesus. Forgive our sins. Guide us in your path. Help us to live by your Word and to speak it boldly. Amen.

1 Kings 17:7-16

FOOD AMID FAMINE

The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry. 1 Kings 17:16

When times are tough, it may seem you can't afford to share. But you can't afford not to share. "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:24-25). If the poor widow had kept her meager food for herself, she would have starved. But she shared with Elijah, and God made sure she always had enough.

This widow lived in Sidon, realm of Jezebel's father, center of Baal worship. The false god Baal could not protect his homeland from the drought sent by the God of Israel. God showed himself Judge not only of Israel but of other nations too. At the same time, God showed himself Savior of persons beyond Israel who believed in the living God. Even as God dried up Baal's home turf, he chose a woman and child from that vile country to be saved through faith. Jesus singled her out to display God's unexpected mercy (Luke 4:25-26).

Whatever your nationality or religious background, you are not exempt from God's judgment or beyond his mercy. God is alive and active still today, judging the complacent and saving the desperate. Faith gives up life on our terms to get life on God's terms. Jesus says, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it... Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward" (Matthew 10:40-41).

PRAYER—Lord, our lives are in your hands. Move us to trust you and to sacrifice for others. Supply all our needs according to your glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1 Kings 17:17-24

LIFE GIVER

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. 1 Kings 17:22

A heartbroken widow weeps over the dead body of her only son. She asks God's prophet, "Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" However, God's mission is not to rub in guilt but to rescue from death. Elijah prays, and God raises the dead boy to life. It is the first resurrection in history. It is not the last.

A heartbroken widow weeps over the dead body of her only son. The Lord Jesus sees her, his heart goes out to her, and he says, "Don't cry." Then he says, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead son sits up and starts talking. Jesus returns him to his mother (Luke 7:12-16).

A heartbroken Father weeps over the dead body of his only Son. He hides his face and shrouds earth in darkness. The Son has died not for his own sin but for the sins of others. Then the Father puts forth his power, and the body of his beloved Son rises to life, never to die again. Now everyone else's resurrection is just a matter of time.

Various nations that have gained independence from colonial powers have special celebrations each year to mark the birth of freedom from foreign rule. But every Sunday is a day for Christians worldwide to celebrate something far greater: freedom from death's reign. On the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead, so every Sunday Christians celebrate "the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, Giver of life, Destroyer of Death, comfort us when we mourn, strengthen us when we fear, and fill us with the joy of eternal life. Amen.

1 Kings 18:1-19

A GOOD POLITICIAN

Obadiah was in charge of [Ahab's] palace. Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord. 1 Kings 18:3

Elijah was a prophet; Obadiah was a politician. Elijah lived in wild, remote places; Obadiah lived in palaces. Elijah rebuked royalty to their face; Obadiah worked within the system. Elijah was God's chief prophet; Obadiah was chief of staff for the wickedest king in Israel's history. We might be tempted to praise the prophet and condemn the politician. But both were faithful to God. Each carried out his own calling to serve the Lord in his own way.

Obadiah didn't challenge the king directly or thunder that Ahab was the main trouble with Israel. Obadiah didn't resign his position to protest the policies of Ahab and Jezebel. Obadiah was a smooth, clever operator who tried to avoid needless risk. We might label such a man a coward and a compromiser, and we might slap the same label on devout politicians making hard choices today. But we should instead affirm their calling to work within the system.

Obadiah was a good politician. He used his influence and money to make a positive difference in a negative situation. He loved God and helped his people. Obadiah was not a prophet, but there would have been a hundred fewer prophets if the good politician had not saved their lives.

Thank God for the boldness of godly preachers, but also thank God for the skill of godly politicians. Pray for "all those in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). As they make difficult decisions, God works through them.

PRAYER—Thank you, Lord, for godly people whom you call to serve in government. Guide them by your wisdom, and encourage them with your power, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

1 Kings 18:20-40

SHOWDOWN

“How long will you waver between two opinions?” 1 Kings 18:21

The Lord hates syncretism. He hates it when we mix man-made religion with divine revelation, when we try to serve other gods along with the Lord God of the Bible. We must stop sitting on the fence and make up our minds.

Elijah called for a showdown to force a decision. He gave Baal home-field advantage: Mount Carmel was near Sidon, a stronghold of Baal worship. Lightning (“fire from heaven”) was supposed to be Baal’s specialty. Baal’s team of prophets outnumbered Elijah 850 to one. Baal’s team prayed loudly all day; Elijah prayed quietly for a minute. Baal’s prophets used wood so dry it would ignite with a spark; Elijah drenched his wood with water. But Baal couldn’t produce even a spark. Then, from a cloudless sky, the Lord sent such a bolt of fire to his altar that even the water, stones, and soil were vaporized.

Syncretism went up in smoke. Gone was the notion that all beliefs are true, that all gods are equal, that all religions can be blended. The people fell flat and cried, “The Lord—he is God!” Then they killed the evil prophets who had led them away from God, corrupted their morals, and sacrificed their children to false gods.

Do you waver between two opinions? Are you mixing faith in Christ with other religions? Do you try to serve both God and Money? Make up your mind to serve God alone, before the day “of judgment and of fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:27). PRAYER—God of Abraham, Father of Jesus, impress us anew that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning our hearts to fear, trust, and love you. Amen.

1 Kings 18:41-46

JUST LIKE US

Elijah was a man just like us... he prayed, and the heavens gave rain.
James 5:17-18

Elijah made kings tremble, ate food delivered by birds, raised the dead, called fire from heaven, directed weather patterns, and outran a king's chariot. *Elijah was a man just like us*. Just like us? Isn't that hard to swallow? Elijah sounds like a superhero, one of a kind, totally unlike any of us. But Elijah had the same human nature we have, and he prayed to the same God we can pray to. God answered his prayers; God will answer our prayers.

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain... Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain" (James 5:16-18). Elijah did not pray for his own wish list. He prayed for what God promised. That's why his prayers were so effective. God had told Elijah, "I will send rain on the land" (18:1). So, on a clear day with no thunder, Elijah told Ahab, "There is the sound of heavy rain." God's Word of rain was the sound that convinced Elijah. Elijah prayed and kept on praying until a tiny cloud appeared. His faith saw not the smallness of the cloud but the certainty of God's promise, and he knew the downpour was near.

If, like Elijah, we are right with God, and if we base our prayers on God's promises, persist without giving up, and watch in faith for God's answer, our prayers are powerful and effective.

PRAYER—Lord, give us ears to hear your Word and faith to trust your promises. Teach us to pray as ordinary people expecting great things from our extraordinary God. Amen.

1 Kings 19:1-21

PITY PARTY

“I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life... I am the only one left.” 1 Kings 19:4,10

Even after Elijah’s preaching and miracles, people still rejected the Lord, and killers hunted Elijah. It was all over. The Lord had nobody left but Elijah, and faith had no future. At least that’s how it seemed to Elijah.

Part of his problem was physical. When the body wears down, the spirit burns out. Elijah needed sleep and strong food, and he needed to get away for time alone with God. We are not stronger than Elijah. To keep going in God’s service, we need rest, good meals, and time away with God.

We also need perspective. God’s coming is sometimes accompanied by wind, earthquake, and fire, but not always. Sometimes God is found only in silence or a gentle whisper, not in wonders that shake the earth and make the headlines.

God let Elijah repeat his complaints, but then the Lord ended the pity party and sent Elijah back to work. Would God’s cause fail? No, covenant breakers would fall before two future kings whom God had already picked. Meanwhile, the future of the faith did not depend on Elijah. Elisha would help him and then take over from him.

Elijah was not as alone as he had felt. God always has “a remnant, chosen by grace” (Romans 11:5). Seven thousand never bowed to Baal. Untold others may have worshiped Baal at some point but turned back to God because of Elijah. Never give up on God or on working for him. “Your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

PRAYER—Lord, help us who feel defeated, alone, and ready to give up on life. Replenish our bodies, refresh our spirits, and renew our mission, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

1 Kings 21:1-16

ACTING LIKE A KING

Jezebel his wife said, “Is this how you act as king over Israel?” 1 Kings 21:7

If a faithful man says no to selling his God-given property, why should a king take no for an answer? Isn't government a law to itself? Ahab and Jezebel had long been violating orders from the Ten Commandments about worshiping the one true God. Why not violate commandments on relating to other people? Why not covet, steal, testify falsely, and murder? Ahab should act like a king! A king doesn't take no for an answer, not from any man, not even from God.

When rulers pursue their own ambitions instead of God's glory and people's wellbeing, they are not rightful rulers but tyrants. To a greedy, ambitious dictator, God says, “Does it make you a king to have more and more...? [A godly ruler] defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the Lord. “But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion” (Jeremiah 22:15-17).

Without the Lord and his commandments, anything goes. Rulers become a law to themselves. Courts think they really are supreme. Godless governments recognize no authority but their own and uphold no human rights except their belief that might makes right.

God approves of no absolute monarch except King Jesus—and he reigns for our good. Government must know its limits under God and recognize that all people are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”

PRAYER—King of kings, help government authorities to live under your authority and to do what is good for people. Judge cruel oppressors, Lord, and save the weak. Amen.

1 Kings 21:17-28

THE REAL ENEMY

Ahab said to Elijah, “So you have found me, my enemy!” 1 Kings 21:20

People who speak God’s Word are labeled troublemakers and enemies if they confront an unjust government, a corrupt church, or sinful neighbors. But the wicked have no worse enemy than their sins. When God sent a drought, Ahab called Elijah the “troubler of Israel.” Elijah responded, “I have not made trouble for Israel. But you and your father’s family have” (18:18). When Elijah confronted Ahab in his victim’s vineyard, Ahab snarled, “My enemy!” Elijah responded, “*You have sold yourself* to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Elijah did not choose to be Ahab’s enemy. Ahab chose to be God’s enemy, Israel’s enemy, and his own worst enemy.

“There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife” (1 Kings 21:25). They would get what they deserved. Ahab, Jezebel, and their whole vile clan would be dead meat, dog food. When Ahab heard this, he was afraid. He did not regret his crime, only that he got caught, and his humility was short-lived. But that was still enough to arouse God’s mercy and postpone final doom.

God is slow to anger and quick to show mercy. If God is our enemy, it’s our doing, not his. Jesus died for his enemies to make us his friends. If even Ahab found droplets of mercy after his brief “repentance,” how much more will we find a flood of saving grace if we truly repent and trust Jesus’ blood to cleanse us.

PRAYER—“You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Turn to me and have mercy on me.” Amen. (Psalm 86)

1 Kings 22:1-28

NOT A CHEERLEADER

“I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad.” 1 Kings 22:8

Micaiah never made the cheerleading squad. He never got hired as one of Ahab’s 400 court preachers. Ahab hated Micaiah for the same reason he hated Elijah: these bold prophets did not say what Ahab wanted to hear. Ahab wanted cheerleaders who said nice things about him and predicted a bright future for him. But Micaiah’s motto was, “I can tell him only what the Lord tells me” (22:14).

If we hate God’s Word and want preachers eager to please us, God may give us what we want. He may let lying spirits control corrupt preachers, and he may let us believe their lies. Demon-directed cheerleaders help us feel good about sin and feel positive on the road to ruin.

Even as these liars cheer us toward death and hell, God’s mercy may give us another chance. He may send a brave voice to speak the truth we hate. Micaiah’s warning was Ahab’s last chance. For each of us there comes a day when God’s speaks his last warning. If we reject him, we will go to our doom amid the cheers of demons.

Pray that God may guard us from “deceiving spirits” and “hypocritical liars” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). Some people “will not put up with sound doctrine” but pick preachers “to suit their own desires” and “to say what their itching ears want to hear.” But godly pastors must “preach the Word... in season and out of season,” when it’s popular and when it’s not (2 Timothy 4:2-3).

PRAYER—Lord, give us prophets, not cheerleaders. Bless brave pastors who tell us your truth. Open our ears and hearts to respond. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

1 Kings 22:29-40

GUIDED MISSILE

Someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. 1 Kings 22:34

Clever Ahab painted a bulls-eye on his ally, King Jehoshaphat of Judah. He told Jehoshaphat to enter battle in royal robes, while Ahab went disguised as an ordinary soldier. The scheme worked. Enemy troops ignored Ahab and targeted Jehoshaphat.

But disguises don't fool God. Clever tactics can't defeat God's plan. Jehoshaphat was a king who "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (22:43), and the Lord saved him from death. Meanwhile, a bored archer shot a random arrow in the general direction of the Israelite troops, the arrow just happened to reach Ahab, and it just happened to hit the one tiny gap in Ahab's armor. That "random" arrow was God's guided missile. Ahab bled to death at a pool for prostitutes, and dogs licked his blood, fulfilling the prophecies of Elijah and Micaiah. Ahab would not live by God's Word, so he died by God's Word. A historian could write of Ahab's palaces, fortresses, and political achievements (1 Kings 22:39), but the Holy Spirit focused the biblical story on Ahab's evil and his doom.

The Lord saves the faithful and punishes the ungodly. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8).

PRAYER—Almighty Lord, your hand directs all things. May we not die at your word of judgment but live by your word of mercy, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Amen.

2 Kings 1:1-18

PLAYING WITH FIRE

“Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub?” 2 Kings 1:3

In some places today, people claim to believe in Jesus but turn to other spiritual powers in a crisis. Facing illness or other problems, they call on various spirits or go to witch doctors. King Ahaziah, son of Ahab and Jezebel, took that approach. He had some notion of God, but when he was badly injured, he turned to Baal-Zebub.

Some science-minded people say not to turn to tribal spirits because those spirits are unreal. That may be true in some cases, but in other cases the spirits are very real. Baal-Zebub is not just a fake; he is a mighty spirit, the prince of demons (Matthew 12:24-28). But though he is real, we must not turn to such spirits under any circumstances. We must trust God alone and fear God alone. Only the Lord holds the power of life and death. God decreed death for the king who looked to a spirit besides the Lord. What a stern warning for “Christians” who turn to tribal spirits and witch doctors!

Another warning: If someone is really a man of God, don’t try to control him or threaten him. Disrespect for God’s representative is disrespect for God himself, and “our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 11:29). Fire destroyed two captains and their troops who called Elijah “man of God” but didn’t treat him that way.

If you claim to believe in Jesus, here are two tests: Where do you turn in crisis? How do you treat God’s Word and those who preach it?

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, you have defeated the spirits, and you meet our every need. Help us to depend on you completely and to worship you with holy fear. Amen.

2 Kings 2:1-12

SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT

A chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared... and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 2 Kings 2:11

Elijah was the only man in history besides Enoch who went to heaven without dying. Jesus had the right and power to bypass death, but he chose to suffer and die, enduring God's punishment against our sin. On the cross, Jesus cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some heard Jesus cry "Eli" and thought he was calling Elijah to come down from heaven and save him (Mark 15:35-36). But Jesus was not calling Elijah, and he was not treated like Elijah. No fire came down to destroy Jesus' enemies. No chariots of fire came to take Jesus away and spare him from death. Jesus paid the price for our sins. He opened a way to God that that does not avoid death but triumphs over death.

The sacrifice of Jesus paid for Elijah's trip to heaven, and it pays for ours. Unlike Elijah, you and I will die (unless Jesus returns first). But like Elijah, we can travel to heaven, escorted by angels. If we trust Jesus, angels will welcome us the moment we die and carry us to heaven (Luke 16:22). What joy to be met by such a welcoming committee and to have such protection on our journey to the next world! This journey with angels is so swift and sweet, and the destination so splendid, that death disappears. Thanks to Jesus, nothing remains of death but a shadow, and even the shadow will be swallowed up in light when the blazing sweet chariot swings low to carry us home.

PRAYER--"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see? A band of angels coming after me. Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home." Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

2 Kings 2:13-25

NEW SPOKESMAN, SAME SPIRIT

“The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” 2 Kings 2:15

Before Elijah was taken to heaven, Elisha asked, “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.” He was not asking to be twice as spiritual as his mentor. It was customary when a man died for his firstborn son to inherit “a double portion,” twice as much as other sons, marking him as new head of the clan. Elisha was asking to take Elijah’s place as head of the prophets and chief spokesman for God. His request was granted. Using Elijah’s cloak and empowered by the same Spirit, Elisha made a miraculous path through the Jordan River as Elijah had done. God’s new spokesman, Elisha, picked up where Elijah left off, showing the same power of God to save or to judge.

Jericho was where God had once wiped out all in the city and declared a curse. But despite its wicked past, Jericho now asked God’s representative for help. God healed their bad water supply and renewed the surrounding land.

Bethel was where God first appeared to Jacob, the father of all Israelites. But despite its glorious past, Bethel had become a shrine to worship a golden calf. When a gang of Bethel’s youth mocked God’s spokesman, Elisha spoke God’s word of judgment. Forty-two of the idol-worshipping, prophet-mocking youths were torn by bears.

Different spokesman, same Spirit, same message: “There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring life. I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand” (Deuteronomy 32:39).

PRAYER—Eternal, unchanging God, may we not despair at past curses or be proud of past glories. May we trust you now and walk in step with your Spirit. Amen.

2 Kings 4:1-7

BROKEN HEARTS, EMPTY POCKETS

“My husband is dead... now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves. 2 Kings 4:1

Elijah and Elisha had been schooling a group of men to preach God’s Word faithfully. Despite persecution, this “company of the prophets” grew, and they led many in that corrupt society to walk with God. One of these godly men died. Whether he was killed for his preaching or died of natural causes, the Bible doesn’t say. But it does say that a wicked creditor had no mercy on the poor survivors. God had commanded, “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan” (Exodus 22:22), but this creditor intended take the two boys as slaves and to heap even more heartbreak on the grieving widow.

Then God stepped in. “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” (Psalm 68:5). God loves widows and orphans; he also loves faithful pastors and their families. After the preacher is gone, God cares for family members who are left behind. The widow had only a little oil, but the God who made the universe from nothing could easily turn a little oil into a lot. The widow and her sons followed Elisha’s advice. Their faith was big enough to gather many jars, and God’s grace was big enough to fill them. The result was enough money to pay all debts and live well on the surplus. “The Lord your God is... mighty and awesome... He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

PRAYER—Loving Father, when our hearts are broken and our pockets are empty, make your grace overflow to us, and then through us to others, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

2 Kings 4:8-17

CIRCLE OF BLESSING

“You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you?” 2 Kings 4:13

After helping a poor widow, Elisha helped a rich wife. Wealthy and well connected, this lady didn't need money or political favors. But even a prosperous person may have secret sorrow too sensitive to talk about. “Each heart knows its own bitterness... Even in laughter the heart may ache” (Proverbs 14:10,13).

Being childless caused heartache for the wealthy couple of Shunem, but they didn't grow bitter. They loved God and were eager to show kindness to “a holy man of God.” Whenever Elisha passed through, they hosted him for meals. They built and furnished a guest room so that the prophet could have his own cozy home away from home.

How could Elisha repay the kindness of a woman who seemed to have it all? He could promise her the one thing she didn't dare ask for or hope for: a baby. It sounded too good to be true—but this couple who had welcomed God's prophet were soon to welcome God's gift of a new baby.

Scripture says, “Respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Bless God's servants as the Shunem couple blessed Elisha, and you in turn will be blessed. God “will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them” (Hebrews 6:10). The more you give, the more you receive in God's circle of blessing.

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, from the fullness of your grace we have received one blessing after another. Give us generous hearts, and grant our hearts' desires. Amen.

2 Kings 4:18-37

HOPES RAISED

“Did I ask you for a son, my lord? Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes’?” 2 Kings 4:28

A miracle baby is born in Shunem. As he grows older, he brings joy to those around him. Then, on a day when the sun is too intense, he dies. Hope dies with him. To the mourners, it seems worse than if he had never lived. If only their hopes had never been raised in the first place! But the God who raised those hopes by giving a son would raise those hopes again by raising the son from the dead.

Fast-forward more than eight centuries. A miracle baby is born in Bethlehem. As he grows older, he brings joy to those around him. Then, on a day when the sun hides, he dies on a cross. Hope dies with him. To the mourners, it seems worse than if he had never lived. They cry, “We had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:20-21). If only their hopes had never been raised in the first place! But the God who raised their hopes by sending his Son would raise those hopes again by raising the Son from the dead. Hope would never die again.

When Scripture lists heroes of faith who lived before Jesus, it says, “Women received back their dead, raised to life again” (Hebrews 11:35). These pre-Easter resurrections previewed what Jesus would do. His rising would guarantee the rising of all his people. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

PRAYER—God of comfort, help those who feel shattered by the death of a loved one. Fill us with the living hope of resurrection through Jesus. Amen.

2 Kings 4:38-44

FOOD PROBLEMS

He cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. 2 Kings 4:39

Imagine eating some stew and then finding out the pot was poisoned. Your stomach hurts. Death is closing in. Even worse, imagine you poisoned the pot yourself. You were trying to help, but the food you put in was deadly. Now you and those with you are dying.

Our best efforts to help others are poisoned by sin and error. Pastors try to feed their hearers with truth, parents try to nourish their children with wisdom, but somehow poison always gets into the pot. “Even the very best we do in this life is imperfect and stained with sin” (Heidelberg Catechism).

If my best efforts can do more harm than good, why even try? Because God can provide the antidote to my errors. He can make a poisoned pot good and even transform the food that is already in people’s stomachs. God’s grace can redeem our flawed efforts, undo the poison of sin, and bring nourishment and health to those we serve.

Even without a poison problem, we might still have a problem with shortages. We don’t have enough time, energy, or money to meet the needs around us. But if the Lord can make poison into health food, he can also turn a shortage into a surplus, as he did when Elisha fed many with a little bread. Whether our task is pastoring or parenting or serving in some other way, we might wonder, “Who is equal to such a task?” But then we remember: “Our competence comes from God” (2 Corinthians 2:16, 3:5).

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, neutralize sin’s poison and bless our efforts to help others. As you fed many with a few loaves, transform our scarcity into your bounty. Amen.

2 Kings 5:1-14

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

“I thought he would surely come out to me... wave his hand over the spot and cure me.” 2 Kings 5:11

Naaman was the top general of a triumphant army, and he expected royal treatment. He traveled in a procession of chariots with people eager to please him. Surely Elisha would be impressed! Surely he would cure Naaman in a grand, dignified manner! But when the motorcade arrived, Elisha didn't even come to the door. He sent an errand boy with a message for the general to go jump in a lake—well, not a lake exactly, but he was supposed to jump in the Jordan River not just once but seven times.

General Naaman left in a huff. How dare anyone treat a great general like a lowly private? How dare anyone expect him to soak in the Jordan when he had bigger, better rivers back home? Naaman knew exactly how his healing was supposed to go—and this was not in the plan. He expected the prophet to do something great. Naaman was even willing to do some great deed himself. A lowly washing? Never!

Finally his servants persuaded him that he had nothing to lose but his leprosy. Naaman washed and became healthy. Only then did Elisha welcome him personally. God cured Naaman of leprosy and of a deadlier disease: pride.

If you want God to fix what's wrong with you, forget your expectations. Abandon your pride. You must be saved God's way, or you cannot be saved at all. Only Jesus' blood can cleanse and heal you. “Be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

PRAYER—Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit with me, for Jesus' sake. Amen. (Psalm 51)

2 Kings 5:15-27

GREED, RACE, AND GRACE

“My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought.” 2 Kings 5:20

God’s grace can be infuriating. “There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27). When Jesus pointed this out, his hometown folks tried to throw him off a cliff.

Elisha’s assistant, Gehazi, didn’t like it either. Why show grace to the wrong race? Why heal “this Aramean,” a rotten foreigner, and not more of “our own people”? Gehazi didn’t like God’s freedom to choose someone from the wrong race, and he didn’t like how freely the gift was given. Naaman should have to pay. Besides, Gehazi was a prophet, and shouldn’t prophets enjoy profits?

God loves to show grace. He hates racism and greed, which deny free grace. Racist Gehazi was greedy for something from Naaman, so God judged that Gehazi and his race after him could have Naaman’s leprosy.

God “accepts men from every nation” (Acts 10:35), so we must not be racist. Believers “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24), so we must not act as though “godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Timothy 6:5). As Elisha said, “Is this the time to take money?” To experience grace and proclaim it, we must be able to say, “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God” (2 Corinthians 2:17).

PRAYER—“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us—that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.” Amen. (Psalm 67)

2 Kings 6:1-7

MINI-MIRACLE

Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float. 2 Kings 6:6

Is this a silly miracle or what? If God Almighty wants to make an exception to his law of gravity, shouldn't he save it for something more important than making an axhead float? Parting the Red Sea to rescue a nation—now there's a big-time miracle! But retrieving an axhead seems minor, and the person involved is minor. He's just a poor student helping on a building project to expand a seminary. Losing a borrowed axhead might be a big deal to him, but in the grand scheme of things, it's very minor.

However, the Lord of the universe loves minor people and keeps track of their minor matters. Nothing is too small and nobody too unimportant for God to care. "Indeed," says Jesus, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid" (Luke 12:7). If God seems silly, let's take all the silliness he'll give us. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom... God chose the foolish things... He chose the lowly things" (1 Corinthians 1:25-28).

God does mini-miracles for minor people, and he does major miracles for them too. He rescues them from hell through Jesus' blood, he makes his home in their hearts through his Holy Spirit, and he destines them to reign with him forever. Whether the Lord is making an axhead float or walking on water himself, whether he is hanging on a cross or reigning from heaven, he works all things (even mini-miracles) for the good of those who love him.

PRAYER—"Hear me, O Lord, for I am poor and needy. You are my God; save your servant. In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me." Amen. (Psalm 86)

2 Kings 6:8-23

OUTNUMBERED

“Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” 2 Kings 6:16

Elisha and his assistant awoke one morning to find themselves surrounded by armed enemies with horses and chariots. The assistant panicked. But Elisha said, "Don't worry. We've got them outnumbered. Our army is bigger and stronger than theirs."

"Our army?" the assistant wondered. "I see only two of us, and lots of them." Then God opened his eyes, and the hidden hosts of heaven became visible to him. He saw a vast army with enough firepower to defeat any opponent. In short order, the enemy troops were struck blind, captured, shown kindness, and sent back to their own land.

God has “many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Revelation 5:11). They are always on alert to carry out God’s orders, always ready to protect and help “those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). These countless millions, unbeatable in battle, are your guardians if you belong to God by faith. “If you make the Most High your dwelling... he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:9-11).

Mighty as the angels are, God himself is mightier still. "Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? He is more awesome than all who surround him" (Psalm 89:6-7). Nothing can defeat him. Nothing can separate his people from his love (Romans 8:37-39). God’s enemies are always outnumbered. God’s friends are never outnumbered.

PRAYER-- "The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands. Summon your power, O God; show us your strength as you have done before." Amen. (Psalm 68)

2 Kings 6:24-33

BLAMING GOD

“This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?” 2 Kings 6:33

Samaria was surrounded. The Israelite capital was running out of food. People were paying high prices to have donkey head or dove dung for dinner. Some were even eating babies. Who was to blame? Evil King Joram blamed God and Elisha, just as Joram’s father, evil King Ahab, had earlier blamed Elijah for a drought.

God’s written Word clearly warned what would happen if the Israelites broke his covenant and went their own way. One penalty would be drought (Deuteronomy 28:22-24). Another would be siege and cannibalism: “Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you” (Deuteronomy 28:53). God gave fair warning, but the wicked kings rejected God. Then they blamed God and his prophets for the results. “A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord” (Proverbs 19:3).

This is not just an ancient story. We live in a society that devours its offspring. We abort babies and use fetal tissue in an attempt to live longer. We experiment on embryos and harvest their cells to aid our own health. When a society devours its young, it is a sign that it has violated God’s covenant and is under his judgment. Yet when trouble strikes, we blame God and complain, “How could God let such awful things happen?”

PRAYER—“O Lord, the great and awesome God, you are righteous, but we are covered with shame. O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!” For Jesus’ sake. Amen. (Daniel 9)

2 Kings 7:1-11

A DAY OF GOOD NEWS

This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves... Let's go at once and report this. 2 Kings 7:9

Elisha preached good news. By special revelation, he predicted that within 24 hours, the siege would be over, the enemy would be gone, and food would be plentiful and cheap. Nobody could have guessed such a thing. But God gave a miraculous glimpse of the future to this mighty prophet.

Is a preacher with supernatural ability the only one able to bring God's good news? Well, the four lepers were not mighty prophets; they were beggars. They had no special revelation or miraculous ability to see the future; they just found out something that had already happened. They did not have to give a grand speech; they just shared what they had discovered. The enemy was gone and food was there for the taking.

Jesus has defeated Satan the enemy, and he offers himself as living bread to make us live forever. You don't need to see into the future to know this; it has already happened. You don't need grand speeches to tell others; it's just a matter of one beggar telling others where to find bread.

Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51). Have you trusted Jesus? Are you eating this bread and relishing his riches? If so, be glad—but don't be selfish. Others are still starving for salvation. "This is a day of good news... Let's go at once and report this."

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, as we trust your gospel on this day of good news, nourish us with yourself and bless us with the riches of your grace. Then send us forth to spread the news. Amen.

2 Kings 7:12-20

THE FLOODGATES OF HEAVEN

“Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?” 2 Kings 7:19

When God opens the floodgates of heaven, he can pour out good things. He invites people to trust and obey him, saying, “See if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Malachi 3:10). But the floodgates of heaven can also pour out judgment. In the time of Noah, “the floodgates of the heavens were opened” (Genesis 7:11), and the Flood wiped out all who were not in Noah’s ark.

King Joram’s right-hand man scoffed when Elisha said that a starving city would have plenty of cheap food by the next day. This official would not trust God for a flood of blessing, so he experienced only a flood of judgment. While others feasted, he was trampled to death.

A final day is coming when the floodgates of heaven will be thrown open. Jesus and his angel armies will stream into this world. For believers, that day will bring “so much blessing you will not have room enough for it.” For unbelieving scoffers, it will bring utter ruin and misery. “The floodgates of the heavens are opened... In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below” (Isaiah 24:18,21). The angels “will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:42-43).

PRAYER—“May God arise, may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him. But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God” (Psalm 68). Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

2 Kings 8:7-15

HEART OF A MONSTER

He stared at him ... until Hazael felt ashamed. Then the man of God began to weep. 2 Kings 8:11

“Why is he looking at me like I’m a monster?” wondered Hazael. “I just go to my government job every day. Why would a grown man break down in tears at the mere sight of me?” Elisha told him why, but Hazael did not believe it. He didn’t think he was capable of smashing babies and slashing pregnant women. Maybe he didn’t think he was evil enough to be such a monster. Or maybe (like youth who shoot up schools, or terrorists who blow up women and babies) Hazael had long dreamed of what he’d like to do to those he hated but never thought he’d actually get to do it.

Sin is monstrous, not just in Hazael but in us. We don’t know our full potential for evil. But God knows. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind” (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Events proved that God knew Hazael better than Hazael knew himself. Hazael betrayed the trust of a sick old king and brutally smothered him. He stole the throne of Aram and became a bloody butcher.

Even this monster was part of God’s plan. Hazael’s evil was his own fault, but it was also God’s way of punishing Israel for sin and faithlessness. “The Lord’s anger burned against Israel, and for a long time he kept them under the power of Hazael” (2 Kings 13:3). If we nurture sin in our hearts and refuse God’s mercy, he may leave us at the mercy of an enemy with a wicked heart.

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, as Elisha wept, you too wept for your people. Give us tears for the perishing. Save us from our sin and from cruel enemies. Amen.

2 Kings 9:14-37

PAYDAY

When they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet, and her hands. 2 Kings 9:35

Crime pays: the wages of sin is death. Over the years, Queen Jezebel saw others collect their wages, but she would not repent. When Elijah called down fire from God at Mount Carmel and killed Jezebel's false prophets, she would not repent. When her husband, Ahab, was killed and dogs licked his blood, she would not repent. When her son King Ahaziah of Israel died after a serious fall, she would not repent. When Jehu killed her son King Joram of Israel and grandson King Ahaziah of Judah, she would not repent.

The wages of sin is death. Payment may be delayed for many years, but eventually payday comes. With painted face, the proud queen was defiant to the end. But Jezebel's makeup got messed up. Some of her own slaves threw her from a high window to the street below. Horses trampled her. Dogs devoured her flesh and ran off with the bones. Nothing was left but a skull, hands, and feet. God had said, "Dogs will devour Jezebel" (1 Kings 21:23). He wasn't bluffing. God never bluffs.

God says, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them" (Deuteronomy 32:35). How can you avoid payday in hell? Repent of your sins, and beg for God's mercy in Christ. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

PRAYER—"Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you" (Psalm 90:11). Have mercy, Lord, and save us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

2 Kings 13:14-19,22-25

MR. MODERATE

He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him. 2 Kings 13:18-19

King Jehoash was a moderate. He smiled on various religions without being too devoted to any. He worshiped gold idols but was also nice to God's prophet. He cared enough about Elisha to weep when the old man (over eighty) was on his deathbed, but he did not care enough about Elisha's God to serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

Elisha told Jehoash to dramatize victory over Israel's enemy, the nation of Aram, by striking the ground with arrows. Mr. Moderate tapped the ground three times and stopped. That upset Elisha. Aram, led by King Hazael, had been butchering men, women, and babies. Elisha didn't want a few moderate victories against such an enemy. He wanted total victory over that evil empire.

God had been using Aram's cruelty to punish rebellious Israel, but God still loved his people. "The Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them" (13:23). He sent help. The help would have been far greater if the king's faith and zeal had been greater.

All too often, we praise as moderate what is double-minded and halfhearted. Satan is too terrible to fight moderately. "Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9). God is too great to trust moderately. "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). Zeal in the service of a glorious God is no vice. Moderation in battling evil is no virtue.

PRAYER—Lord, give us faith large enough to receive your great salvation in its fullness. Give us hearts to love you fully and to fight sin fiercely, for Jesus sake. Amen.

2 Kings 13:20-21

LIFE OUT OF DEATH

When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet. 2 Kings 13:21

During his lifetime, Elisha fed a large crowd with a little food, healed leprosy, and raised the dead. When Elisha died, his death meant life for someone else. Does that sound like anyone you know?

Elisha was a foretaste of Jesus. Our goal in reading about Elijah and Elisha is not just to learn a few more facts about these prophets but to know Jesus. The Son of God, who sent the prophets, became our chief Prophet himself. Jesus fed larger crowds, healed more lepers, and raised more dead people than Elisha did. His death also had more life-giving power than Elisha's.

Elisha's death raised one person to life; Jesus' death raised many. The moment Jesus died, "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people" (Matthew 27:52-53). That was an impressive wave of resurrections, but Jesus' life-giving power goes even farther. "A time is coming when *all* who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out" (John 5:28-29).

Jesus says, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18). If we know Jesus, the grave can't hold us. If we are buried with him, we will also live with him. "He died for us so that... we may live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:10).

PRAYER—"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Matthew 17:1-13

THE FINAL WORD

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” Matthew 17:5

Elijah went to heaven in a dazzling chariot, but he visited earth once after that. Moses and Elijah joined Jesus on a mountaintop. There Jesus gave three disciples a glimpse of his glory and showed the connection between himself and the prophets of the Bible. Jesus was the Lord who had sent Moses and Elijah and all the prophets who came before Christ, and they had been pointing to him all along.

Peter was a bit confused at the time, but later he understood. He wrote, “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty... We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18). Jesus’ glory seals the truth of the prophetic Scriptures. As Peter put it, “We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

As Elisha inherited Elijah’s prophetic spirit, so John the Baptist was the final prophet to inherit Elijah’s ministry and prepare the way for Jesus. All previous words led up to God’s final Word. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... The Son is the radiance of God’s glory” (Hebrews 1:1-3). Trust Jesus, God’s final word to us. From heaven God says, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

PRAYER—God of the prophets, Father of Jesus, shine the light of your Word and send the life of your Spirit into our hearts, that we too may be with Jesus in glory. Amen.