

# **Bible Overview 12: Beginning of the Prophets - Elijah and Elisha**

## **Background:**

Elijah and Elisha – prophets in the Northern Kingdom during dynasties of Omri and Jehu.

Elijah appears 1 Kings 17:1 during reign of Ahab, Elisha died during reign of Jehoash 2 Kings 13:20.

Dynasty of Omri – 885-874

Ahab 874-853

Ahaziah 853-852

Jehoram 852-841

Dynasty of Jehu 841-814

Jehoahaz 814-798

Jehoash 798-782

Jeroboam II 782-753

Zechariah 753-752

Focus especially on reign of Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

## **Conditions in the Northern Kingdom**

After the Kingdom split in 2, Jeroboam established Canaanite shrines in the northern Kingdom. Omri arranged the marriage of his son Ahab with princess of Tyre – Jezebel. Jezebel set out to remove the worship of Yahweh from Israel and replace with foreign gods. Under Ahab and his successors to the throne, influenced by Jezebel, life in the northern kingdom was a battle between the rulers who promoted the worship of Baal and those who remained true to Israel's God 'Yahweh'.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings cover over 400 years, yet almost a 1/3 concentrates on the 80 year period during which Elijah and Elisha lived.

Focus especially on reign of Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

Moses was a 'prophet' but the ministry of Elijah/Elisha has a prominent place in the role of the prophets.

(The appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mt of Transfiguration summarise the Old Testament = the 'Law and the Prophets' – see Luke 24:27 &44)

The role of the prophet was to speak God's Word to God's people, in particular to call the King back to covenant faithfulness with Yahweh.

The Old Testament ends with the promise that God will send the prophet Elijah before the 'great and dreadful day of the Lord'. (Malachi 4:5)

Matthew, in particular, draws parallels between the lives of Elijah and Elisha and the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus.

He presents John the Baptist as the fulfilment of the promise that Elijah would come again and Jesus as the new Elisha.

John is not literally a reincarnation of Elijah (which Jews expected) hence his declaration when asked if he was Elijah "I am not" (John 1:21), but Jesus describes John as 'the Elijah who was to come' (Matt 11:14). In his life and ministry John is fulfilling the Elijah role as the one who comes before the day of the Lord. (See also Luke 1:17 p1025)

### **Elijah's ministry foreshadows John**

#### **Compare:**

- 2 Kings 1:7-8 (368) & Matt 3:4 (967)
- Hostility from those in power, in particular a woman behind the throne 1 Kings 19:2,10,14 (361) & Matt 14:3-12 (981)
- Both anointed their successors at the Jordan River, the heavens opened and they saw something descend from heaven 2 Kings 2:11-12 (369) & Matt 3:16 (967).
- Elijah was the forerunner to Elisha as John was the forerunner to Jesus

### **Elisha's ministry foreshadows Jesus**

#### **Compare:**

Elisha's ministry takes over from Elijah (the forerunner) following his anointing by Elijah at the river Jordan 2 Kings 2:7, 9

2 Kings 4: Elisha raises a child who had died (authority over death)  
Jesus raises a dead girl Matt 9:18-25

2 Kings 4:42-44 Elisha miraculously feeds a large crowd with a few loaves and there is some left over  
Jesus feeding the 5000 Matt 14

2 Kings 5 Elisha heals Naaman of leprosy (authority over sickness)  
Jesus heals lepers Matt 8:1-4

2 Kings 6:1-7 Elisha miraculously causes the iron axe-head to float on water (authority even over nature)  
Jesus walks on water Mark 6:45-56

2 Kings 6:17 Elisha opens the eyes of the 'blind'  
Jesus gives sight to the blind John 9

2 Kings 6:8-17 Elisha 'sees' the unseen army of the Lord  
Jesus knows of but refuses to call upon the unseen army of the Lord to save him from death in order to fulfil the Scriptures Matt 26:52-54

John the Baptist when in prison asks if Jesus really is the one 'to come'. Jesus sends John's disciples back with the message "the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cured, deaf hear, dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor" (Matt 11:2-5). Elisha restores sight to the blind (2 Kings 6:18-20 p375) cures leprosy (2 Kgs 5 p373-4) raises the dead (2Kgs 4:32-37, 8:4-5, 13:21) and brought good news to the poor (2 Kgs 4:1-7, 7:1-2, 8:6). The Servant of the Lord promised in Isaiah 61 is seen in the ministry of Elisha, fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

Nb In the Bible there are certain 'epochs' in which miraculous signs and wonders are plentiful – Moses, Elijah/Elisha, Jesus and the apostles = the introduction of the law, the prophets, King Jesus and the apostles ministry.

Introduced to Elijah in v1 – Warning to Ahab that a drought is coming.

## **1 Kings 18**

Elijah called to confront Ahab  
Obadiah has hidden a 100 prophets from Jezebel, Ahab's wife, but is reluctant to take Elijah's message to Ahab for fear of death (v14)

Ahab calls Elijah "you troubler in Israel" (v17)

V16-46 Confrontation between the prophets of Baal and Elijah at Mount Carmel.

- Challenges the people regarding their constant wavering (v21)
- V25-29 – Prophets of Baal attempt to call down fire from Baal on their sacrifice – mocked by Elijah
- V30-36 Elijah rebuilds the Lord's altar with 12 stones (12 tribes of Israel) & soaked with water
- V36-37 he prays – for what and why?

- V38 the fire falls and people fall prostrate and cry out
- V40-42 execution of the prophets of Baal
- End of the drought

Dramatic victory for Elijah over the prophets of Baal, yet....

## **1 Kings 19**

- Jezebel remains unrepentant and undaunted despite great signs and wonders (Exodus 5-12, John 12:27 'Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence they still would not believe in him') – fundamental problem – sinful heart not ignorance
- Elijah's flees – in fear and despair v3-5
- Travels to Horeb - 40 days and nights (v7-9a)
- Elijah and Moses – at Mount Horeb, hidden in cave/cleft of rock, behold the presence of the Lord (Exodus 33-34 – what is significant? Not what they see but what they hear.
- What is the significance of earthquake, wind and fire? (11-13)

"God's control of the world and of history do not require fire from heaven, it is enough for Him to speak for His will to be done. His word is sovereign and almighty; His purposes do not fail. The Lord spoke to Elijah commanding him to anoint 3 individuals who would be in different ways, God's instruments in the overthrow of Baalism in Israel. Hazael was to be anointed king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel and Elisha God's prophet to succeed Elijah" Ed Clowney (and the Lord also had 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal)

Israel had quickly forgotten the fire that fell but God's word would be spoken.

"Elijah stood at the head of the long succession of prophets who ministered that word of God, not in the thunder of Sinai, not in the fire of Carmel but in the quiet word of revelation to his prophets, the Lord would reveal the incredible design of his saving mercy" (Ed Clowney).

The last and greatest of the prophets, who came in the spirit of Elijah – John the Baptist also expected fire to fall on God’s enemies:

“The axe is already at the root of the trees and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire...He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.....gathering the wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire ” Matt 3:10-12

But Jesus brought blessing and not judgment and the fire did not come so he sent his disciples to ask, “Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?” Luke 7:19

Jesus reminded John of the miracles (echoing Elisha) and fulfilling the prophecies – see Isaiah 35:5-6.

“Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me” Luke 7:23. The quiet voice of the Lord instructed John as it had Elijah.

### **READ Luke 9:28-26**

Moses and Elijah meet with the Lord of glory, again on a mountain top and the subject of the conversation was the coming ‘Exodus’ (v31) of Jesus at Jerusalem. The ‘word of the Lord’ finds its focus and fulfilment in the death of Jesus on the cross to liberate his people. The ‘fire’ of judgment falls not upon rebel subjects but on the King himself.

This is THE great subject of the prophetic message,

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” 1 Peter 1:10-11

### **In Mark 3 Jesus encounters great opposition and conflict:**

- 3v6 the Pharisees and Herodians plot to kill him
- His own family think he has gone insane 3v21
- The teachers of the law accuse him of being demon possessed 3v22

### **What is Jesus’ response to such fierce opposition?**

#### **Chapter 4:**

- The parable of the sower (1-20) – a parable about the ‘word’ v14
- The parable of the growing seed v26-29, the ‘seed’ grows though he does not know how
- The parable of the mustard seed v30-34 – the smallest seed becomes the largest plant

The 'Word' (the gospel message) that seems so weak, so small so powerless is growing and spreading all over the world.

"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ-crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" 1 Cor 1:22-28

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God" 1 Cor 1:18

## **The Prophet**

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods must be put to death" Deut 18:14-22

## **Jesus is THE prophet of God**

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" Hebrews 1:1-3

## **Jesus fulfils 3 Old Testament 'Offices': Prophet, Priest and King**

He is The **Great High Priest** – whose sacrifice made once for all brings salvation for all God's people

He is **The King** – the descendant of David, the Lion of Judah, God's Messiah

He is **The Prophet** – he is the Word of God made flesh, the greatest, fullest and definitive revelation of God

"As King he is the might Creator who rules heaven and earth and ensures the redemption of his people. As Prophet he is God's very Word who teaches God's truth. As Priest, he offers his perfect life as a sacrifice for the sins of his people and ever lives in resurrection glory to make intercession for them" John Frame