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1 Kings 19 - 20



1 Kings - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the continuation of the story of Elijah the prophet in 1 Kings chapters 19 and 20. After fleeing to the safety of Sidon, Elijah is instructed by an angel to journey to the horror mountain of God, where he hears a small voice speaking to him. As Elijah expresses his isolation and frustration, he realizes that God is still with him in the silence. Eventually, Elijah musters 7,000 people to help fight against Ben-Hadad, and with Yahweh on their side, the Israelites are victorious. However, Ahab's failure to obey God's voice leads to a harsh consequence.

Transcript

Now we come to 1 Kings chapter 19, and we continue our story of Elijah the prophet. And there was a drought of three and a half years that was announced at its beginning by Elijah, and then ended at the end of three and a half years through the prayers of Elijah. In the meantime, Elijah had to hide because the wicked king Ahab was looking for him.

And he spent part of that time hiding down by a brook, probably hiding in the bushes, as God had ravens bring food to him day by day. When that brook dried up and no longer could provide a source of water, he had to go elsewhere, and God directed him to go up into the region of Sidon, which was the region that Jezebel was from. And seemingly the most inhospitable place for a person of his convictions and in his position, but it may have proven to be the safest place because Ahab spent that three and a half years sending out search parties, looking for Elijah everywhere and requiring different countries to report if they'd seen him or if they were housing him.

And it may be that Sidon is the only place he didn't send search parties just because he certainly wouldn't go there. That would be the most dangerous place to go. And if that was how Ahab reasoned, then God reasoned that going to Sidon was the safest place for Elijah to go.

And so he stayed there with a widow who herself was sustained only because of her hospitality to the prophet. She was a widow like many others who would have died in the famine. She had come down to her very last morsels of bread to prepare for her son and

herself, and then they just expected to starve because there was no more food anywhere.

And because Elijah visited her, she was able to eat and survive through the entire famine. Her son did seemingly die of a sickness during that time, but Elijah raised him from the dead. So it was altogether a great boon to her that she took in the prophet into her home.

And at their first meeting, Elijah asked her for bread and she didn't have any extra. And he just said, well, make some for me anyway and give it to me first. This was obviously a test of her faith.

Mekeshimah said, well, go find your own bread. We have too little as it is. But he said, well, if you give it to me first, then God will provide for you and you won't run out.

Of course, she didn't know whether that was true or not, but she put her faith in that promise. She did give up her first fruits to God, as it were, to the man of God, and God did sustain her. She was a Gentile, and therefore her experience with Elijah provides one of the many biblical stories showing that God is not a racist.

God does not care more for a Jewish person than for a Gentile person. What he looks for is a person who is of faith. And Jesus pointed this out in the synagogue of Nazareth when he preached there in Luke chapter 4, pointing out that the people of Nazareth would not see as many miracles as people outside Nazareth would for the simple reason that a prophet is not as well received among his own kin in his own country.

And they did not have as much faith in him as outsiders did. Likewise, he said that was how Elijah found it. There were no widows in Israel that would take him in, apparently.

Faith was not common in Israel in those days. And therefore, a widow who had faith who was a foreigner actually was benefited by the miraculous provision. Now, after three and a half years, God told Elijah it was time to get the rain back, and so he went and, first of all, he proposed a challenge to the prophets of Baal.

They obviously had been powerless to bring rain, and now they were going to show themselves powerless to bring fire as well from heaven. They could get no response from heaven at all because their God wasn't there. And Elijah showed that by making two altars.

He had them make one, and he made one. And they called on their God who did not show, and he called on Yahweh who did show up, and fire from heaven came down and consumed the sacrifice on the altar, as well as the stones of the altar and all the water that had been poured over the altar and had gathered into a trough around it. And this impressed the people briefly that Yahweh was the true God and Baal was not.

And Elijah pressed his advantage at that moment to his popular support with the people allowed him to execute the prophets of Baal, which should have been the beginning of a fine revival in Israel, but the rulers of Israel were still wicked. Ahab and Jezebel were unmoved by this. And Jezebel, we will see in the beginning of chapter 19, puts a price on Elijah's head.

She's angry because she is a priestess of Baal herself, and he has now been responsible for the death of 450 prophets of Baal. And rather than being impressed by what had happened, she is only angered and has made herself then the mortal, deadly enemy of Elijah. Now in the last portion we read of chapter 18, the rain came, the drought ended.

This was announced by Elijah to Ahab, and he said, go ahead and eat and drink now because food is going to be abundant. The rain is going to come. And Elijah went on Mount Carmel and prayed seven times, and sent his servant to go and check and see if there's any evidence of clouds forming, and there was none initially.

But after the seventh time he reported, well, there's a little cloud about the size of a man's hand. I don't know if that counts. And Elijah said, that's it.

That's the provision. Go tell Ahab to get in his chariot and get home to Jezreel because he'll otherwise be overtaken with the floods of rain. And sure enough, within a very short time, the whole sky was black with clouds, and rain was torrentially blowing down upon them.

And Ahab rode his chariot back to Jezreel, but Elijah ran there on foot and actually got there ahead of him. I suggested that that is perhaps another of the supernatural things. After all, it was a trip of about 25 miles.

For a man to run 25 miles is quite a feat. I mean, that's a marathon. And then to get there faster than the chariot would be seemingly supernatural also.

Unless we are to assume that the chariots got bogged down in mud and therefore went slower than a running man would go. In any case, both Ahab and Elijah arrived at Jezreel. Now, why Elijah went there is not told us.

Because no sooner had he gotten there, than he finds his life is in danger and he goes somewhere else. It doesn't seem like it would be necessary for him to go to Jezreel, and that's where Jezebel was. It says in chapter 19, verse 1, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more so also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. Now, if she knew where he was to send a message to him, I don't know why she didn't just pick him up. Maybe she was bluffing.

Maybe she was just wanting to scare him away. And she was just angry. It's possible that she was really afraid to do anything to him.

At that particular moment, Elijah would have been a popular figure. Because the people had just seen a great miracle wrought. Not only the fire from heaven, but also the rain.

The welcome rain had come back because of his prayers. It might be that Jezebel was all bluff, and wanted to just talk tough to him, and yet she didn't. She said, By this time tomorrow.

Well, why not pick him up today? If your messenger knows where to find him and take the message to him, why not just send the police and arrest him and then do something to him? It's possible that she realized that she really couldn't carry out this threat very easily. And she was speaking hastily, but she wanted to let him know that she wanted him dead. And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life.

And went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah. And left his servant there. Now, Beersheba would have been about a hundred miles for him to go.

Probably took him the better part of a week to get there. And it was in the land of Judah. Therefore, it was beyond the reach of Jezebel.

And Ahab, they were the king and queen of the northern kingdom. Now, Elijah was safely, one would think, in the realm of Judah, where Jezebel would have no jurisdiction. But he left his servant there and continued moving south.

And he went down to Horeb, that is to Mount Sinai, where the law had been given. This was, of course, not in Israel at all, but it was in Syria. Hundreds of miles away.

It took him some time to get there, as we shall see. It says, he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. And came and sat down under a broom tree.

And he prayed that he might die. And said, it is enough now, Lord, take my life. For I know better than my fathers.

Now, he's just experiencing depression here. Here's a man who had called fire out of heaven and seen it come down. He could announce that there'd be no rain and pray for rain.

And he could control the weather by his prayers. He's a man of great faith. And yet, perhaps he felt like, okay, that's enough.

You know, the queen wants to kill me. I can't go back home safely. I'm a loner.

I've got no friends. You know, I've done the deed that you want me to do. I've accomplished whatever it is I was born for.

It's time for me to die, just like all my fathers have. I'm not really better than they are. We all have an end.

And this is a good time for mine to be. Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, Arise and eat. Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water.

So he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time and touched him and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you. So he arose and ate and drank.

And he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. Now, the traditional location of Horeb, the mountain of God, is only about two hundred miles from where he was. And it shouldn't take forty days to go that long.

On foot it would take maybe two weeks. So forty days would be a very slow rate of travel. But Horeb is probably not in its traditional place, but considerably further away.

The traditional place of Mount Sinai or Horeb is in what's called the Sinai Peninsula today. But a more biblical opinion seems to be, and one that's more confirmed by archaeology, would be that it is over in another location, further east than that, in Syria. And it would be a longer journey for him then.

It still might be done in less than forty days, but probably not very much less. And he wasn't eating during this forty days of journey, so he might have been traveling slow. He might be able to outrun horses when he's got a full belly, but when he's fasting for forty days, he apparently didn't really tax his strength that much and he took his time getting there.

You said Syria, I think you meant Saudi Arabia. Oh, I'm sorry, thank you very much. Right, my mistake, Saudi Arabia, not Syria.

The more likely place of Mount Horeb is in Saudi Arabia. And Paul himself says that Sinai is in Arabia, in Galatians chapter 4. So, fasting for forty days after eating these two meals, he made this journey. He went down to the same place where Moses had received the Ten Commandments.

And where Moses had seen God in the burning bush. Maybe not the exact same spot on the mountain. He found a cave there to hang out in for a while.

So he ended up at the mountain of God, Horeb, and there he went into a cave and spent the night in that place. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him. And he said to him, what are you doing here, Elijah? So he said, I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts.

For the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life. Now when God says, what are you doing here? It seems that God did not specifically tell him to go down to Mount Horeb.

He went down there on his own volition. Now the angel of the Lord knew he was going down there and said, you've got a long journey you're making, so here's some food for you. But we don't have any, necessarily, evidence that God told him to go down to Mount Horeb.

And when he got there, God said, well, why did you come down here? Now, it's not clear why he came down there. When God asked him that, he simply points out that his life is in danger, but he didn't have to go that far away to be safe. He was already safe in Beersheba before he made this journey.

So he must have intended to get closer to God by going to the roots where God had first revealed himself to Israel's founding leader. And Moses and Elijah are men who are joined together in significance in the mind of the Jews as the giver of the law and the chief of the prophets. And so they also appeared together with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Now, Elijah's gone to the same mountain that Moses was at when God first met him. And perhaps because it was a sacred place, a place where Elijah felt like he'd be closer to God, he wanted to go down there. He was looking for isolation.

He didn't take his servant with him. He left his servant back in Beersheba, and he went alone. He was a bit depressed.

He was despondent, of course. And he wanted to get some time alone with God, and where better to go than Mount Horeb, where God had appeared before? And sure enough, once he arrived there, God says, well, I'm here. What are you doing here? And his answer is simply, you know, I'm kind of lonely in the ministry here.

Where I live, they've killed off all the prophets. They've torn down your altars. It's an apostate country.

I can't find any like-minded brothers for fellowship. They're even seeking my life. Seems like there's not much left to live for.

Then God said, go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great strong wind tore into the mountains, and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind.

And after the wind, an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire.

But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still small voice. Now, it's interesting that it says that God passed by when he was there on the mountain.

And when Moses had been on that mountain in Exodus, he had asked to see the glory of God. And God said, no one can see my face and live, but there's a place by me here, a cleft in a rock. Perhaps a cave.

Perhaps the same cave that Elijah was now in. Who knows? And God said, I will pass by. I'll cause all my glory to pass by you.

And I'll cover you with my hand. And when I pass by, I'll remove my hand, and you can see my hind parts, but you can't see my face. So, when Moses was on this mountain, in or near a cave, perhaps, God passed by and revealed himself to Moses.

And now God's saying, I will pass, or it says here, the Lord passed by for Elijah's sake too. But, there were several phenomena that apparently occurred supernaturally, but God was not speaking in them. There was a great wind, so much that it broke rocks.

Now, I've never seen rocks broken by wind before. I've seen tree branches broken by wind, but rocks, that's a pretty stiff wind, I'd say. And there was an earthquake, and then there was this fire.

All of them, dramatic phenomena. And yet, it says God was not in those things. But, when a still small voice came to Elijah, that was God speaking to him.

Now, it's not clear why this series of events happened, and I'm not sure I can give it its intended significance. I'm not sure. I think it interesting that he and Moses both were on that mountain.

And both times, both men had God pass by, and they both had some kind of revelation of God. But, the point is, there were several dramatic phenomena that were not the means by which God was speaking. Now, when it says God was not in the wind, or God was not in the earthquake, or God was not in the fire, I don't think this is saying that God didn't cause them.

I think the idea is that God didn't speak through them. Elijah was hoping for some kind of guidance, some kind of word of comfort, something from God. And these phenomena happened in series, and God was not in them.

Now, he did come, then, in a still small voice to him. And, I don't know, perhaps he was trying to say to Elijah, not everything God does has got to be dramatic. I mean, he'd seen fire come down from heaven, he'd seen storms of rain, famine.

Sometimes God just talked quietly to you. You might expect him to be in the sensational events. And, when people say there was a tsunami, they say, was God in this? Was God

the one who caused this tsunami? Or this earthquake that killed all these people? Was that God? Well, I don't know.

Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. We always think that, we always think we need to find God's purpose in the dramatic disasters in the world. And some of those things might just be things that happen, and that's not really God doing anything or saying anything in particular through them.

He speaks through his spirit. He might speak through natural events, too, but not always so. But he speaks in a still small voice to the conscience or to the mind, to the spirit.

And that's how he spoke to Elijah here. Elijah might have been accustomed to more dramatic means of God speaking to him. We don't know exactly how Elijah heard from God on a regular basis.

Whenever he did, it must have been very hard to miss, because he was able to go out and make very bold pronouncements about what God was going to do. He must have had a very clear word, an unmistakable word. But in this case, the most dramatic means by which Elijah might have been looking to see, is God speaking in that fire or in that earthquake? It wasn't the case.

God was not. And so, Elijah then begins to hear this small voice speaking to him. And when Elijah heard it, verse 13, so it was that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.

And suddenly, a voice came to him and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? Very same question as before, in verse 9. So he gave the same answer that he gave in verse 10. So he said, I've been very zealous for Yahweh, God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life.

In other words, I'm in a very depressing situation. That's why I'm here. They're after me.

So I can put as much distance as I could between me and them. They want to kill me. But I'm here in particular because I'm zealous for you.

And nobody else seems to be. You don't seem to have any people anymore up in my country. So I came down to your country down here, down to the place where you'd met Moses in the past.

Then the Lord said to him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also, you shall anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, as king over Israel.

And Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abel-Meholah, you shall anoint as prophet in your

place. And it shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill. Whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.

Yet I have reserved 7,000 in Israel, all of whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him. Now, this is just sort of a final parting thing after the main part of the message. By the way, you're not right about being the only one left.

There's 7,000 more that you don't know about that I know about in Israel. That's still a very small minority, by the way, of a population of a country that's got millions of people. Millions of people.

7,000 had not worshipped Baal. That'd make a pretty good, sizable church if you could get them all in one place. The problem is finding them a place where they can meet and meet each other.

Elijah, who was a very visible man of Yahweh, didn't know of any of them. None of them had come out of the woodwork to contact him, and maybe they didn't know each other. But God knew who they were.

There are times when you just don't really have any like-minded friends, and you feel like you're the only person who thinks the way you do. And yet, God knows that you're there, and God knows the other ones are there. And from time to time, He lets you know about it, as He let Elijah know.

Here, there's some others out there, the remnant. Now, this business of Hazael and Jehu and Elisha. Some have tried to make some kind of connection between the wind and the fire, the wind and the earthquake and the fire.

Like, you know, Hazael's conquest would be like a mighty wind, a destructive storm. Jehu's would be like, you know, an earthquake happening, and Elisha's influence would be like a fire. Well, maybe that is true.

I'm not sure that that's obvious. But there were three things that God told Elijah to do. We only have record of him doing one of them, and that's the third one.

That is that he anointed Elisha to be his successor. The anointing of Hazael is not something that we read of Elijah doing. The anointing of Jehu, the king of Israel, was not done by Elijah either, but by a servant of Elisha.

And so, it would appear that his main thing that he was required to do is to pick his successor, Elisha. And Elisha would carry out at least one of the other duties on his behalf. And the anointing of Hazael, we don't know, we don't have record of that.

I mean, it's very possible Elijah did that, probably did, but we don't have record of it. Now, what's a little difficult to understand is verse 17. It shall be that whoever escapes

the sword of Hazeal, Jehu will kill.

Whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Because Elisha really didn't kill people. He was a prophet, like Elijah was.

And unlike Elijah, Elisha's miracles were all beneficial miracles. Elijah had some destructive miracles. Like we will see, yet to come in chapter 1 of 2 Kings, that soldiers are sent to arrest Elijah.

And he calls fire out of heaven to destroy them. Elijah does have some power, destructive power, that he actually has. But Elisha does not.

Elisha does about twice as many miracles as Elijah did, but they're all beneficial miracles. And so we don't have Elisha killing anybody. So it must be a figure.

It must be, perhaps, God's way of saying, he's going to wreak havoc on the Baal worshippers in Israel. Some of that havoc will come from the invasion of Syria, Hazeal of Syria. Some of that will come from Jehu's uprising, as he would wipe out the household of Ahab.

And he would eliminate Baal worship, though he would not eliminate idolatry. And then, of course, Elisha's influence would do more to stomp upon Baal worship. There are three waves of attack against Baal worship in Israel that God is going to bring.

And the reference to killing is more or less figurative. Basically, there will be a slaughter against Baal that will have three waves. Syrian invasion, Jehu's revolt, and then the ministry of Elisha.

That would appear to be what is meant here. And so we do find, of the three things that God tells him to do, we read of him doing one of them, and that is the third. And that is the anointing, or the calling, of Elisha to become his successor.

And verse 19 says, So he departed from there and found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him. Now, this is probably a very large farming operation. Twelve yoke of oxen probably doesn't mean that he had 24 oxen pulling his one plow.

I don't think the ground would be that hard even after three and a half years of drought. I don't think you'd need 24 oxen to pull your plow. It probably means that this is a large farming operation and there were twelve plows.

Twelve yoke of oxen each pulling a plow. And his, in the rear, perhaps he was the youngest son of a family. Or he was a son, he was in his household farm, we do know that.

He had to go home and say goodbye to his family. But it would appear that it was a rich

family with a lot of oxen and a lot of farmland to take care of. And he was with the twelve yoke.

It says, Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. Apparently just passed by and tossed his mantle over him as he went by. A symbolic act of saying, I'm putting you in my position, basically.

You're going to wear my clothes. You're going to wear my mantle. You're going to have my ministry and my job to do.

You're going to wear my hat, as it were. Okay, so he threw his mantle over him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, Please let me kiss my father and my mother and then I will follow you.

And he said to him, Go back again, for what have I done to you? Now that answer of Elijah is very ambiguous. It may be that he's saying, and some think he's saying simply that, Yeah, feel free. Go say goodbye to your family.

I'm not here to hinder you. I'm not here to prevent that. He does seem to give him permission.

On the other hand, he might be saying it with irony or sarcasm. Saying, Well sure, what I did to you isn't significant, is it? Why don't you just go on back home and forget about what I'm calling you to do? Go on back if you want to. What have I done to you of any importance? It's hard to know exactly how that is to be understood.

Did Elijah give him permission? Or did he deny him permission? It sounds on the surface that he gave him permission to go and say goodbye. And it would appear that that's what he did. Because that's how Elisha responded.

He did go back. But then he followed Elijah. Now, there's some verbal similarities to this.

And something that we find in Luke chapter 9. And I don't know if Jesus has in mind this story of Elisha or not. In the last two verses of Luke 9. Luke 9, verses 61 and 62. It said, Another said to Jesus, Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.

But Jesus said to him, No one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. Now, it's interesting that Jesus used this illustration of a plow and turning back. Because this person, I'll follow you, but first let me go and say goodbye to my family.

That's exactly what Elisha said to Elijah. Let me go say goodbye to my family, then I'll follow you wherever you go. And he said it from a plow.

He had been plowing. And he turned back and apparently went back to his family to say

goodbye. And so Jesus may be alluding to this.

Only it would seem like he's telling this man, No, I don't think you should go back. I think you're thinking about pursuing the kingdom of God. I think going back and saying goodbye to them is going to be detrimental to your focus, to your concentration, to your commitment.

I think you'll be looking back. You'll not plow a straight furrow. But the language of plowing, along with the similar question there in this passage in Luke, has always intrigued me to see whether it's, if Jesus is alluding to this, that Elijah, of course, when he called Elisha, called him away from plowing.

And to a different kind of activity. But it positively ruined his plowing. You know, he became useless for plowing because he became a follower.

He even destroyed the plow and the oxen and offered a sacrifice to the Lord. In a sense, his plowing career was over. And if anyone's got his hand to the plow and he looks back, then he's not going to be plowing properly anymore.

But it seems to be a different application in Jesus' case because he seems to be forbidding the man to go back. Whereas in Elijah's case, he seemed to have allowed Elisha to go back. It says, so Elisha turned back from him and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh using the oxen's equipment and gave it to the people and they ate.

So he apparently had sort of a goodbye feast for his friends and family as he was going to leave the family farm, which was a wealthy one, apparently. He is leaving a life of comfort and wealth to live with a guy who stayed in caves and lived under bushes and was fed by ravens and things. Then he arose and followed Elijah and served him.

So just as Joshua had served Moses, and then later on, when Moses died, Joshua became his successor in leadership. So Elisha served Elijah. At a later point in time, when Elijah was gone, it was said by somebody describing Elisha, that he was the one who had poured water over the hands of Elijah.

In other words, he was the one who had been the servant of Elijah. And yet he also, when Elijah was taken away, he was the successor. Now, this is a lot like Moses.

Moses and Elijah each had young men that they called to be successors of them. Moses had a servant, Joshua. Elijah had a servant, Elisha.

Both of them left their mantle of leadership to the one who had been their servant. Now, Moses and Elijah, I believe, represent the Old Covenant. And that's what I think the meaning was of the Mount of Transfiguration.

When Moses and Elijah appeared to the disciples along with Jesus and Peter said, Lord, let's build three tabernacles. One for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. We'll all stay here together.

How wonderful to have Moses and Elijah with us. We always have you, Lord, and you're great too. But we're really impressed seeing these old guys from the past.

This is wonderful. Let's keep all three of you around as long as we can. But Peter said that because he didn't know what to say, the Bible says.

And what happened then was that Moses and Elijah disappeared. And only Jesus was left and God said, this is my son, hear him. As if to say, he is the successor to Moses and Elijah.

He is the one that you'll hear from now on. Moses and Elijah are gone. And this is now the one you'll be listening to, Jesus.

And of course, in a broader sense, this means that the covenant of the Old Testament was gone. Moses and Elijah, the authority of the law and the prophets, that was a thing of the past. Now we've got a new authority we listen to, Jesus.

There's a new covenant, a new lawgiver, a new authority. Moses and Elijah had been the authorities under which the apostles had been raised as Jews. And now Jesus is that new voice.

This is my son, hear him now. So that in that vision on the Mount of Transfiguration, it was seen that as far as God was concerned, Jesus is the successor to Moses and the successor to Elijah. Moses and Elijah representing the old covenant, Jesus the new.

But in that sense, both Joshua and Elisha are seen as types of Christ himself. As they were successors of Moses and Elijah, so Christ is the successor, the permanent successor of Moses and Elijah. And I think it's interesting to compare the ministries of Elijah and Elisha in that line.

Elijah's ministry was a severe ministry. It was a ministry of judgment. Elijah's ministry brought famine.

Elijah's ministry brought fire from heaven upon those who came to arrest him and so forth. Elijah's ministry was a ministry of judgment and severity. Elisha's ministry was a ministry of helping people.

We'll find that Elisha multiplies food like Jesus did. And he heals the sick and he raises the dead. Some of these things Elijah did too.

But the point is, Elisha even raises the dead after he's dead. There will be a time after Elisha has died in 2 Kings 13, where he is buried and his bones are all that's left of him in

the cave. And at a later time, a dead man's soldier who was killed in battle, he's thrown into the cave.

His body, which is dead, touches the bones of Elisha and comes to life. So that Elisha continues to be life-giving even after he's died. Just as Jesus continues to give life after his death and his resurrection, of course.

Not everything is going to be exactly parallel. But it's rather, it is interesting. Elisha did more miracles than Elijah.

And they were all beneficial miracles. He even taught things like Jesus taught. Like when the Syrians were there to besiege Dothan when he was there.

And he captured them. They were struck blind. And he captured them and led them away to the king of Israel, their enemy.

And when the king of Israel saw these captive Syrians, he says to Elisha, What shall I do with them? Shall I slaughter them? Elisha says, No. Give them food and drink and send them home. In other words, feed your enemy.

Do good to him that persecutes you. Elisha's teaching is like that of Jesus. Elisha actually commands a leper to baptize himself in the Jordan.

And to be healed. Which is, of course, in the story that we will find that in, no doubt a picture of salvation. And even of baptism.

And so, there's going to be a number of ways in which Elisha looks like Jesus. And like Joshua was a type of Christ. So Elisha seems to be both of them as successors of the two great leaders of the Old Testament.

Moses and Elijah. Jesus is the ultimate successor of those men. So we are now introduced to Elisha.

Chapter 20. Now, Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, gathered all his forces together. There were 32 kings with him, with horses and chariots.

And he went up and besieged Samaria and made war against it. Now, Ben-Hadad is probably the same Syrian king that Eza had hired against Israel. Remember the problem of Eza, he was a good king, but he made the mistake of hiring the king of Syria to come against Israel.

Because he was threatened by Israel himself. And so we have this Syrian attack on Samaria. And besiege against Samaria.

And he sent messengers to the city to Ahab, king of Israel. And he said to him, thus says Ben-Hadad, your silver and your gold are mine. Your loveliest wives and children are

mine.

Now, this is basically saying, you can surrender them or I'll take them by force. Now, Ahab being the heroic type, said, my lord, oh king, just as you say, I and all that I have are yours. Take my kids, take my wives, what do I care? You look menacing to me.

You've got 32 kings with you, I've only got me. And therefore, yeah, you can have my wives, you can have my kids, you can have everything, my silver, my gold. So that should stop the attack, right? Well, not quite.

Then the messengers came back and said, thus speaks Ben-Hadad, saying, indeed, I have sent to you, saying, you shall deliver me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children. But I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time. And they shall search your house and the houses of your servants.

And it shall be that whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they shall put in their hands and take it. Now, it's in addition to taking all your silver and gold that you're voluntarily surrendering and your wives and your children. We're going to come and loot your and pillage your houses, take whatever we want from you.

Now, that was too much. You can have my wife and my children, but you want to take my TV set? No way. Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, notice, please, and see how this man seeks trouble.

You know, do you get the impression this guy is seeking trouble with us? I didn't think so when he just asked for my wives and my children and my silver and my gold. But now I think he's really looking for a fight here, don't you think? Notice, please, how this man seeks trouble, for he sent to me for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, and I did not deny him. Be glad to get rid of Jezebel.

And all the elders and all the people said to him, do not listen or consent. Therefore, he said to the messengers of Ben, Hey, Dad, tell my lord, the king, all that you sent for your servant the first time I will do. But this thing I cannot do.

Now, you know, if you're going to defy the invaders, say you can't have what you want. Why are you going to surrender your wives and children? If you're going to stand up against them, why not hold on to everything? It's like, listen, you know, we're just not going to give up our, you know, our kitchen appliances to you. But but but we'll be glad to send your wives and kids.

Why isn't that enough for you? Well, the messengers departed and brought back word to him. Then Ben had sent him and said, the gods do so to me and more. Also, if enough dust is left of Samaria for a handful for each of my people to fall, who follow me.

Now, that's the same kind of vote that Jezebel made against Elijah. She said, the gods do

so to me and more. Also, if I don't make you like one of those prophets of Baal by this time tomorrow.

Now, Ben, Hey, Dad's using the same language to talk to Jezebel's husband and saying, you know, this is how you're going to look tomorrow. There's not going to be enough dust left of your city for my soldiers to carry out in a handful each. So the king of Israel answered and said, tell him, let not the one who puts on his armor boasts like the one who takes it off.

In other words, it's the same thing as saying, don't count your chickens before they hatch. It's a better time to boast of victory is after you've won than before you've gone to battle. After all, you may not win.

So the man who's putting on his armor is not in the same position as the man who's taken it off. The man who's putting on his armor is just going to war. The one who's taking it off has finished the war.

Let not the man who's putting on his armor boast like the one who's taking it off. Means you're a little overconfident there, buddy. You know, we were ready to just surrender everything we had in terms of wives, children, gold and silver.

But when it comes to pillaging and looting our houses, well, we're going to fight like a cornered animal. And you may not win as much as you think. And it happened when Ben-Hadad heard this message, as he and the kings were drinking at the command post, that he said to his servants, get ready.

And they got ready to attack the city. Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab, king of Israel, saying, Thus says Yahweh, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today. And you shall know that I am Yahweh.

Now, it's interesting that a prophet of Yahweh was able to just come on up and talk to Ahab when Jezebel had earlier put the prophets of Yahweh to the sword and some of them had to be hiding in a cage. Very possibly, Elijah's success had still some residual effects in the country. After all, in spite of the fact that he had killed 450 prophets of Baal, which made him the object of Jezebel's wrath, he had restored reign.

And there had been much to impress the people and maybe even to impress Ahab about Elijah. Elijah himself would confront Ahab again over the Naboth's vineyard issue. And apparently there was more freedom of the prophets of Yahweh to wander around, even to have a conference with the king.

After Elijah's influence had probably lifted the ban to some degree on being a prophet of Yahweh. And so he comes to Ahab and says, You're going to win this battle against this great multitude because God's going to give you the victory. Now, that's not because Ahab was a good guy.

That's just God being gracious to Israel. Maybe because there were 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal. And if God would have spared Sodom, finding 10 righteous there, maybe he'd just felt he'd spared Israel if he found 7,000 righteous there.

So Ahab said, By whom? That is, by whom will the Lord save us? And he said, Thus says the Lord by the young leaders of the provinces. Then he said, Who will set the battle in order? And he answered, You. So the prophet is giving Ahab his strategy.

Then he mustered the young leaders of the provinces, and there were 232. And after them he mustered all the people, all the children of Israel, 7,000. Now that would not be a very large army, 7,000, if you're going against 32 kings and their forces.

But even so, it's not even the 7,000, but the 232 leaders of the provinces. These would be probably like tribal leaders. Not so much military leaders, but tribal leaders.

But they were apparently men who had some strength and military prowess. But they were also such men as might be negotiators, or they might be ambassadors. They were political leaders.

And perhaps they were mistaken by the Syrians as a political delegation coming out to negotiate something. And therefore they were unsuspected when they went and led the attack. It says, So they went out at noon.

Meanwhile, Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post. The young leaders of the provinces went out first. And Ben-Hadad sent out a patrol, and they told him, saying, Men are coming out of Samaria.

So he said, If they have come out for peace, take them alive. If they have come out for war, take them alive. These were not regular military.

These were like local political leaders in the provinces. And therefore they might be coming peaceably. They might be coming with some kind of a surrender or, you know, there may be some negotiations they're seeking.

So he wasn't sure. Are they coming peaceably or not? You can take them alive if they're coming out either way. He says, Take them alive either way, whether they're coming for war or for peace.

Then these young leaders of the provinces went out of the city and with the army which followed them. And each one killed his man. So when the patrol came out to meet them, these guys apparently had concealed weapons.

And they were like commandos that started slaughtering the Syrians who came out to meet them. And apparently it just put the Syrians in disarray. After all, their leaders were drunk.

They were so overconfident they were just getting drunk. And so the first fighting, Israel takes the fighting up and begins it and takes the offensive. And Syria is unprepared, not knowing that these men had come to attack them.

So these young leaders of the provinces killed each one his man. That is, each killed at least a man. So that the Syrians fled and Israel pursued them.

And Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, escaped on a horse with the cavalry. Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter. And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, Go strengthen yourself, take note and see what you should do.

For in the spring of the year, the king of Syria will come up against you. So this battle was victorious. And we don't know exactly how all the practicalities of it worked out.

But the thing is that they managed to drive away the threat. And they didn't have to surrender their wives or their children or their stereos. And so the threat is gone.

And the prophet says, however, this is not the last you'll see of them. In the spring they're going to come back. So strengthen your forces and get prepared for battle next spring.

Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, The gods, that is Israel's gods, are gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we. But if we fight against them in the plain, then surely we will be stronger than they.

Now it is true that there were a lot of chariots on the other side. We can see that because it says so in verse 21. The king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and the chariots.

Now chariots operate best on flat ground, on plains, not in mountains, not in the hills over the rocks. I mean, that really interferes with the chariots' mobility. And so the argument was, well, if we could engage them in a flatter plain, then we would have the advantage.

And they cast it in religious terms. Well, our gods couldn't defeat their god because their gods are gods of mountains. And that's where the battler was taken up in the mountains.

So if we can engage them elsewhere, then their gods can't save them against us. Do this thing. And dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their place.

And you shall muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain. Surely we will be stronger than they.

And he listened to their voice and did so. This is the king of Syria listening to his advisers

to mount a second attack. The prophet knew he would and had already told Ahab that.

So it was in the spring of the year that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. And the children of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went against them. Now the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside.

Now, like two little flocks of goats means that the children of Israel were greatly outnumbered. They were like a flock of animals surrounded by a pack of wolves. The Syrians filled the whole countryside in contrast to them.

Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel and said, Thus says Yahweh, because the Syrians have said, Yahweh is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys. Therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am Yahweh. And they encamped opposite each other for seven days.

So it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the children of Israel killed 100,000 foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek into the city. Then a wall fell on 27,000 of the men.

It must have been a big wall for there to be 27,000. It may be that they were all the refugees from Babylon. It was a small city, so they were all kind of crowded shoulder to shoulder, and they couldn't, if the wall collapsed, whether it was an earthquake that caused it or what, but the falling rocks, if it was a very tall wall, some of these cities had very tall walls, 30 and 40 feet tall or more, then it's possible that it was knocked down, and everyone was kind of stuck in one place where they couldn't escape the falling debris, because they were too crowded there in the city, having fled there from the battle.

Anyway, Ben-Hadad fled himself and went into the city into an inner chamber. Now I find it interesting that Yahweh is spoken of as he is in this whole section, since Israel had outlawed the worship of Yahweh and had officially made Baal the god of Israel, that talks about how, you know, they're saying, the enemy's saying that Yahweh can't defend you here, but Yahweh's going to defend you here. It's almost like the prophet is assuming that Ahab sees himself as fighting wars on the side of Yahweh.

And maybe he was at this point. He was a wicked king and very compromised, and there probably was still Baal worshipped there, because his wife was a Baal priestess, but it may be that after Elijah had killed the 450 prophets of Baal, that even though Jezebel was still a Baal worshipper, she may not have been able to have the popular support that made Baal worship the official religion of the land. It may be that Baal worship just simply became another of the religions, and that the nation at least nominally identified itself with Yahweh.

Because through all this conversation here, it's like the assumption is Israel's the people of Yahweh, and Yahweh's fighting for them, and this even seems to be how communication to Ahab is being verbalized. He doesn't seem to object. And so the king Ben-Hadad of Syria fled into the city, and he was hiding in an inner chamber.

And his servant said to him, Look, now we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Please let us put sackcloth around our waist and ropes around our heads, and go out to the king of Israel. Perhaps he will spare your life.

It's interesting that the kings of Israel have always had the reputation of being merciful to their enemies. They're not real merciful to their prophets, but they're pretty merciful to their pagan enemies. And so it is true.

I mean, the pagan enemies would often torture the enemy kings and drag off the captives with hooks through their noses and things like that. But Israel didn't generally treat their enemies that way. So they wore sackcloth around their waists and put ropes around their heads, and they came to the king of Israel and said, Your servant Ben-Hadad says, Please let me live.

And Ahab said, Is he still alive? He's my brother. He just means I'll treat him as a brother. Now the men were diligently watching to see whether any sign of mercy would come from him.

And they quickly grasped at his word and said, Your brother Ben-Hadad. So he said, Go bring him. Then Ben-Hadad came out to him, and he had him come into his chariot.

Then Ben-Hadad said to him, The cities which my father took from your father, I will restore, and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria. Then Ahab said, I will send you away with this treaty. So he made a treaty with him and sent him away.

So they made a peace treaty between themselves, which probably seemed good for Ahab, since the Syrians had been a threat to him now twice recently, twice in two years. And to have a peace treaty made sense. It made political sense.

However, it didn't please God, because apparently God had intended for Ahab to be a judge of Ben-Hadad and kill him. That was not made plain any time previous to this. Whether Ahab knew that or should have known that, we don't know.

Because it's not necessarily always the case that you shouldn't make peace with your enemies. Sometimes you should. And it seems that almost a positive thing that Ahab did here.

But it wasn't what God wanted him to do on this occasion. So we have him confronted by a prophet about this. Verse 35, Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his

neighbor by the word of the Lord, Strike me please.

And the man refused to strike him. Then he said to him, Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, surely as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you. And as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him.

Now that seems a little harsh. The man says, Strike me. I think, I won't strike you.

Okay, a lion will kill you for that. What, for being civilized? Is that my offense? That I don't strike prophets? Well, the thing is he commanded him by the word of Yahweh. In other words, he said, Yahweh says you should strike me.

Well, that doesn't make a lot of sense. But if God said it, you know, trust in the Lord, call your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. You better do what God says.

Because God expects people to be obedient. Now, it seems a strange and severe judgment on this man who refused to strike the prophet. But I guess God sometimes just wants to make the point that you have to do what God said or there's consequences.

And he found another man and said, Strike me, please. That man may have heard about the other guy. So he struck him, inflicting a wound.

Now, the whole purpose of that was so that this prophet could disguise himself as a wounded soldier. Too bad they didn't have the kind of makeup they have in Hollywood nowadays. They could have done this without the actual injuries.

I mean, he subjected himself to possible infection and so forth just for this ruse. But he had to get himself a wound so he could look like a wounded soldier. Actually, it wasn't even part of his story that he was wounded.

He just wanted to impersonate a soldier. The story he was going to bring and the role he was going to play was just required that he looked like a soldier. He wouldn't even have to be wounded, but he's really, he's playing the role all the way with a wound and everything.

So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the road, disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes. Now, as the king passed by, he cried out to the king and said, Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and there a man came over and brought a man to me and said, Guard this man. If by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.

And while your servant was busy here and there, the man was gone. In other words, I was charged with watching a prisoner that had been captured and I lost him because I was kind of busy with other stuff. And the king of Israel said to him, So shall your judgment be.

You yourself have decided it. Meaning that you'll either have to die or pay a talent of silver for the man that you lost. Then the son of the prophet hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.

Apparently, the king was familiar with these prophets. Or maybe they dressed or looked a certain way that set them apart. But now, when the man took off his disguise, the king recognized, Oh, this is not a soldier, this is a prophet.

I'm probably going to get rebuked. And he said to him, Thus says the Lord, Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people. So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and he came to Samaria.

Now, God apparently had intended for Israel to not only defeat Syria, but for Ahab to kill Ben-Hadad too, and instead he had made a treaty with him. He was too generous with him. And yet, being generous to your enemies is not only a virtue in the New Testament, but also in the Old, in many cases.

So, there must have been some way that Ahab had been communicated with that's not on record. That would suggest that he knew he was supposed to kill this man, but he didn't do it. And so, that would be the only reason why God could hold him responsible.

Otherwise, he wouldn't intuitively know that it's wrong to give this guy a break and make a treaty. I mean, that would seem politically wise and generous. There's nothing wrong with being a generous person toward your enemy.

I mean, Ben-Hadad was not a Canaanite who needed to be exterminated. Therefore, God's intention that Ben-Hadad be killed would have to have been communicated to Ahab before this, if Ahab were to be responsible for knowing. And perhaps there's a great deal more that was communicated than is on record here.

Ahab did the wrong thing and was responsible for it, so he must have known better. And therefore, his family is going to be destroyed. He's going to die.

His people are going to die. Now, at the end here, we read that Ahab goes back to his house sullen and displeased. He's going to be sullen and displeased in the next chapter, too, because he doesn't get his way.

He's kind of pouty, actually. And we're going to find him pouting over the fact that he can't get his neighbor's vineyard from him in the next chapter. But Jezebel comes to the rescue and saves the day, as we shall see in chapter 21, next session.