

Elijah and Elisha, Mentoring Series
1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 13;

Introduction.

Elijah is one of the greatest characters in the Old Testament. He haunts the gospels of the New Testament. Around the beginning of Jesus ministry Jewish priestly scholars and researchers eagerly investigated the possibilities that John the Baptist was a second Elijah, Malachi's promised procurer to the coming of the Messiah. Elijah actually appears on the Mount of Transfiguration talking with Jesus the Messiah. When Jesus cried out just prior to his death on the cross people mistakenly thought he was calling out for Elijah. The rugged Tishbite had certainly made his mark on his nation's people!¹

1. Elijah, the Mentor and Model. 1Kings 17-18;

Elijah was remarkable as a single minded servant of God, a prophet, a man of prayer, the leader of a school of prophets, a miracle worker, a man of unique holiness and n impressive mentor in the school of prophets and with Elisha.

Among the outstanding recorded features of his ministry he commanded it not to rain for three and half years as a disciplinary act of God on an arrogant people of the northern kingdom of Israel. (1 Kings 17:1 and James 5:17). During the ensuing severe drought Elijah was sustained by God at the brook Cherish (1 Kings 17:2-7) and later by the widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17 8-16), Later when the widow's only son on died, with God's help he raised the body back to life (1 Kings 17-24).

In a power struggle with King Ahab and his completely pagan Queen Jezebel who was killing members of the prophets school in her hatred for the worshippers of Yahweh, Elijah prevailed. He did so by calling on God to ignite the water saturated wood he had prepared on an alter and thus provided evidence of the existence and power of God. He later led in the killing of the

¹ Ernest Blaitlock, *Bible Characters and Doctrines Jeroboam to Hosea*, Sydney: Anzea Scripture Union, 1972, 39

prophets of Baal (1Kings 17-40). The Elijah prayed for God to bring rain again to end the drought and it happened. (James 4:18).

Retrospectively the prophet was so honoured by his fellow Hebrews that the letter writer James, brother to Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, that Elijah had his weaknesses and frailties of a normal human being- he became scared of Jezebel, and he was both physically and emotionally exhausted after significant spiritual warfare as any other healthy person would have been (1 Kings 19:1-3). **However, we can see from his story that people who pray with integrity see supernatural and natural answers to our prayer.**

Elijah ministry gives evidence of momentous demonstrations of courage obedience and faith. Likewise, he demonstrates compassion to stubborn uncooperative nations and pays attention to the plight of disempowered and marginalised women like the widow of Zarephath². **We readers of this story well to note the compassion of God on the life of this powerless widow in contrast with God's judgement on Jezebel, who was an advocate of Baal worship and a Queen. God's care for the marginalised is evident in Elijah's ministry and in this story³.** Elijah stood up to king Ahab when the king committed murder of Naboth, to get a vineyard he wanted

Obadiah, also prophet who like Elijah in the administrative structures of King Ahab. He therefore lived in the complex world of politics with the King Ahab who compromised the worship of Israel because his wife's devotion to Baal. At great personal risk Obadiah sought to faithfully follow the ways of the Lord with integrity. **He hid numerous prophets and saw that they were cared for their daily needs and protected from the Queen's evil purposes. He also sought to assist the king cope with the drought in a way that enables the general populace.**

There is no doubt that in his Elijah took a revolutionary path in ministry. He who urged people to trust Yahweh exclusively for national health care, harvest

² Travis and Terri, *Mentoring in the Old Testament Elijah and Elisha*, travissnode.com Wikipedia, accessed 29 May, 2020

³ John W Olley, *First and Second Kings, then and Now*, Sydney: Morling Press, 2001, 62-63.

and its security. He was counter-cultural and counter-intuitive in his practice and that is a difficult path to take.⁴

Elijah is a mentor who rejects the selfishness of some leaders who do not see the need to mentor potential reveals for their leadership. It is the responsibility of mature leaders in kingdom ministry to look to nurturing and the upcoming generation, instead of seeing them as rivals, in the face of their own inevitable decline of strength of mind and body. He cultivated the younger prophets faith and maturing use of their gifts for the benefit of the nation and their peers.

2. Elijah's Protege, Elisha, (2 Kings 2:6- 12)

Elisha was a faithful disciple of Elijah who followed his teacher as one of the 7000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal. **When Elisha was plowing his father's field, he left the fields, gave away his things and went with Elijah and stayed close to his new mentor and teacher. cultivating a learner's posture. He took on life long learning journey of faith and courage as he observed and interacted with Elijah and went on to serve in mentor's place that he treasured his first hand view of his teacher's view of the world, and his faithful to his God given tasks is evident in the parallels in his own ministry.**

Elisha's was with Elijah when his mentor began his fiery journey up to heaven in a chariot, He cried out to Elijah, "My father, my father", recognising his father in God. In his grief Elisha tore his clothes and shaved his head. He by this knew he was called to follow his mentor in leadership and prophetic ministry. **Elisha took up Elijah's mantle that had been dropped as he journeyed to heaven. He sensed the double portion of the spirit of Elijah that he had asked for was now his.** He took up this new ministry he crossed the Jordan river carrying Elijah's mantle and threw it down and the waters of the river parted as they had when Elijah had done the same. Other members of the prophet's school saw this and acknowledged that he was their new model and leader. God had not yet given up on the kingdom he had a new

ambassador for justice, mercy and humility before God and humble respect for individuals.

The people of Jericho came to the prophets and complained that their nearest wells were contaminated and the water was killing stock and making people unwell. Elisha asked them to bring him salt which he cast it into the water supply and told them the water was now rectified and they and their animals could now drink fearlessly of the sweetened and purified water. His reputation was confirmed by means of this miracle.

On leaving Jericho and proceeding to Bethel he was confronted with those who abused him as a foolish bald headed man. It is possible that their businesses reduced as water carriers and they were reacting the renewed provision of fresh water, prompted their hatred for the man of God. Not unusual for the OT to speak of adults as child when they act foolishly from an uninformed uninformed or defiant behaviour. When the men died after being attacked by bears the onlookers were awed by the prophet. Elisha's reputation had spread widely.

Three kings came to Elisha for assistance with the struggle with the Moabites who re emerged as a local power after Ahab's death. The three kings included the king of Israel, Amaziah and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, and the king of their neighbours, the Edomites, Their armies had ran out of water. Elisha fearlessly rebuked Amaziah, for his continuance of his father's policy of spreading Baal worship, and told him that it was not for the king of Judah, he would not act. He wanted on to affirm God's goodness to the armies and urged them of taking the practical step of digging ditches that would fill with pure water and to drink from them along with their horses. He promised them victory over the Moabites. And it all eventuated.

There is then the beautiful more personal ministry with the widow of the prophet Obadiah whose husband died leaving her deeply debt with the threat of having her two sons enslaved. The prophet urged her to take her one remaining pot of oil, to borrow other pots and start filling them from her one pot. the oil kept coming and numerous pots were filled and she did as Elijah told her to and sold the excess oil off and repaid her debts and could thereafter support her family.

⁴ John Goldengay, *land 2 Kings for Everyone*, London: SPCK, 2011, 85-87.

Then there was the Shunammite woman who graciously opened her home and provided a roof top room for Elisha to live in. The house hold servant Gehazi, urged the prophet to take note of the women's childlessness. He promised the woman she would give birth to a child within a year, despite her age. The boy grew and one day in the fields with his dad in the great heat the boy succumbed, Elisha was called from distant Mt Carmel to intervene and restored the boy to health and life. Hebrews tells us We ought not remember to neglect Hospitality, to others we could by so doing entertained angels or God's messengers.

This lovely personal incident is followed by an equally enthralling story of a slave girl in the house of Naaman, a Syrian military officer, who has become leprous, alerts her mistress to the existence of Elisha. The somewhat humorous account of Naaman's, proud but understandable refusal to be dipped into the tortuous muddy Jordan River that flows into the dead sea from which there is no escape but evaporation. I empathise with him ...I stood in it to baptise a believer! Naaman was healed and his final humility and gratitude is expressed in his desire to return to his homeland set up a place of worship for Yahweh there.

Time and Time again Elisha urged his stubborn people to mend their ways. They did not, and the outcome for them was the disciplinary action of God on the nation that came in the form of a 7 year drought.

During that time the school of prophets themselves suffered and need the intervention of their facilitating leader. They were fed as were others miraculously. Some small barley loaves and the first fruits of the harvest were given to the prophet and was stretched to feed hungry people around. .

Then when Syria was at war with Ephraim Elisha travels to the enemy capital city to attend to the sick monarch, king BenHaddad. The prophet informed the king through Hazeal that the king would die. He wept at needing to inform the king of his death and the need to predict that Hazeal himself would cause unspeakable misery for Elisha own people though his abuse. Hazeal killed the Syrian King that night and went on to do as Elijah had predicted.

For over 65 years Elisha served his God and his people as the had of the school of godly prophets. Some scholars suggest that Jonah was one of the

school of prophets at the time of Elisha⁵ He had seen kings come and go in both Israel and Judah and had fearlessly fulfilled his divine mission until his last day came. King Joash, son of Jehu of Israel came to his bedside and wept, crying out "my father, my father, the chariot and horseman of Israel." The insight of the weeping king was that he, although still worshipping Baal, he had come to rely more on the prophet that he could rely on his own weakened military. He nevertheless did not grasp Elisha last off to exercise his faith and start a war with Syria that he would win. As indeed the prophet told him he would win. The impotent king failed even at a deathbed and the prophet could do nothing for him. Later Jesus would be disempowered by the unbelief of the people Nazareth, 'could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief' (Matthew 13:58). 'When faith like of Joash is weak, grace is restricted'⁶. So even at his death Elisha made it clear that God was unable to resist the impulse to be merciful, even to weak compromising people (2 Kings 13)

⁵ Nissan, Mindel, The Prophet *Elisha, Elijah's Successor*, Kehot Publication Society, Wikipedia, accessed 29 May, 2020

⁶ Blaiklock, 1972, 93.