

Man of God: Living Faithfully in an Age of Apostasy-Part II

(Gospel Living from the Stories of Elijah and
Elisha)



Artwork by Jan Sluyters; 1904

If you haven't read Part I, please pick up a copy at the information desk before starting Part II.

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About this devotional:

As a Lenten devotional, it's introspective in nature. There will be 40 devotionals for each day of Lent, not including Sundays. To make the most, readers are encouraged to:

- Be sure to read and meditate on the text each day *before* reading the devotional.
- Use prayers as jumping off points
- Don't skip sessions to "catch up." The devotionals build on one another and reference prior ones. You can use Sundays to catch up if needed.

Unbelievabaal Stubbornness

Read: 2 Ki 1

March 16

Key Verses: 1:15

Schaeffer's famous work, *How Should We Then Live* explores the development of Western thought and how it plays out in our culture. As Christian values diminished, they were replaced by dominant values of personal peace (being untroubled by others) and affluence. Having found these values empty, culture has rightly rejected them, but each proposed solution is equally empty.

The strange thing about the human condition is that when one idol is proved worthless, rather than turning back to the Lord, we pick a new idol. If Baal of the Sidonians fails, we'll try the Baal of Ekron. Perhaps we ought not mock Ahaziah so hard for we've done the same thing. Each generation picks a new Baal to serve. As Sam Allberry summarized: The 80s: serve yourself; 90s: find yourself; 00s: accept yourself; 10s: express yourself. The latest iterations will always fail as surely as the others.

Each new value refreshes the age-old contempt for the Word and His people. So, commanders will come and demand the Man of God to come speak to the king. Implicit in their view, the prince of the king is greater than the man of God. For them God (and his people) are to serve and subject themselves to the reign of the king, rather than the king subjecting himself to the reign of God.

We find God's stubborn, uncompromising position untenable and at times embarrassing. The liberalism of the last generation demanded the moral teaching of Christ without the miracles. The current generation demands the miracles without the moral teaching. We want the word of God to descend to us on our terms. We rewrite Scripture to justify our cultural idolatries of serving ourselves, finding ourselves, accepting ourselves and expressing ourselves. But when the Word descends, he calls us to die to ourselves, so then, and only then, we may find life.

Prayer: *How have I conformed your Word to our age's idols?*

The Blank Check

Read: 2 Ki 2:1-14

March 17

Key Verse: 2:9

The 1994 children's movie *Blank Check* let me live vicariously through a child who was given a blank check which he cashed for a million dollars. I got to imagine all the ways I'd indulge my childish impulses with such money. As is typical for children, and the movie's protagonist, my fantasies were irresponsible, self-indulgent, and centered on gratifying the moment over sustained success.

In I-II Kings, this is the second blank check offered to one of God's leaders. The first was to Solomon who rightly asked for wisdom (1 Ki 3). But what wisdom is to kings, so the spirit is to prophets. Fortunately, Elisha's request wasn't to shirk responsibility but to take it on. When he asked for a double portion, he's asking for the firstborn's inheritance (see Dt 21:17). In ancient times, when a father died, the firstborn would receive a double portion (so if he had two sons the firstborn would receive 2/3rds of the inheritance). The difference came with a cost though. The firstborn was now under obligation for the entire family. He was the leader and responsible for the care of all his siblings and their families.

To take on the mantle of God's prophetic voice in a culture hardened to His rule and reign, the power of the Spirit is essential. Yet Jesus pours it freely upon the church. He expected his church to do greater things than he did (Jn 14:12). The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives in the church (Rom 8:11). The Spirit emboldens and empowers for a life of ministry in this world. Yet many of us feel impotent and abandoned in the face of a hostile world. Why? Perhaps because we're still childish. Jesus tells us to be asking, seeking, and knocking and the Father will surely give the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:9-13), yet so often our prayers are consumed for our own pleasures (Jm 4:3) that we miss the promise. We may not long for the Spirit's empowering presence, because we eschew the obligation of the prophetic mantle.

Prayer: *Father, fill me with your Spirit for ministry.*

The Same Spirit

Read; 2 Ki 2:13-18

March 18

Key Verse: 2:15

As God appoints new leaders for new eras, though it can often be difficult to accept the change, we can so easily worry or dismiss the new thing and miss out on God's blessing.

Chapter 2 is structured in what biblical scholars call a chiasm:

A-With the sons of prophets in Bethel

B-With the sons of prophets in Jericho

C-Miraculous crossing of the Jordan

D-Elijah is taken up

C'-Miraculous crossing of the Jordan

B'-With the sons of prophets in Jericho

A'-With the little boys in Bethel

Each of the latter three stories is to answer Elisha's question "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" Meaning, has God's presence, power, and work been taken up with the Man of God? These stories answer with a resounding "No" for it's on Elisha.

As different as the ministry of Joshua was to Moses', so the ministry of Elisha is from his predecessor. While Elijah's ministry focused on confronting the evil powers in Israel; Elisha's is nurturing the faithful within Israel. Elijah's miracles of blessing went to outsiders; Elisha's to the faithful remnant. Elijah is so often alone; Elisha is often in the company of prophets.

The list of differences could continue, but the point is that the same God continues to be at work. In these narratives we receive different reactions to Elisha as the new leader. Here, they accept but question his judgment ("Please, let us go look for Elijah"), others look to him and receive salvation, while others mock (23). We can be sure that God will continue His work even as His instruments change. His ministry isn't tied to us, our giftings, or our favorite leader, but to His Spirit that remains from age to age.

Prayer: *Even as times change and leaders fall, I can trust in You.*

Far as the Curse is Found

Read: 2 Ki 2:19-22

March 19

Key Verse: 2:21

If you remember back to where we began this devotional (16:34), Jericho is the cursed city. Hiel, in rebuilding the city lost his oldest and youngest sons. When we read texts like this, we may often think that someone dies “out of the blue” where it’s patently obvious that God’s hand is at work. But the God who sovereignly wields history and creation so often allows his hand to be deniable. So here we read what probably was the issue when they built the city—the water is contaminated, making the land unfruitful, and rather than giving life gives death and miscarriage.

Symbolically, Jericho as a cursed city epitomizes the nation’s rebellion against God’s reign. Jericho was the firstfruits given to God which under Ahab was stolen back, revealing how no part of their covenant would be left unbroken. The walls which had once been a symbol of God’s victory for them have become symbols of their intent to live life through their own wisdom. In one sense, the curse of Jericho was a beautiful reminder of the fruit of rebellion.

Yet the cursedness of the ground merely highlights the redemption of God. This monument to rebellion becomes one of redemption. God is not holding a grudge. What he does for Jericho, he plans to do for all the earth. As the advent hymn reminds us, “He comes to make His blessings flow; far as the curse is found.”

Even in a land of plenty, cursed places are all around us—death, poverty, and destruction poison the inhabitants. Could it be the greater Elisha would pour cleansing salt on these places? Is that not the identity of His church? “You are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13) Jesus tells us. The cursedness of these places will not be healed through government programs (whether left or right), but through the miraculous power of Jesus’ healing.

Prayer: *Lord, how would you like to use me to bring blessing to cursed places?*

Rebellion in Bethel

Read: 2 Ki 2:23-25

March 20

Key Verse: 2:23

In steep contrast to the preceding story, where the cursed city becomes blessed, here we have a blessed city experiencing a curse. At Bethel, Jacob received the dream of angels ascending and descending on a staircase and called it “the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:17). No doubt why after Israel seceded from Judah, they set up their idolatrous cult there (1 Ki 12). Through their idolatry, we see a building contempt for the Lord emerging at Bethel.

Scholars debate the nature of the mockers. “Little boys” can be literal or refer to subordinates. It’s unclear whether it’s referring to children (aged 12-30) or to the Levites of the Bethel cult (probable).

Elisha’s baldness isn’t mocked because of recessive genes but an ascended master. Earlier, when the sons of prophets warned him that Elijah was being taken up, the Hebrew reads “The Lord is taking him from upon your head” (e.g. 2:5). Since Elijah was a hairy man (see 1:8), his absence makes Elisha bald, whether he was actually is unclear, but could make the words that much more biting.

The sons of prophets in Bethel received the same revelation as those in Jericho of Elijah’s ascension, but they did not see as the Jerichoans the same spirit on Elisha. So, they treated him with contempt. Telling him to “go up, go up,” meaning he’s nothing without his master, so he might as well join him.

As Jericho invites us under the curse for healing, Bethel stands as a warning to the church. Past blessings from the Lord can become outposts of idolatry quickly. Under the guise of respectability, the church can sneer at balding prophets and his work through them. Even as Jesus told us we are the salt of the earth; he warns that losing saltiness leads us to be trampled as surely as the boys were mauled.

Prayer: *Let us be as Jericho and not Bethel to your work.*

The Easy Yoke

Read: 2 Ki 3

March 21

Key Verse: 3:27

Perhaps one of the more confusing verses of Scripture, leaving the reader asking, “whose wrath?” Some have speculated that it was the LORD’s wrath upon Israel as He’s the most common subject of this word throughout Scripture, as if He would be appeased by human sacrifice. Or perhaps the pagan god, Chemosh, fighting against Israel. But the editing skills of the author to miss something so obviously contradictory to the rest of his theology is hard to imagine.

Others speculate the Lord’s wrath was for violating just war practices of cutting down trees and ruining land. Elisha wasn’t commanding the practice but predicting their evil. The first problem with this view is that it doesn’t appear to actually go against the Lord’s commands. Secondly, it does nothing to explain the causal nature of the sacrifice. Still others suggest that the sacrifice worked up the Moabite army to fight really hard against Israel. A placebo effect for an army who can’t muster the fortitude in a dire scenario. Seems unlikely.

The last option is that the word for wrath can mean “consternation” and while it’s unusual, it’s possible. Meaning, Israel is disgusted by human sacrifice so much that they just packed up and left. The Septuagint translators saw it this way and is the most likely option.

How blessed we are to follow Jesus’ law than that of paganism, who sacrifice children to appease an unknown god. Our modern gods of money, sex, and power are as exacting as the old pagan ones. The other day I heard a woman brag about how her wealth and status was gained through the sacrifice of her baby. The unborn slain on the altar to mammon. By contrast, God gives flourishing life through His Law. He is appeased not through demanding our sons, but by giving His beloved Son.

Prayer: *Your Law, O Lord, leads to life.*

The Paradox of Provision

Read: 2 Ki 4:1-7

March 23

Key Verse: 4:1

This short story epitomizes the tension we experience as followers of God. On the one hand, we aren't impervious to chaos and hardship. This young family was simultaneously marked by faithfulness but also debt, death, and destitution. The prophet's faithfulness did not shield this family from trial.

On the other hand, the faithful receive blessing and provision from God, who provided not only enough to pay the debt but help sustain them. Beyond the pain of losing sons, the widow would also lose her connection with society. At this time, a woman's way of interacting in society was through males. Just as today, children are valued and cared for, but unable to make contracts, sign waivers, etc. without their parents, so women were in this culture. God cares for her in her distress and hardship.

We may ask why God didn't just preserve her husband to help with the situation rather than the means he did? Simply put, we don't know. Just as we don't know why God allows hardship in our own lives. But even as he allows some hardships, He also provides great blessings to his faithful ones. God doesn't just provide, but lavishly provides. He could have let her keep one son, or just enough to pay for both, but there's extra!

So, we see here the paradox of the life of faithfulness. We are neither shielded from trials nor are we left as orphans. Our hardships are not signs of God's forgetfulness but times when we see His faithfulness all the more. Just as Jesus experienced both trials in His ministry and the radical assurance of the Father's care, we can as well.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for your faithfulness that has seen me through every hardship.*

The Spirit of Elijah

Read: 2 Ki 4:8-37

March 24

Key Verse: 4:28

If you get a sense of Deja vu reading these stories, you aren't alone. The parallel to Elijah's ministry is obvious (See 1 Ki 17:7-24). They both first save a poor widow and son(s), followed by the raising of a benefactor's dead son. Both bereaved mothers initially place the blame on the prophet. Both times the prophet stretched himself over the boy to revive him. Elisha is quite like his master.

But the similarities highlight some of the differences. Most notably the Shunammite woman's story. She lives as many of us have had to: worn out by hope and content to live faithfully before the Lord. Over the years she's hardened herself to the unfulfilled yearning to bear a son. So much that the prophet's promise doesn't bring jubilation (16b). It's not because a son is undesired but because she can't bear to be disappointed again. You can imagine, after many years of fruitless striving and dashed hopes, she decided she could no longer deal with heartbreak. In many ways, she models the faithful under hardship. She hasn't become bitter toward God but continues to serve Him and His servants.

Unfortunately, the point of the story is not that every faithful barren family will bear children, or all wrongs are righted in this age. But we see here a glimpse of the Lord's blessing among the faithful in an age of apostasy. While the nation is far from the Lord, the Lord is not far from His people. In secret, God's people enjoy the life that flows from His word. They are nourished in a barren land.

As the Lord draws near, life springs forth. As the man of God enters, life erupts. The one who carries the name of the Lord carries with him blessings. Dear Christian, you too bear the name of the Lord as you go forth into this world. Life is to flow from you as surely as life flows from Christ. For where you go, Christ goes with you. Where Christ goes, life flows.

Pray: [Walk around the neighborhood, praying for life to spring up]

Sanctifying the Stewpid

Read: 2 Ki 4:38-41

March 25

Key Verse: 4:41

We teach our children the valuable lesson of how bad things corrupt the good. Examples are plenty, but we read it clearly in Paul who warns, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal 5:9). Likewise we know, “One rotten apple spoils the bunch.” Badness and evil are not to be messed with, because they have a way to corrupt and corrode all that’s around them.

In a time of famine, food is precious. This man gathered what he could find. Probably not realizing these gourds have been left by animals and people alike for a reason. The infecting principle is at work here, “Death is in the pot” therefore the whole pot is inedible. But this story isn’t meant to reinforce the age-old truism. We know that clean is defiled by unclean and life by death. What’s remarkable is that we see the reverse—Life is infecting death.

We see this same phenomenon in Jesus. For example, normally touching a man with leprosy contaminates the clean man, but Jesus touches and cleanses the leper. Certainly, we see this in our present age as well. As Christians we await and expect the miraculous from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is not defiled by indwelling His people but rather His people are cleansed.

The church operates as such to the world. While we must be aware of the first principle—sin and worldliness can corrupt a church. The inverse applies as well—as the Church enters the world, it brings life because it brings the Life-giving Spirit of God. As I write, I’m listening to the testimony of a family who were a part of EMC before moving. The wife is recounting the emptiness of their lives and how their marriage was over, but God changed both. As my wife (among many others) entered their lives, through friendship and prayer, we saw life flow into dead places. As the church enters the world, the Life-giving Spirit revives the dead.

Prayer: *Where I go, let your Life be poured into the world thru me.*

The Feeding of the One Hundred

Read: 2 Ki 4:42-44

March 26

Key Verse: 4:44

The man who brings the gift is bringing his first fruits, which is normally designated to the priests. But the priests are apostates, serving the king at idolatrous high places. For many, this would be enough of an excuse to not bring the offerings before the Lord, especially during a famine. In his faithfulness, he ignored the temptation to use an excuse to only look out for himself and his family. Elisha has the similar temptation as this gift dog-eared for him could sustain *him* for a while but couldn't feed the masses. How easy is it to say, "There's no sense in all of us being hungry, so I might as well eat." An attitude indicated by the skepticism of his servant (43).

Yet these understandable attitudes are exactly the kind that leads to a culture of death. In scarcity, I must look out for myself and my family first. But the Life of God does not spring from a scarcity mindset, but one that trusts His generosity.

Since the garden, humanity has called into question God's care and generosity. If God can't be trusted, we must do what's right in our own eyes. Israel entered the vicious cycle where they rejected the LORD, so they didn't have enough; and so, they felt all the more inclined to follow what's right in their own eyes.

God raises up a man of God to show the nation what faithfully trusting his word can bring. We can be satisfied in scarcity and filled in famine. And so, the greater man of God would proclaim as he fed far more with far less. He reminds us not to worry because we have a generous Father (Mt 6:25-34). And so, the Church reveals its new humanity as it gives not out of abundance but out of scarcity. Perhaps then, and only then, will we find that there's more than enough.

Prayer: *Father, you have faithfully provided all my life. Help me to trust you in abundance and scarcity, that I might share your Life.*

Who Will Go for Us?

Read: 2 Ki 5:1-19a

March 27

Key Verse: 5:3

As we've mentioned before, Israel was to be a royal priesthood and a light to the nations. By keeping their covenant with the Lord, they were to show the nations what God is like and the blessings of living under His word. Rather than being a window through which the nations saw God's Life, they were a mirror reflecting the death of following idols.

A faithless age is not without faithful people, though. God's plan and design wasn't halted by Israel's apostasy, but changed avenues. Earlier in Kings, we saw Israel at her best during the reign of Solomon. He brought the nations to worship, exemplified in the proclamation of the Queen of Sheba who in seeing his wisdom remarked, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness" (1 Ki 10:9).

By contrast the current king of Israel is unable to point the nations to the Lord. When given the opportunity, he laments and tears his clothes. Those who don't walk faithfully before the Lord, haven't seen the Lord walk faithfully with them. Not having experienced his presence, they don't rely on his help. So the king is an utterly insufficient ambassador to the Lord.

But as we said, just because the king is impotent to reveal God, God still reveals himself. When kings won't rule by His wisdom, slaves still testify to His grace. As the faithful are exiled, the witness to God extends to the nations. How often we feel too weak to be a productive witness, but that's exactly who the Lord delights to use. He uses the despised, foolish, and lowly so His power is revealed. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: *Lord, use me in my weakness to faithfully witness to you and your kingdom.*

The Gospel Hangs by a Thread

Read: 2 Ki 5:1-19a

March 28

Key Verse: 5:16

Imagine for a moment a big named celebrity enters your church, looking for a touch from God. Perhaps, they had once been an enemy of the Church, mocking and jeering but now they come in desperate need. How would we react to such an occasion?

Two responses are common. The first is to show too much deference to a person of status. The Church too often bends over backward for people of power who wink at her. The second is to demand they earn good will. Perhaps he should grovel, give or do some task to demonstrate publicly how gracious you are.

Perhaps occasions arise for such responses but not here. Elisha doesn't humiliate him but humbles him in three ways. First, he merely sends a messenger with instructions without even seeing him face to face. Second, he gives him a simple task that seems silly—bathe in the Jordan. Third, he accepts no reward.

Elisha isn't against receiving from others. In the previous story he readily received a small offering of grain, why would he not receive a large offering from this foreigner? How much more could he help others if he did? Because to do so would betray the gospel.

Receiving grace can sometimes be the most costly thing, particularly with people of status. Those used to wielding money and power to get what they want are more humbled by grace than offerings. For Elisha to receive money, may suggest Naaman's healing was bought. God's grace isn't reserved for those who can afford to put a dent in the church budget line. He can't be bought by waiving big checks. God is no respecter of persons but offers grace to the humble. By denying the gift, Elisha makes it clear that the grace of the Lord can't be bought or earned but only received.

Prayer: *Lord, I have tried to earn your favor through money and works, but you offer grace to the humble.*

Grace and Gehazi

Read: 2 Ki 5:19b-27

March 30

Key Verse: 5:20

Grace offends both outsiders and insiders. Yesterday, we saw how grace humbled Naaman, who could not wield his power, status, or money but merely had to receive from God. Today we read about an insider who was offended by God's grace. While my Bible's heading for the passage is "Gehazi's Greed," it's not his greed at all. Gehazi seems less concerned about earning as he does for Naaman to pay, lamenting, "My master has spared him."

Gehazi is not the first religious person to be offended by God's grace offered to a pagan world. Gehazi has paid the price for faithfulness. He's served Elisha, gone through famines, lived in less than desirable conditions. In comes this foreigner who has oppressed God's people, raided their villages, took their girls as slaves (5:2) and *he* receives God's healing for nothing!

Religious people often miss the gospel. Particularly when we live in an age where it's costly to follow God. We can so quickly believe that "I've done a lot for God, so He is happy with me. You too must pay a price." Since we've suffered, others getting off for free is offensive.

The great danger is that by doing so, we lose the gospel—that we are indeed saved by grace through faith. Gehazi's great offense (and thus the harsh punishment) was for distorting the very nature of the gospel. Similarly, Paul would damn the Judaizers, who added in works (Gal 1:8-9). Despite our professed theology, our true theology emerges as we encounter sinners receiving unearned grace. If we find ourselves resentful, jealous, or judgmental, we have missed the gospel. We have casually added in works, distorting who God is to the nations.

Prayer: *Lord how have I looked to works or judged others and denied your gospel of grace?*

Axe Marks the Spot

Read: 2 Ki 6:1-7

March 31

Key Verse: 6:5

A couple years ago I went kayaking in the Pasquotank River and upon exiting my phone slipped out of my pocket into the abyss. All attempts to retrieve it failed as this particular part was deep, dark, and full of snakes. Being so close to the lost item yet unable to retrieve it makes it all the more frustrating.

While losing a phone is unpleasant, it's not terribly hard to recover. With cloud storage and quick shipping, I was largely recovered (minus a couple hundred dollars) by the end of the week. This student prophet wasn't so fortunate. At this time, the cost of an iron ax may be the equivalent to a car today.

Let me rewrite this story with a modern situation. Some poor, young seminary students decide to rent a house together and one of them borrows a new truck to help them move. In the course of the move, the young student totals the truck while uninsured. We don't have a modern equivalent for the implied disaster for we are protected by insurance and bankruptcy laws. This young prophet would more than likely be forced into slavery to repay his debt.

Without seeing this account with ancient eyes, it can seem trivial. Without seeing it with God-centered eyes, it can seem bizarre. It teaches little of how we should behave or act. Many have wondered why it was included at all.

While it doesn't teach much about how we should act, it does reveal the nature and character of God who sees our individual needs and redeems us from debts we can't pay. How good it is to serve such a God! The God who is sovereignly guiding the events of kings and kingdoms is not too busy or unconcerned for the plight of this single person, with his individual problem.

Prayer: *Lord, we give you thanks for your redeeming work that frees us from our bondage to sin and death.*

Elisha and the Burning (Am)bush

Read: 2 Ki 6:8-23

April 1

Key Verses: 6:17

This account reveals three levels of sight. First, normal sight is how we see the physical world with relative accuracy. Second, Elisha and his servant have *true sight* in that they see the spiritual world at work. Third, the Arameans were struck with *blindness*. Now this word is not the typical word for blindness in Hebrew and probably means confusion. I'm skeptical physical blindness would lead men to continue on in their mission. They received something far worse than physical blindness—the inability to perceive the world combined with an assurance that they could.

Such a supernatural view of the world jars our Western, empirical minds. Often the church is filled with glorified Deists, who profess the theology of the Church but contradictingly live only in a material world. This plays itself out in many ways:

First in ministering, prayer is often on the backburner. We devote so much to strategy and study, prayer gets lost. We are told that “the god of this world blinds the minds of unbelievers” (2 Co 4:4), meaning their primary problem is spiritual. Only the power of God can help people see. So, prayer must be foundational in our ministry and witness.

Second, we find it difficult to offer grace to our enemies. When you see yourself in a spiritual world, you realize that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against...the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). Politicians, media members, etc. who revile Christianity are not the true enemies of the Church. We can offer grace as we understand that they operate in ignorance to spiritual realities. Rather than becoming objects of scorn, we can offer grace, mercy and forgiveness.

Prayer: *Give me eyes to see your invisible work in this world.*

Strange New Respect

Read: 2 Ki 6:24-7:2

April 2

Key Verse: 6:31

In 1992, Tom Bethell wrote about the “Strange New Respect” granted to political conservatives who move leftward. Someone who was once despised is now praised as a person of character or intelligence because they left their pack. Strange New Respect happens on all sides of the aisle. During the Trump impeachment, Strange New Respect was given to Mitt Romney for voting to remove him *and* the democrats who voted against impeachment, though from different sides. Strange New Respect however only lasts for as long as you’re useful.

If you’ve been paying attention to the story of Kings, it appears there’s a Strange New Respect for the Lord and His prophet. Elisha hasn’t had a major confrontation with the king of Israel. Unlike his predecessor, the king consults him (3:11), Elisha helps protect the kingdom (6:9), and the king calls him “Father” (6:21) and heeds his words. Jehoram, though evil, was not like Ahab and he even removed the Baal pillar (3:2).

Jehoram may have made reforms, but he was far from faithful. The siege and famine they’re experiencing (v. 24) are signs of God’s continued judgment (Lev 26:29). As the king experiences God’s wrath, his wrath turns to God’s man. Notice how quickly he shifts his feelings toward Elisha. When Elisha is feeding him information and delivering opposing armies, he’s “Father.” When he’s not serving the interest of the state, he’s public enemy number one.

Why his hostility is aimed at Elisha is unknown, but ultimately, it’s because he’s no longer useful. Beware the great temptation to feed the Strange New Respect we may receive (particularly when we scorn other believers) for you will be devoured. Respect is not repentance; as easily as it’s given, it will be stripped (Jn 2:23-5).

Prayer: *In me is a desire to please crowds and kings, strengthen me to listen to your voice alone.*

How Beautiful the Feet that Bring Good News

Read: 2 Ki 6:33-7:20

April 3

Key Verse: 7:9

Chapter 6 ends with the vicious indictment from Israel's king, "This trouble is from the LORD! Why should I hope (or wait) in the LORD any longer?" While our impulse in reading is to come to the defense of the Lord, in some ways he's right. The LORD brought about the siege as part of His judgment. So, if God is against them, why should they wait on Him?

The double use of the divine name in 6:33 gives way to the double use in the answer, "Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD..." (7:1). The answer is clear, you can hope in the LORD because He alone can fix the situation with a word.

The king is impotent against the threat. The captain can't even envision salvation. The army is weakened, the people are starved. The gods of the nations are impotent. He must hope in the LORD for there's nothing left to hope in.

Only the Lord defeats the nations without lifting a sword. In the previous story, the Arameans were defeated by not being able to see what was there. Here, it's by hearing what is not there. Only the Lord does that. He alone uses lepers to save a city they can't enter. Only YHWH makes beautiful feet that are untouchable.

The Church can hold fast to the Lord, because His word alone can create and sustain the universe, overturn kingdoms, bring haughty commanders down, and make unclean lepers the heroes. The Lord alone can break a siege in a day and supply a city in an hour. The lepers got it right, "This is a day of good news" in that God has once again rescued his people when they had no hope. All they could do was trust and hope in Him. As the psalmist declares, "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God" (Ps 146:5)

Prayer: [Let Psalm 146 be your prayer]

The God who Remembers

Read: 2 Ki 8:1-6

April 4

Key Verse: 8:6

After the great heroic stories dealing with kings and kingdoms, the plight of the Shunammite woman from chapter 4 returns in a somewhat anticlimactic way. This gives great encouragement to the regular, everyday believer who isn't often involved in the business of kings and kingdoms.

After Elisha protected her household from the seven-year famine, she returns. Abandoned land was most likely taken by the crown until it would be reclaimed, but things may be a little more complicated in this story. If you remember back to the devotional on 2 Ki 4:1-7, women would interact with society through their fathers or husbands. We notice, the woman returns, and she is appealing to the king. We may suspect she's now a widow, who is susceptible to the abuses of unjust people in the system.

Gehazi just happens to be there telling her story. We may wonder how this leprous man is standing before the king, but these stories may not be strictly chronological, or we may suspect that even as Namaan's skin disease didn't preclude him from serving nor does Gehazi's. Either way, his stories infatuated the king.

We can also imagine what the woman was feeling as she got up that morning to go before the king. Would he dismiss her as a widow? Would he humiliate her for her attempt at justice? Was she going to have to come back daily to fight for justice like in the parable of the unjust judge (Lk 18:1-8)? No to all because *coincidentally* Gehazi had just been telling her story to the delight of the king. So not only did she receive her land but all the lost profit. Isn't she lucky? No. She was faithful to care for God's people and God doesn't forget such kindness. As Jesus reminds us, "Whoever welcomes a prophet...will receive a prophet's reward" (Mt 10:41). Even in all His dealing with empires, God sees all the small acts of faithfulness by His children and doesn't forget.

Prayer: *Lord, I thank you that you don't forget our acts of faithfulness to you.*

The Beginning of the End

Read: 2 Ki 8:7-15

April 6

Key Verse: 8:11

We may wonder at Elisha's response to Hazael. How can this prophet of the Lord of truth tell Hazael to lie? While several solutions are involved (including a textual variant that changes the meaning), I think we are supposed to understand that Elisha is responding from the question that asked specifically about the illness (v. 9). He can truthfully say that the illness will not kill him, though he'll never get to that point.

Elisha's prophecy was fulfilled by its utterance, for it wasn't merely a prophecy but an anointing. Elisha's ministry has reached a turning point as he fulfills the command to Elijah back in chapter 19. Elijah was commanded to anoint three people: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha for God's coming flood of judgment on the kingdom. We only read of Elisha's anointing, but here and the following chapter, Elisha fulfills Elijah's commission. Here is Hazael's anointing. So far Elisha has been a minister of life, producing healing and bounty wherever he goes. But God's invitation to life does not make little of his warning of judgment.

Elisha is a true representative of the word. He proclaims God's coming judgment but he doesn't rejoice but weeps. For God Himself has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ez. 33:11) but desires the wicked to repent. Elisha points us forward to Jesus' own weeping over Jerusalem, whose judgement could have been spared if they turned to him, but they crucified him instead (Lk 19:41-44).

God's prophet doesn't proclaim God's judgement blithely or with smug satisfaction, but with weeping and tears. God's judgment is at times necessary but it's never pretty. He has done all He can to spare us: giving prophets, signs, warnings, chances, and most of all His Son who would take the wrath of the Father upon Himself. God's church must similarly weep for the lost.

Prayer: *God, let my heart be broken for the lost as yours is.*

The Madman Messiah

Read: 2 Ki 9

April 7

Key Verse: 9:22

While Hazael would ravage the nation, Jehu is pictured as a Messiah. He alone of Israel's kings is anointed. He alone is said to have "done well" (10:30), though that comes with a caveat. As gruesome as these chapters are, they fulfilled the words of the prophet Elijah on the house of Ahab and "all that was in [the Lord's] heart" (10:30).

Four times Jehu is asked, "Is it peace?" (meaning: have you come in peace). Twice by messengers who become his soldiers, once by Joram, and lastly by Jezebel. The answer is always, "no" because as Joram states there can't be peace as long as sin abounds (v. 22). The biblical idea of peace goes beyond the absence of conflict but speaks of things being rightly ordered.

God is steadfastly opposed to evil and will eliminate it from this world. The Church should rejoice at such a fact. If we imagine ourselves reading these texts as many Christians throughout the centuries who've lived in hostile environments and have seen their families slaughtered and friends beaten for the sake of the gospel, we may find Jehu's behavior more comforting than troublesome. The message to God's people is a loud and clear, evil and tyranny have an expiration date. I had a seminary professor who got to teach the book of Revelation in the USSR during the Cold War and assured the students that one day the Soviet Empire would fall. Students couldn't believe it; it seemed too strong, too permanent. Only a few years later the Berlin wall came down. Empires fall at the word of YHWH.

Our call as Christians, is not to be mini-Jehus, taking the Lord's vengeance in our own hands against the nations. We should however have the zeal and commitment to destroy the evil within ourselves. To be ruthless toward our flesh that rebels against God's rule and reign.

Prayer: [Read Col 3:5-11, putting to death all Paul mentions]

The Almost Messiah

Read: 2 Ki 10

April 8

Key Verses: 10:31-32

While most modern English speakers equate the two, historically jealousy and envy were distinct. Envy longs for what belongs to another, jealousy is possessive for what belongs to you. So, a man may be envious to desire another's wife but jealous for the affections of his own. Envy is always wrong, jealousy varies. The Lord's declaration that "I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (e.g. Ex 20:5) often goes underappreciated. He demands a lot.

Jehu provides readers with their first, and only, glimmer of hope for Israel. With zeal, he rid the nation of the Baal cult and overcame the dynasty of Ahab. But despite all the great things he did, the final assessment is that he "was not careful to follow the law of the LORD the God of Israel with all his heart." Despite having done positive things for the Lord, he was unable to move Israel from being under judgment, as seen by the trimming off of the land (v. 32). Jehu in all his zeal, still falls short. He is an almost Messiah.

The Lord is a jealous God. Almost following is not enough. Partial obedience is disobedience. Half-hearted devotion is adultery. We may wish the Lord would back off His standards a bit; maybe He should demand a little less and temper His expectations. Who can stand beneath them?

Fortunately for us, though we are half-hearted people, we serve a God who does nothing half-heartedly. At our best we produce almost Messiahs, so the Father provides a real deal. We feel good when we partially obey, so the Father provides one who will obey entirely on our behalf. We become self-righteous in showing *any* zeal for the Lord, so He provides one consumed by Zeal for His house. Jehu is us at our best but our best is not enough.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord for giving your Son in whom we fulfil the Law and through whom you give a new heart that can love you.*

Same Old, Same Old

Read: 2 Ki 13:1-13

April 9

Key Verse: 13:4

D. R. Davis retells a story of a slave woman on an island in the Indian Ocean who worked terribly long and hard to save money to buy the freedom of her daughter (though she remained a slave). Not long after purchasing her freedom she came into the room to sit down beside her daughter as normal. But this time the daughter turned enraged and said, “How dare you sit down in my presence? Do you not know that I am a free woman, and you are a slave? Rise instantly, and leave the room!” (194; 2005).

If you’ve been following along with Kings (or the Bible in general), Such evil in the human heart won’t surprise us. We can pray for God’s power to assist us just as Jehoahaz did and the Lord answers us. He gives Israel a Savior, but do they turn from idolatry? The calves remain up as does the Asherah pole. The sins of the nation continue in God’s mercy and judgment alike. Neither carrot nor stick turns unfaithful people toward faithfulness. Like the woman in the story, they spit in the face of the one who redeemed them from slavery.

God for His part doesn’t give up on this people nor his standards. The Lord listens to Israel, even as they continue in sin and will continue in sin. He saves them simply from His compassion. As we go through life, we ought to be comforted by His mercy.

At the same time, we see once again that God doesn’t just “get over” our continued, cultural sins. Many Christians implicitly believe that the practices of the culture are fine. Somehow if we embrace standards for long enough, God won’t continue caring about them. For liberals, this may mean our sexual standards that fall short of God’s design. For conservatives, it may be our lust for self-governance or money. In all cases, without rejecting our cultural idols, we are spitting in the face of God’s great mercy.

Prayer: From *what culturally affirmed idols must I repent, Lord?*

With Joy and Gladness

Read: 2 Ki 13:14-19

April 10

Key Verse: 13:19

Arrows are typical symbols for military prowess, so it's not a surprise that they are used in prophetic sign acts for Elisha here. The thing that confuses is why is Israel's victory limited based upon Jehoash's response when it wasn't even explained?

As we've seen elsewhere in the narratives, the Man of God is a representation of the divine Word. The Man of God carries the divine word and how people respond to the prophet reveals how they respond to God. What Jehoash reveals is an unenthusiastic response to the divine word. How fitting for the king of Israel to unenthusiastically obey, for that has been Israel at their best.

An unenthusiastic obedience to the divine word does not reap the fullness of divine promises. We often feel the battle is simply *whether* we obey and not *how* we obey. Yet the Lord expects joy and enthusiasm to His word. Who wants their spouse to obey with a deep sigh or slamming of cabinets? So, the Lord even warns them of their future exile would come, "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with *joyfulness* and *gladness of heart*" (Dt 28:47). Since when did joy become the fulcrum of faithfulness?

For sure at times obedience is hard and costly. Even Jesus prays, "Not my will but yours" to the Father. But there's a chasm of difference between that prayer and an unenthusiastic posture toward the divine rule. Jehoash's response is indicative of the latter. Often ours is as well. Such a demand of God makes it clear to our souls, that we cannot fulfill His law on our own strength. We need more than just better knowledge of His law or better self-control, we need a new heart. We need a divine miracle; nothing less will do. On this Good Friday, we cast our eyes to Calvary to remember the king who endured the cross "with joy set before him." One, who followed the Father completely to provide new hearts to those in him.

Prayer: *Give me a new heart to follow you with joy and enthusiasm.*

The Grave that Speaks

Read: 2 Ki 13:20-21

April 11

Key Verse: 13:21

The death of Elisha marks the end of an era. Despite so often being in the company of prophets, we are given no indication of passing on the work to another as Elijah did. Historically, we know of other prophets to Israel, like Micah and Hosea but the text is silent on them. The author of Kings avoids such descriptions because he wants us to see that Israel's hope to respond died with Elisha, with him the word of God is buried.

After his death the pace of the text quickens, giving only brief accounts of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah until we arrive at Israel's death in chapter 17. Assyria comes in, wipes them out, and takes them into exile. As surely as Elisha dies, Israel too will die.

Here we receive a small inkling, that Israel's death is not the final word, for the God of Israel isn't bound by the grave. Even as Life follows the Man of God, it flows from him even in the grave. Israel will be cast into the grave of exile, for they have rejected the word of the Lord, but there will be a Man of God whose grave has resurrection power.

Miracles, by their nature, are redemptive and typological. They cause us to see God's ultimate plans of how He makes the world right. As we read this conclusion to the life of Elisha, we await the greater Elisha to come.

Whereas this Elisha gives life to one man from the grave, the greater Elisha welcomes all men to be buried with him. For he does not just bear the word of the Lord, he *is* the Word. Life flows from him as a never-ending stream. We "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12). So, this Holy Saturday we are buried with Christ by faith and await the dawn. For as Jesus rises, we rise with him. Hallelujah!

Prayer: *Lord, we give you thanks and praise that you have conquered sin and death on our behalf!*

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