

THE TALE OF TWO PROPHETS
OR
HOW TO OVERCOME THE CORRUPTION OF KINGS

By Rev. Christine Meier

1 Kings 16:21: *“Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri.”*

Our feature texts this month (1 Kings 18 & 19 and 2 Kings 5-7) tell the tales of corruption, fear and the triumph of God’s word. So why have I quoted a verse outside of our texts? Because the real reason Israel went through her struggles took place long before the time period we will be studying. Let’s just say the nation of Israel was as human as the rest of us. After the dynasties of King David and his son, Solomon, the nation split into two parts: Judah and Israel (Samaria). When referring to ancient Israel, most folks forget this. That’s why the books of Kings and Chronicles can be confusing. Different kings with the same name are ruling different parts of what had been a united nation. Sometimes it’s easier to read those portions in a chronological Bible and sometimes it’s better to view concepts and ignore the names of the kings involved. The first verse I’ve quoted refers to a second split within the area of Israel (Samaria). The prophets we will be looking at, Elijah and Elisha prophesied mostly within Israel (Samaria) proper. Elisha took over after Elijah was taken up into heaven. If you’ve never read that there was a prophet who was transported without dying, well there are two such individuals within the pages of our Bible: Enoch and Elijah.

The hows and whys of those two incidents are lengthy and involved. Suffice it to say that Jewish tradition and biblical references let us know that both individuals are listed to come back before the coming of Messiah. The New Testament lets us know that John the Baptist came within the spirit and anointing of Elijah to prepare Jesus’ first coming. Both Old and New Testaments talk about two witnesses coming before that *“great and terrible Day of the Lord.”* (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:20; Malachi 4:5; Zephaniah 1:14-18) The New Testament refers to this as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Those events are not what I am referring to here; although, the concepts have a similar theme. That’s what I would like to review.

The history of anyone speaking the true word of the Lord, or functioning with a mandate from God while addressing the sins of a people, is that controversy flies in all directions. In fact, it is so predictable that it can be near impossible without the

indwelling Holy Spirit to tell who is on the Lord's side and who is not. That's because so much "dust" is in the air. When a people make a commitment to the Lord, regardless of how many centuries pass from that commitment, and God desires to bring them back in line, He sends His word to do so. Because their leaders are so corrupt, threats are made to stop that word from being spoken. In fact, you will see factions develop within the society which may even prevent or hinder that full word or truth from being known. To break these strongholds and remove these hinderances— even in some cases the spiritual forces which have embedded themselves into a nation— the Lord moves in such a way as to disrupt their "comfort."

That pattern is reflected within the lives of the two prophets we will review. Elijah is an odd character right from the time we see him emerge on the biblical page. *"Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As certainly as the LORD God of Israel lives (whom I serve), there will be no dew or rain in the years ahead unless I give the command.' "* (1 Kings 17:1; NET Bible©) We also know he probably wore camel or goat hair clothing and ate locusts, as did John the Baptist centuries later. (2 Kings 1:8 and Matthew 3:4) So if this were a Hollywood film, the type has already been cast. These individuals live alone and in obscurity until God calls them. They obey only His voice and move at His behest. They are also known as a breaker anointing in many Bible-based circles. In other words, when people are thick headed, you need a battering ram to break through their stubbornness. So these folks are known to be somewhat crude and gruff. They are not your polished politician. Within the pages of the Bible, we see God use these type of people over and over again. Yet Elijah is different. In his case, he is totally devoted to the Lord. Signs and wonders come at the word of the Lord spoken from his mouth.

Albeit, the predictable pattern I've already mentioned emerges quickly in our story. No sooner does Elijah prophesy the above words, when the Lord tells him to go hide out and ravens will bring him food and he will drink from a stream in the Kerith Valley near Jordan. When the spring dries up the Lord tells him to go to Zarephath in Sidonian territory where there is a widow with a handful of flour in a jar and a little bit of olive oil in a jug. Elijah tells this woman to give him her food first and prophesies that when she does so, the flour in the jar and the oil in the jug will never dry up until rain comes back to the land. It's here you would think to find the controversy. But this woman does as Elijah commands and they eat for quite a long time. Yet we all have a breaking point where our faith just simply has not grown strong enough to believe what it is God has promised. That point came for this woman when her son died. *"Why, prophet, have you come to me to*

confront me with my sin and kill my son?" (NET Bible©) On almost a visceral level we all share this same understanding; and that is all the harm we see in our lives is caused by our sin. Sometimes that is warranted and sometimes it is not. I doubt this woman's sin caused her son to die, yet sin does cause harm to a nation and it causes harm to people individually as well. Drink, smoke, party and drug yourself around town, and sooner or later your body will stop functioning and you may die. Get enough people in a nation to neglect morality and a Godly code of justice, and sooner or later the land will exhibit the problems reflected in bad behavior. Get the leaders of a nation involved in corruption and it won't be long before the nation also reflects the evidence of that bad behavior. While this woman blamed herself, she also blamed the entity who reflected what good behavior looks like; or said another way, the person who represented God's word. God's word is not the cause of our problems. As soon as her mouth spouted this blame and pain, Elijah scooped the boy up in his arms and brought him before the Lord. Her blame reflected the fact that her faith had grown to receive flour and oil from empty vessels, but not a son brought back to life. It was Elijah's faith that took her the rest of the way.

As it was on an individual basis, so it was for the nation. King Ahab blames Elijah for the drought. He's been hunting him down for a while now. King Ahab is married to one of the most corrupt women in the Bible, Jezebel. She has swindled, murdered and threatened her way throughout several of our narrative chapters. Standing in her way are the Lord's priests and prophets. She has murdered hundreds of them already. Elijah confronts King Ahab, the people, along with the priests of the Baals and the prophets of Asherah. The showdown has Elijah asking the people, "*How long are you going to be paralyzed by indecision? If the Lord is the true God, then follow him, but if Baal is, follow him!*" *But the people did not say a word. Elijah said to them: 'I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but there are 450 prophets of Baal. Let them bring us two bulls. Let them choose one of the bulls for themselves, cut it up into pieces, and place it on the wood. But they must not set it on fire. I will do the same to the other bull and place it on the wood. But I will not set it on fire. Then you will invoke the name of your god, and I will invoke the name of the Lord. The god who responds with fire will demonstrate that he is the true God.'* All the people responded, *'This will be a fair test.'*" (1 Kings 18:21-24; NET Bible©)

After an all-day cult ceremony, no fire falls on the Baal altar. At the time of the evening sacrifice, we are told Elijah prays over the now water-soaked altar of God and fire falls from heaven, licks up the sacrifice as well as the water. Elijah commands the people to seize the false prophets and kill them all. He tells King

Ahab to eat, drink and be on his way because there is the sound of heavy rain coming. After this kind of a successful event, you would think Elijah would be fearless, full of faith and ready to move mountains. Yet when King Ahab gets home and tells Jezebel, she sends word to Elijah that by tomorrow, around the same time her prophets died, Elijah will die by her hand. This sends Elijah into a fear-filled tailspin, running for his life and depleting his body's energy reserves. In fact, we are told he is fed twice by angels and runs 40 days on those two meals. What takes place next is a scene from a CGI movie. God tells Elijah to go into a cave and the Lord Himself will pass by. A powerful storm takes place with debris flying, but God is not in the storm. An earthquake occurs with rocks falling and landslides flowing, but God is not in the quaking. Fire follows, but God is not in the fire. Finally, the Bible tells us a still, small voice is heard by Elijah. That's when Elijah covers his face with his robe and ventures out of the cave.

Our second prophet is Elijah's apprentice. Named Elisha, he is the son of Shaphat. This man is different from Elijah in that we are told he has strong ties to his family, and probably wore normal clothing; yet he has the same penchant for in-your-face "speak" as Elijah has. We are also told a story in which we see Elisha has a stick-to-your-word approach. He is given a word that if he sees God take Elijah, his mentor, up into heaven, a double portion will flow to him. (2 Kings 2:9 & 10; NET Bible©) Elisha never leaves Elijah's side and he sees when the chariots of fire come and take Elijah. As Elijah is taken, his mantle (cloak or coat) falls to the ground and Elisha picks it up, hits the waters of the Jordan, demanding of the Lord, "*Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?*" Instantly the waters part and Elisha walks across on dry ground. This begins his ministry.

Over several chapters we see the Lord confirm Elisha's ministry to those who believe the word from his mouth. Armies are delivered and ax heads float. But it is one of the more interesting stories we will review. It seems one of the enemies of Israel, Syria (do things ever change?) decides they want to capture and kill her king. So they plan several events to do exactly that. Each time Elisha hears what the king of Syria is planning and warns Israel's king. Eventually the Syrian king accuses his counsel of treason, going so far as to tell the guilty individual to come forward. One brave man steps up and tells him they are all innocent; that in fact, it is because Elisha, a prophet in Israel hears everything going on and tells the Israeli king. So the Syrian king puts a bounty on Elisha's head. An army surrounds Elisha's location. As Elisha's servant is going about his work that morning he sees this huge army encompassing them. He cries out to Elisha who replies, "*Don't be afraid, for our side outnumbers them.*" Then Elisha prayed, "*O Lord, open his eyes so he can see.*" The Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw that the hill was full

of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:16 & 17; NET Bible©) Needless to say, the human army did not win that day. Elisha continued to live, blessing Israel and seeing the word of the Lord brought forth to save the nation from another famine and the destruction of yet another war. Of course, leaders and kings still blame him and God, and still refuse to listen. (2 Kings 6:24-7:20) Nevertheless, we see Elisha succeed where Elijah had withered. Though we know Elijah’s story is not over yet.

So what is it about these two prophets that tell us how to overcome throughout the corruption and degradation of a nation in order to see success and turnaround, not only in the nation, but in our own lives? First we must understand that in some cases it is generational. Elijah never fully does what God tells him to do. The work does not have to be left to another generation, but in this case as in so many others we see within the Scriptures, the bulk of the work is left for another generation. So another generation must be raised up in order to do that. The question is what should we raise them up in? The answer, for the Christian, should be obvious: The Love of Christ. Let’s look at Elijah first. I don’t get the warm and fuzzies when I read his story. Yet the experience in the cave gives us some insight. The reality that his body was in trouble is clear. Before he fears Jezebel, he has run and overtaken the chariot of Ahab to Jezreel (1Kings 18:45 & 46). He then runs to the point of exhaustion grave enough to be fed and ministered to by angels. In order to pass on what Christ has given us we must stay healthy and alive in order to do it! Today’s penchant for prescription drugs of every kind is quite taxing and harmful to our bodies. Better to avoid them totally— and the archetype involved in it. But what happens to those saints already caught in it? The only solution is the deliverance of Christ. Deliverance must be sought and understood as a faith walk. Elijah understood this. He walked alone with God to the extent that he understood the safety of the cave when all hell was breaking loose outside.

He understood something else: The true voice of God. In order to hear that, he had to have an intimacy in love with the God who created the universe. When God shows up, everything in controversy against his word flies up into the air. The word of the Lord brings controversy simply because we are not in agreement with it. All becomes laid bare before our God. Elijah knew well enough that the earth shaking and all hell breaking loose around him was not the Lord but His movement, and the moving of what was standing in God’s way. We see similar events in other portions of Scripture. In Joel 2 after the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun, moon and stars no longer shine, the prophet says this: “ ‘*Yet even now,*’ *the Lord says, return to me with all your heart— with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts and not just your garments.*’ *Return to the Lord your God, for he is*

merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and boundless in loyal LOVE— often relenting from calamitous punishment. Who knows? Perhaps he will be compassionate and grant a reprieve, and leave blessing in his wake....” (Joel 2:12-14a; NET Bible©) To understand that the still, small voice of God is not in all the shakings and rumblings, but comes afterward, is to understand the God who utters that voice. In order to do so, and to leave that understanding to the next generation, one must understand His great love for us. Elijah had to understand this simply because he understood the need that intimacy is experienced up close and personal in a quiet place with God. Once we understand this, we understand deliverance. After our example in Joel 2, the end of the chapter says this: *“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”* (Joel 2:32) At that point, Elijah understood the future plans the Lord had for Elisha, and new leadership for the nation to undue the damage caused by Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 19:15-17).

We have to avoid feeling sorry for ourselves because things have not gone our way. This attitude was what almost potentially ruined Elijah. In his confrontation with the corrupt system, he tells the people he is the only prophet left. Later when he talks with God outside the cave, he utters the same words. The Lord tells him clearly at that point: *“Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”* (1 Kings 19:18) Isolation can heighten the attitudes and soul-based issues which can potentially hinder us from the destiny God has planned for us. Family and friends have a way of exposing those issues. Elisha, on the other hand, understands family. When Elijah first encounters him, letting him know the job of “assistant” has opened, Elisha’s first request is that he say good-bye to family and friends by throwing a going-away party. All throughout Elisha’s ministry we see him with other people: the “sons of the prophets” (2 Kings 2; a school which raised up new prophetic leadership); living in a room in the house of the Shunnamite woman when he passed by that way (2 Kings 4); the elders of the people are sitting in Elisha’s house visiting (2 Kings 6). In these and many others mentioned in the Old Testament, Elisha is always seeing the need and receiving the word of the Lord to bring the anointing to accomplish the need of God as well as His people.

Elijah’s vision was to do nothing except what the Lord required. Yet Elisha, because of his understanding of human relationship, knew the Lord could meet the need and he could be the vessel to bring it to fruition in the nation. Not only do we need to be able to hear what God wants, but we need to have his compassion to see it brought to pass among the brethren. Lastly— and this is a piece to the puzzle

many people miss— there needs to be secular or non-religious categories of leaders who can mirror some of this among the people. I'm not saying they should be heathen, although they might be (see when Hazael is prophesied to be king in Syria; 2 Kings 8:7-13). In many instances they alone can implement the laws and change needed to rid a nation of corruption and degradation. In countries accustomed to violence, they can be violent people. In countries more geared to the rule of law, they themselves will be people desirous of implementing the rule of law in order to bring the nation back in line with its laws and the heritage of those traditions (see 1 Kings 19;15-17).

These are the attitudes and principles needed to survive and bring a nation back from the precipice of disaster. In some cases it takes time, depending upon how long and how deep the corruption goes. That God desires us to be survivors is without question. His response to the prophetic utterance in Joel 2 is this: *“And it shall come to pass afterward....”* (After what? The destruction!) *“.....that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.....”* (Joel 2: 28 & 29) *“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”* (Joel 2:32) God always desires survivors or a remnant. Humans are the cause of corruption and destruction, not God. Learning how to survive and overcome as the Lord prepares a generation to take over and remove the corruption, are lessons not solely from some ancient book, written thousands of years ago. They are lessons we all need to understand today in order to implement change for a better future.