

Lesson Eleven
The Life and Times of Elijah and Elisha
Elijah in the New Testament

- I. The Old Testament concludes with a prophecy of the coming Elijah. Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6.
 - A. After Moses (80 times), Abraham (73 times), and David (59 times) Elijah is the most frequently mentioned Old Testament figure in the New Testament (30 times).
 1. Four events from Elijah's life are mentioned in the N.T.
 - a) His proclamation of the drought (1 Kings 17:1) and the associated famine (cf. Luke 4:25; James 5:17; Rev. 11:6)
 - b) God's sending of Elijah to the Widow of Zarephath is used by Jesus in Luke 4:25 to show from Scripture that it may please God to offer salvation to the Gentiles to the exclusion of the salvation people.
 - c) The special Lucan material in the story of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43; cf. 1 Kings 19:5, 7) is reminiscent of the story of the flight of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1ff. (The assurance given to the despairing prophet on this occasion that God had reserved for himself 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (19:18) makes Paul quite certain that there is present in Israel in his day a sacred remnant according to God's grace (Rom. 11:2-5.)
 - d) Luke 9:54 (cf. Rev. 11:5) refers to the divine judgment that Elijah executed on his enemies when he destroyed them by fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:10, 12).
 - B. Malachi refers to the return of Elijah as a Messianic figure who prepares the way for the heavenly King (3:1) by purifying the priesthood (3:2-4) and establishing peace (4:6).
 1. Other non-Biblical sources add to the twofold task of Malachi (mitigating the wrath of Jehovah before the judgment and turning the hearts of the fathers to the sons) a third task of restoring the tribes of Israel.
 2. Since this is a task attributed to the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 49:6), this indicates that at least a few looked upon the returning Elijah as the Messiah.
 - C. Basing their expectation on Malachi's prophecy, a far more widespread view was the Jews' expectation that Elijah would return in person as the forerunner of the Messiah; one source declared: "Elijah the Prophet, come to us soon; may the King Messiah sprout forth in our days."

- D.** We shall see that the disciples had the same misconception that Jesus corrected at the Mount of Transfiguration. Matt. 17:10-13.
- E.** The Jews had the same idea about Jesus. Matt. 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:19.
- F.** It also surfaced at the final mockery under the cross. Mark 15:35.
- G.** The angel in Luke 1:17, like Jesus, had it exactly right - the promised Elijah is John because he will work "in the spirit and power of Elijah."
 - 1.** The "messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1) refers constantly throughout the Old Testament to Christ before his incarnation.
 - 2.** Malachi 3:1 therefore expressly prophesies that before Christ the Lord appears to His people He will send a messenger ahead to prepare the way before Him.
 - 3.** Malachi 4:5-6 state that Elijah the prophet will be sent before the great and terrible day of the Lord.
 - 4.** That these words do not refer to the time of the final consummation, but to the time of the incarnation of Christ, appears from the fact that Jesus Himself said of John that he was the Prophet Elijah who was to come.
 - 5.** The incarnation of Christ as a great and terrible day to the Jews because by it the people were sifted.
 - 6.** When the majority refused to accept him, the judgments of God smote the people in an unparalleled manner, until Jerusalem and the whole of the Jewish national existence in Palestine was totally destroyed in A.D. 70.
 - 7.** The forerunner will be the same stern, abstemious person who is needed, like Elijah, by the same impenitent and unbelieving nation, whose great task was to preach stern contrition and repentance.
 - 8.** He will be, as it were, a reincarnation of the fearless prophet of old.
 - a)** Just as Elijah had often been in the deserts, thus, too, it was with John.
 - b)** Just as Elijah had pronounced divine judgment on sinners without respect of persons, so also did John.
 - c)** If we compare the two characters with one another, it becomes clear that in the whole of Scripture there are no two persons who bear a greater resemblance to one another than Elijah and John the Baptist.
 - d)** What Malachi, and now centuries later the angelic messenger, prophesies concerning the predecessor of Christ was thus completely confirmed.
 - 9.** What he will not be is Elijah.
 - a)** Matt. 11:7-15.

b) Luke 9:7-9.

c) John 1:21, 25.

(1) Those who heard John could think of only three persons whom John might claim to be -- the Messiah, the expected and promised prophet, or Elijah.

(2) We consider only the possibility of Elijah.

(a) It was the Jewish belief that before the Messiah came Elijah would return to herald his coming and to prepare the world to receive him.

(b) Particularly, Elijah was to come to arrange all disputes.

i) He would settle what things and what people were clean and unclean.

ii) He would settle who were Jews and who were not Jews.

iii) He would bring together again families that were estranged.

(c) So much did the Jews believe this that the traditional law said that money and property whose owners were disputed, or anything found whose owner was unknown, must wait "until Elijah comes."

(d) It was even believed that Elijah would anoint the Messiah to his kingly office, as all kings were anointed, and that he would raise the dead to share in the new kingdom.

d) John denied that any such honor was his.

II. What, then, is Elijah in the New Testament?

A. He was associated with Christ. Matt. 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:19.

B. He is a declarer of the universality of the gospel.

1. Luke 4:25-26

a) The reason that many did not acknowledge Christ as in other parts of Galilee is the well-known circumstance that a prophet or other exceptional person is never recognized and treated as a great man by those who know him well.

b) To prove that this is always the case Jesus refers to the instances of Elijah and Elisha, who also did not meet with the necessary acknowledgment among their own people and were consequently sent by God to pagans to bring salvation to them.

c) By this means Jesus proclaims plainly that unless the inhabitants of Nazareth and the Jewish people as a whole are going to accept him as

the promised Messiah, he will turn to the heathen.

d) In other words, salvation is not restricted to the sons of Abraham, but is for all the sons of Adam.

(1) Jesus did not come to save Jewry, but humanity.

(2) Your own history warns you that the Jews will be disbelieving and rejected while the Gentiles will be blessed.

2. Romans 11:1-14.

a) It is not our purpose to discuss Paul's discussion of the salvation of the Jews. (Those who wish to do so may find that discussion in the lessons on Romans at www.thywordistruth.com.)

b) Rather we wish to look at the use that Paul makes of Elijah.

(1) Paul asks his readers to remember Elijah's despondency when he thought that he alone was left; Jezebel had slain the prophets and prevented the appointment of others by destroying the altars.

(2) Yet God reminded Elijah that he had reserved unto himself a remnant of 7,000 men.

(3) This remnant was God's true people just as God had a remnant in the days of Paul and, as in the days of Elijah, the remnant was joined by the heathen who were blessed because of the fall of Israel.

C. He was a companion to Christ to prepare him for Calvary. Matt. 17:3ff; Mark 9:4ff; Luke 9:30ff.

1. Luke 9:30-31. 30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: 31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

a) In Jewish thought these two figures always stood for certain things.

(1) Moses was the greatest of all lawgivers; he was supremely and uniquely the man who brought God's law to men.

(a) Moses prayed for admission to Canaan.

(b) The request was denied, and yet here he is - all as he wished - within Palestine, surveying from no foreign Pisgah, but from one of its own mountains, the inheritance of his people.

(2) Elijah was the greatest of all the prophets; in him the voice of God spoke to men with unique directness.

b) These two men were the twin peaks of Israel's religious history and achievement.

- (1) It is as if the greatest figures in Israel's history came to Jesus,, as he was setting out on the last and greatest adventure into the unknown, and told him to go on.
 - (2) In them all history recognized Jesus as its own consummation.
 - (3) The greatest of the law-givers and the greatest of the prophets recognized Jesus as the one of whom they had dreamed, as the one of whom they had foretold.
 - (4) Their appearance was the signal for Jesus to go on.
 - (5) The greatest human figures witnessed to Jesus that he was on the right way and bade him go out on his exodus to Jerusalem and to Calvary.
2. The disciples fell asleep, and while they slept Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus and freely discussed the deep things of God.
- a) The subject discussed was important to each of the three.
 - (1) It was certainly important to Jesus because he was to be the sufferer.
 - (2) It was important to Moses and Elijah.
 - (a) They were certainly glorified saints, but all of this they had acquired in virtue of the Messiah's anticipated sufferings.
 - (b) Not a plant bloomed in their paradise, not a note thrilled in their songs, not a gem gleamed in their crowns, but was due to the decease that Christ would accomplish at Jerusalem.
 - b) The event confirmed the ancient prophetic dispensation.
 - (1) The ancient prophets speak of the Messiah indicating a strange union of the extremes of debasement and glory, very strikingly illustrated here.
 - (2) The ancient dispensation was marked with special care as to the quality of the sacrifices to be offered to God; here we see the shadow giving place to the substance; the victim is distinctively identified -- this is my beloved Son.
 - (3) The law and the prophets were continually holding forth some "better things" than themselves; now Moses and Elijah converse with Him showing the harmony of the whole, and they surrender, as it were, their commission into His hands, and then depart leaving Him the sole object on which the eye of the world should rest forever.
 - c) The event accomplished its purpose of strengthening Christ for the

ordeal before him.

- (1) The great human figures confirmed that he was on the right path.
- (2) The voice of God confirmed His Sonship and his authority.
- (3) It was the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration that enabled Jesus inflexibly to walk the way to the Cross.