

The Life and Times of Elijah and Elisha

Lesson One

Introduction

1. The Bible is the working out of God's plan for man's redemption.
 1. Gen. 3:15 contains the primal messianic prophecy.
 2. The remainder of scripture is the history of God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ.
 3. It is the first work of Paradise Lost (Garden of Eden) and Paradise Regained (the church and the Paradise of God).
2. Preparatory History.
 - + 1. Adam to Noah.
 - + 2. Noah to Abraham.
 - + 3. Abraham to Moses.
 - + 4. Moses to Elijah.
3. With the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, the establishment of Baal-worship as the state religion, and the attempted extermination of the prophets and followers of Jehovah, the apostasy of Israel reached its high point.
 1. As if to mark Israel's general disregard of the threatened judgment of God and the coming vindication of Jehovah's kingship, Scripture here inserts a notice of the daring rebuilding of the walls of Jericho and of the literal fulfillment of Joshua's curse upon its builder (1 Ki. 16:34; comp. Josh. 6:26).
 2. The land was now ripe for the sickle of God's judgment.
 1. Yet as the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, so it waited in the days of Ahab.
 2. As then, the preacher of righteousness had raised the voice of warning while giving evidence of coming destruction, so now was Elijah commissioned to present to the people of his age in symbolic deed the alternative of serving God or Baal, with all that that choice implied.
 3. The difference between Noah and Elijah was only that of times and circumstances.
 1. Noah was before and Elijah was after the giving of the Law.
 2. Noah was sent to an apostate world and Elijah was sent to an apostatizing covenant people.
 3. Ahab, Jezebel, Baal and Israel were on one side, arrayed against Jehovah and Elijah, his prophet.
 1. It was a question of reality and power.
 2. Elijah was the embodiment of the Divine Power, the minister of the

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Living and True God.

3. The contest between them could not be decided by words, but by deeds.
4. The Divine would become manifest in its reality and irresistible greatness, and whoever or whatever came in contact with it would, for good or evil, experience its Presence.
5. It is almost as if Elijah, in his prophetic capacity, was an impersonal being.
 1. Throughout his history other prophets were also employed on various occasions, but Elijah was only employed to do what no other had ever done and what no other could do.
 2. His path was alone, such as no other had trod or could tread.
 3. He was the impersonation of the Old Testament in one of its aspects -- that of grandeur and judgment -- the living realization of the topmost height of the mount, which burned with fire, around which lightnings played and thunder rolled, and from out of whose terrible glory spake the voice of Jehovah, the God of Israel.
6. We have the highest authority for saying that he was the type of John the Baptist.
 1. Chiefly in the respect that he lifted the axe to the root of the tree, yet, before it fell, called for fruits meet for repentance.
 2. Elijah was not the forerunner of the Lord, except in judgment.
 3. He was the forerunner of the King, not of the Kingdom.
 4. The destruction of the state and of the people of Israel, not the salvation of the world, followed upon his announcement.
4. A grander figure never stood out against the Old Testament sky than Elijah.
 1. As Israel's apostasy had reached its highest point in the time of Ahab, so the Old Testament antagonism to apostasy reached its highest point in the mission and person of Elijah.
 2. The analogy and parallelism between his history and that of Moses, even to minute details, is obvious when the two are compared.
 3. Jewish tradition extols him almost to the point of blasphemy, to show

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how absolutely God had delegated to Elijah his power, or as the Rabbis express it -- His three powers -- those of rain, of children, and of raising to life.

4. With special application of Hosea 12:13 to Moses and Elijah, Jewish tradition traces a very minute and instructive parallelism between the various incidents in the lives of Moses and Elijah (Yalkut, vol. 2, p. 32).
5. Moses and Elijah are the two Old Testament figures who appear on the Mount of Transfiguration.
3. Yet as much as Scripture tells about Elijah, we may have only outlines of his prophetic greatness before us.
 1. By his side others, even Elisha, seem small.
 2. As we view him as Jehovah's representative, his unswerving faithfulness to, and absolutely fearless discharge of his trust, stand out.
 3. And yet this strong man had his hours of weakness and loneliness, as when he fled before Ahab and Jezebel, and would have laid down to die in the wilderness.
 4. As we recall his almost unlimited power, we learn that its spring was in constant prayer.
 5. He demonstrated unbending sternness and sharp irony on Mt. Carmel.
 6. But we also learn that deep in his heart there were soft and warm feelings as when he made himself the guest of the poor widow and by prayer brought her son back to life.
4. Elijah's first appearance, in its manner and suddenness, was emblematic of all that was to follow.
 1. We know next to nothing of his birth and early circumstances.
 1. Josephus (Antiquities, viii, 13, 2) assumes that the Tishbah which gave him his name (1 Ki. 17:1) lay on the eastern side of Jordan, in the land of Gilead.
 2. Most likely is the generally accepted view that his birth place was the Tishbi in upper Galilee (within the territory of Naphtali).
 3. Another inference as to his character may be drawn from his name, Elijah, that means "My God, Jehovah."
 2. With the same, or perhaps with even more unexpectedness and

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- strangeness than that which characterized the appearance of John the Baptist -- and with precisely the same object in it -- Elijah suddenly presented himself in Samaria before Ahab.
3. We can imagine the stern figure of Elijah, arrayed in an upper garment of black camel's hair (2 Ki. 1:8, "a hairy man" is questionable) and loins girt with a leathern girdle.
 1. This seems to have become the distinctive garb of the prophets (Zech. 13:4).
 2. The dress betokened poverty, renunciation of the world, mourning, almost stern judgment, while the girdle, which, as the badge of the office, always the richest part of the dress, was such as was worn by the poorest in the land.
 3. When he reached the height where the palace stood and met Ahab, his message to the King was abrupt and curt -- a repetition of Jehovah's judgment upon an apostate people with this addition -- the cessation of dew and rain except by Elijah's word.
 4. This addition was perhaps intended to emphasize the impotence of Ahab's prophets and priests as against Jehovah.
 5. Elijah withdraws as suddenly as he appeared.
 1. His first direction was to the waddy Cherith, probably east of Jordan.
 2. In this wild solitude, like Moses, even like Jesus himself, Elijah was alone with God to plead for Israel and to prepare for his further work.
 3. When Cherith failed, Elijah was directed to Zaraphath where his sustenance was perhaps more amazing than the ravens -- the widow of Zaraphath.
 5. The life and times of Elijah cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the miraculous in Scripture.
 1. Elijah's work was done in the period of the commencing decline in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, though the decline of Judah was retarded by the gracious faithfulness of God in regard to the house of David, and by seasons of temporary repentance on the part of the people.
 1. The special interest of this period was critical to the future of the nations.

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2. Its history also bears evidence in the more marked interpositions (self-manifestations) on the part of God, whether by more emphatic evidence of His constant presence and claims, or in the more continuous mission and direct qualifications of the prophets whom he commissioned.
3. This accounts for the intensified miraculous character of the period, notably on the part of Elijah and Elisha.
2. The miraculous in the work of Elijah and Elisha was a great progression toward the perfections of the New Testament.
 1. In the beginning of the Old Testament the miraculous is introduced and then promptly disappears.
 2. The patriarchal history (notably that of Isaac and Jacob), has comparatively less of the miraculous.
 3. It appears in the desert history of Israel and on their entrance into the promised land.
 4. It disappears again in great measure to appear again in a manner altogether unprecedented at a comparatively advanced time, when the history of Israel runs parallel to the trustworthy records of other nations as perpetuated on their monuments and records.
 5. The miraculous now stands with increasing clearness in direct connection with moral relationship towards God.
 1. The miraculous interventions are now not so much on behalf of Israel as such, but whether in judgment or in mercy, with direct application to Israel's moral and spiritual condition.
 2. This points to the perfectness of the New Testament, in which the relation of God to each soul, as well as to the church, and the spiritual condition of the soul and of the church; the outward and the inward are correlative.
 3. Thus, in the wider application, these miraculous elements in the history of Israel are themselves prophecies of which the fulfillment is in Christ.