

Elijah and Elisha Class 1
Introduction

This year we will be studying the lives and ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who become towering figures in the books of 1&2 Kings. They also serve as types of the One to come as well as penultimate fulfillments of Deut 18:15.

It is important first to understand a bit of the kind of literature the books of the Kings represent as well as the role of the OT prophet.

OT and NT are stylized communication intended to evoke a response. They are written according to ancient Near Eastern formulas of international treaty documents between kings and kingdoms. It is helpful to remember that Moses was raised in the court of one of the great kings of the ancient Near East, Pharaoh of Egypt, as an adopted son, of the crown princess...perhaps of the most famous female ruler in all of Egypt's storied past...Hatshepsut. Drs. Kline and Kitchen, I believe, have proven conclusively that the Torah or Pentateuch or the Five books of Moses were written according to the Suzerainty Covenant Form as it existed in the second millennium BC. This does not prove Mosaic authorship but it certainly does not rule it out.

The Form consisted of

Preamble to introduce the parties to the covenant

Historical Prologue to document the historical relationship between the parties and to magnify the greatness of the Great King and the obligation of the lesser king.

The Stipulations or Commands or specific obligations of the vassal king and people.

The Sanctions or Blessings for obedience and Curses for disobedience.

The Documentary Clause protecting the text and warning of unauthorized amendments as well directing the proper storage and reading or review of the text.

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These documents served as a constitutional document from which was expected to flow a documentation of the covenant relationship or case law. As covenant violations occurred judicial encounters were brought forward in what are known as a Riv or lawsuit or controversy. The Riv also had a form.

Prologue Identifying the parties to the lawsuit.

Judicial Interrogative...What have you done?

Indictment...a listing and documenting of the covenant violations...reviewing the specific commands that had been violated.

The threat of covenant sanctions or Curses for violations as well as sometimes the reminder of the restoration of relationship and blessing upon repentance and restitution, according to the specific sanctions of the constitutional document...in this case Deuteronomy.

There are two stages to the lawsuit. Stage 1 where repentance is possible and Stage 2 where judgment is certain.

The Riv is primarily the work of Prophetic literature. Prophets were not so much seers into the future as they were prosecutors of God's covenant lawsuit with his people Israel and their leadership. The futures the Prophets laid out were not fabrications of their own minds but rather they were explications and immediate applications of the sanctions of the covenant.

Prophetic literature, until about the time we are considering, took the form of Royal court records...almost transcript like. These OT books are often taught as Historical Books but are understood by Jews as the Former Prophets. These books consist of Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings. Prophets begin to write their own books during the period of the rise of the Assyrian Empire, which is the period we are studying...around the 9th Century BC.

The books of 1&2 Kings are traditionally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah in ancient Jewish circles. They originally circulated as a single book. They describe the period of the monarchy, hence the title. They provide a theological interpretation of the history of the Jewish nation in light of the covenant relationship with Yahweh. The phrasing of Kings is

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dependent on the book of Deuteronomy...see Deut 8:6 (walking in his ways); 11:1 (keep the charge of the Lord your God); 6:2 (keeping all his statutes and his commandments); 29:9 (that you may prosper in all you do); 9:25 (that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers) 4:29 (with all your heart and all your soul). This kind of language appears throughout 1&2 Kings. The material of the court records are combined with material about the lives and ministries of Elijah and Elisha which were likely retained in oral form by the school of the prophets.

As God raised up Judges in times of crisis prior to the monarchy, during the monarchy God uses the office of the prophet to call his people through their leaders to repentance. The prophets are not simply political commentators like our political pundits but are in fact summoned into God's presence to hear the Lord's complaint and to receive the Lord's message, to be delivered verbatim to the King. The office of the prophet is established in Deut 18 along with the expectation that God would raise up a prophet...like Moses.

Background: Following the Division of the Kingdom there was The Period of Civil Strife

The Civil War that was delayed through the ministry of the prophet 1 Kings 12:21-24 did eventually break out, see 1 Kings 14:30. The war continued until they were forced together through a common enemy, Syria; see 1 Kings 15:16 and 1 Kings 22:1-4, 29. A Royal marriage between the Northern King's daughter and the Southern King's son, cemented the alliance 2 Kings 8:18. The war came to an end 1 Kings 22:44.

The Northern Kingdom had other struggles just to maintain unity. Jeroboam 1 felt he had to create his own cult to deemphasize Jerusalem as the center of religious life for the nation. 1 Kings 12:25-27 so he set up rival shrines in Dan and Bethel and commanded the people to worship there, 1 Kings 12:28, 29.

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The two golden calves set up at opposite ends of the kingdom proved fatal. They lured the people away from trusting in the one true God. 1 Kings 13:34.

Outward idolatry led to inward corruption and societal decay. Each king was threatened by plots and plotters within the House of Israel. Since God was not selecting their rulers, the throne of the Northern Kingdom was usually occupied by a murderer who would stop at nothing to rule. Nadab, who succeeded Jeroboam 1, ruled for 2 years and became the victim of the plot hatched by Baasha, 1 Kings 15:25-30. Baasha was succeeded by his son, Elah, who after 2 years was killed by one of his chariot officers 1 Kings 16:8-13. Zimri, Elah's assassin, ruled for 7 days and committed suicide and saved Omri, the people's choice, the job of murdering him. Omri, ruled for 12 years and was replaced by his son, Ahab, 1 Kings 16:29-30, perhaps the most infamous of Israel's kings.

Internal weakness brought about external attacks. Judah had so been so hard pressed by attacks from the North they entered into an alliance with Ben-Hadad of Syria, 1 Kings 15:16-19. The Syrian king was happy to oblige and wreaked havoc on Israel, 1 Kings 15:20-21. But just like Lebanon today, when the war was over the Syrians stayed! Syria threatened Israel's independence from Baasha's reign through Omri's. Not until Ahab came to the throne was this threat thrown off, 1 Kings 20:1-30. Ahab permitted a remnant of the Syrians to go free, including their king, only to battle with them again three years later, 1 Kings 22:1-4, 29-36.

The North had a death struggle with Paganism

Though Ahab had temporarily rid Israel of Syria he brought a more deadly enemy into the land, Baalism. Israel had dealt with this pagan cult before but never to the same degree. Seeking to secure Israel, Ahab married Jezebel and for a wedding present built her an altar for her gods in the center of Samaria, 1 Kings 16:31-33.

Jezebel, was a princess of Sidon, and priestess of the Baal cult. Their gods were Baal, Astarte, Asherah, Anat, and multitude of lesser

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gods. They represented the functions of nature and fertility. Its aim was to produce fertility in the soil, flocks and in man. All such religions involve sacred prostitution of both sexes and orgiastic practices and ecstatic experiences. Rather than trusting God to provide for Israel, Israel looked to control and manipulate the forces of nature for their own ends. We become like the gods we worship so the objects of our worship matter and shape individuals and societies. If Israel embraced Baalism it would be the end of her and the end of her mission. So God sent his prophets to warn the people of the monster in their midst.

Elijah and Elisha denounced Israel's identification with Baal. See 1 Kings 18:17,18. Elijah denounced the king and his pagan queen but he also made his case to the people of Israel, see 1 Kings 18:21.

Then came the inevitable showdown between the Lord and Baal and the demonstration that there is only one God worthy of their devotion and only God able to deliver his people. See 1 Kings 18:19-46.

Elijah's successor was Elisha and was God's instrument in purging Ahab's house, 2 Kings 9:1-37. These prophets pronounced God's judgment upon all who persisted in their vain pursuit of Baal. Yet it was still stage 1 of their lawsuit, repentance was still possible. While God's judgment of the nation became increasingly certain hope was still preached to the remnant.

The Period of Wealth and Prosperity

With temporary peace Omri and Ahab enacted trade relations that helped Israel economically, 1 Kings 16:24; 20:31-34. Ahab cemented Israel's relationship with Phoenicia and wealth began to flow into the Northern Kingdom as was not seen since the days of Solomon.

Homework read 1 Kings.