

***PROMISED LAND 2: Lesson Eight,***  
***The Ministries of Elijah and Elisha***  
***1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 13***

**Subject:** Elijah and Elisha were God’s spokesmen in an exceptionally decadent period in Israel’s history.

**Main Idea:** Believers should be living signposts that point others to God.

**Principles:**

1. *The word of God is our final authority and it directs us to worship Him alone.*
2. *Miracles themselves do not save people; the gospel saves people.*

### Introduction

I am sometimes amused by roadside signage. In very large letters, one sign reads, “CAUTION. This sign has SHARP EDGES. Do not touch the edges of this sign.” In tiny letters below are the words, “The Bridge Is Out Ahead.” Another sign warns, “Touching Wires Causes Instant Death. \$200 fine.” When I learned to drive at age 16, I had to learn to identify certain signs with pictures but no words. I was told these were “international” signs, yet when I moved to Europe about ten years later, the so-called international signs looked entirely different! There is one, however, that no one can misunderstand: the big, flashing arrow, pointing drivers away from construction, sharp turns in the road, and other such hazards. As I read about the lives and ministries of Elijah and Elisha, I can’t help but think of those arrows. Like living neon signs, Elijah and Elisha pointed a society in Israel that had grown desperately wicked away from the danger of idolatry and back to the living God. No one could miss their message.

In many places in the world today, knowledge of the true and living God has been or is being snuffed out. People are confused about what to believe and there are plenty of neon signs offering answers: Hollywood (and other television and movie-making centers) points us toward self-gratification. Politicians and special interest groups point us in the ways that best suit their agendas. Educators sometimes point us to higher education as the solution to our problems. Meanwhile, God is looking for a few Elijahs and Elishas, a few living signposts. He expects our words and actions to point people to Him.

When reference is made to the Biblical prophets, perhaps we think first of those whose words have been preserved in a book of the Bible that carries their name, like Isaiah or Jeremiah. However, the tradition of Biblical prophecy predates those so-called “classical” or literary prophets. Elijah and Elisha are part of a group sometimes referred to as *nonliterary* prophets, since we have no book of the Bible named for them. But we would be mistaken to conclude that they were less important in Israel’s history than the writing prophets. Elijah and Elisha were God’s spokesmen in a period of Israel’s history that was exceptionally decadent. A full one-third of the books of Kings are devoted to them. In terms of the importance of their roles, Elijah stands shoulder to shoulder with Moses. Until the birth of John the Baptist, no other prophet of Israel had equal significance.

## I. The Ministry of Elijah – 1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 2

### A. Ahab and Jezebel

- i. From Syncretism to a New State Religion: King Ahab was more evil than any of Israel's previous kings. He married Jezebel, a princess of Phoenicia. The Phoenicians were the northwestern neighbors of Israel and were known for their wealth, deviant behavior, and vile worship practices. Jezebel's father was Ethbaal. His name means, "I'm with Baal" or "Baal exists." According to Menander, the Greek historian of Phoenicia, Ethbaal was not only king of the Sidonians but also was a high priest of Astarte (whose worship is equated with Baalism). This seems to explain Jezebel's zeal for Baalism. Long before she married Ahab, the northern kingdom of Israel had become syncretistic, worshipping Yahweh and Jeroboam's golden calves simultaneously. While it appears that Ahab was himself syncretistic (worshipping both Yahweh and Baal), by the time Elijah arrived on the scene, Jezebel had a temple built for Baal in Israel's capital city of Samaria and had made great progress in making Baalism Israel's new state religion. "Her successes moved Israel beyond tolerance of high places and syncretism to outright worship of another god."<sup>i</sup>
- ii. Execution of the Lord's Prophets: Jezebel attempted to kill all those who opposed her. Perhaps we again see her father's influence, since (according to Menander) Ethbaal murdered his way to the throne. Specifically, Jezebel wanted the prophets of the Lord executed – all of them! She had made such progress that, by the time Elijah fled from her, he was under the impression that he was the only remaining prophet of the Lord. However, the Lord had reserved a remnant of 7,000 individuals in Israel who had remained faithful to Him (1 Kings 19:14, 18).

### B. Baalism

- i. Who Was Baal? The Hebrew word translated *Baal* means "owner" or "lord."<sup>ii</sup> When the Israelites entered Canaan, they found every piece of land had its own deity, its "owner." There were many Baals. The gods of individual localities had appropriate surnames, such as Baal-Peor (Numbers 25:3), Baal-Hazor (2 Samuel 13: 23), Baal-Zebub (2 Kings 1:1-6), Baal-Zephon (Exodus 14:2, 9), and Baal-Dagon (Judges 16:23).
- ii. What Was Involved in Baal Worship?
  1. Baal worship was the most degraded religious system ever devised, and Phoenician Baalism was the worst of the lot. Some have proposed that the Phoenician coast was settled by refugees from Sodom and Gomorrah who fled when their cities were destroyed, bringing their depraved culture with them (Genesis 19). When the Romans (hardly models of virtue themselves) encountered Baalism at Carthage, a Phoenician colony, they were appalled by the degree of sexual perversion and aggression.<sup>iii</sup>

2. Baal was the storm god and also the god of fertility. Baal worshippers believed that fertility for their fields, flocks and families resulted from the frequent sexual intercourse Baal had with his female consorts, principally Anat (although Asherah, the mother goddess, was also one of Baal's consorts). They believed that by emulating these gods, they could be guaranteed productive harvests, large flocks, herds, and livestock, and also sizable families. Male and female prostitutes who served Baal at the "high places" were considered sons and daughters of the gods and available to Baal worshippers for this purpose.
3. The Canaanites and Phoenicians also believed that Baal descended into the netherworld, the domain of the god Mot, as part of the cycle of seasons. "In order to bring Baal up from the realm of Mot and thus ensure initiation of the fertile rainy season, the Canaanites engaged in orgiastic worship that included human sacrifice as well as sexual rites (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4–6)."<sup>iv</sup>

### **C. Elijah's Contest with the Prophets of Baal – 1 Kings 17-19**

#### **i. Elijah's Introduction**

1. The Israelites were God's representatives. They had God's word and were to bless all nations with words and actions that helped others know Him. If they completely stopped worshipping the Lord, His plan of salvation would have been (humanly speaking) at risk. Therefore, the Lord sent Elijah to call the Israelites back to Him and to expose Baal as nonexistent. As H.H. Rowley observed, "Without Moses the religion of Yahweh as it figured in the Old Testament would never have been born. Without Elijah it would have died."<sup>v</sup>
2. Unlike the great prophets Moses and Samuel, we know nothing of Elijah's background, except that he was from Tishbe in Gilead (that is, the Transjordan). Apparently, his parents were among the remnant of true believers in the land, for their son's name means, "Yahweh is my God." In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah simply appears on the scene, sent to Ahab by the Lord to announce a prolonged drought. Of course, a drought that was ongoing would have directly undermined belief in Baal's power, since he was (supposedly) the god of storms (rain) and fertility.

#### **ii. The Great Drought – 1 Kings 17**

1. After Elijah made his announcement, the Lord sent him into hiding. Elijah drank from a brook at the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and was supernaturally supplied with food carried by ravens.

2. When the brook dried up, the Lord sent Elijah out of Israel, to the home of a widow in Sidon. Ironically, this was the region from which Jezebel came, the very heart of Baalism. The Lord's miraculous provision for Elijah through this foreign widow shows His concern for people outside Israel and His supreme power in the land that the Sidonians believed belonged to Baal.
3. Chapter 17 also showcases the prophetic powers of Elijah. The widow and her son had been starving prior to Elijah's promise of ongoing miraculous provision. Later, when the woman's son became ill and died, the Lord answered Elijah's prayers and brought the boy back to life.

iii. The God of Rain – 1 Kings 18

1. After three years of drought, the Lord sent Elijah back to Ahab to announce that rain would finally come to the land. The announcement was important because it showed that rain came at the command of the Lord, not through Baal. En route, Elijah encountered Ahab's palace administrator, Obadiah (not to be confused with the Obadiah who has a Biblical book of prophecy named for him). Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord and had secretly hidden some of the Lord's prophets from Jezebel.
2. Elijah not only announced that the Lord would send rain but, at the Lord's bidding (18:36), determined to *prove* that the Lord was the source. He challenged the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah to a contest on Mount Carmel and ordered Ahab to gather all Israel as witnesses. Once all were gathered, Elijah boldly addressed the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (18:21). As Jesus affirmed, centuries later, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Elijah and the prophets of Baal were given everything they needed for a sacrifice, with the exception of fire. According to the rules of the contest, they would both call on their gods and the one who answered by fire would prove his existence and superiority.
3. Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to choose which of the two bulls would be their sacrifice and to call on their god first. With so many of them gathered, they surely believed their storm god would send lightening to light the sacrifice. However, despite all their frenetic activity from morning until evening, "there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention" (18:29).

4. When it was time for the evening sacrifice required by the Mosaic Law, Elijah repaired the Lord's long-ignored altar and dug a trench around it. Three times, he had four large jars of water poured over his sacrifice and the wood beneath it, until the water filled the trench. Then, Elijah called on the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. "Let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again" (18:36-37). Fire from the Lord fell and not only burned up the offering and the wood but also stones and soil and licked up the water in the trench.
  5. Elijah had the people slaughter the priests of Baal. Meanwhile, he began to pray for rain. He sent his servant seven times to look toward the sea for any sign. On the seventh occasion, a very tiny cloud was rising from the sea. As Ahab set out in his chariot for his winter palace in Jezreel, the power of the Lord came on Elijah and he outran the chariot.
- iv. Elijah's Depression and Flight to Mount Horeb – 1 Kings 19
1. *Flight*: Jezebel was as committed to Baal as Elijah was to Yahweh. When she heard about the outcome of the contest and the execution of her prophets, she swore to kill Elijah. When he heard this, the courageous man who had taken on the king of Israel and 850 idolatrous prophets in a public showdown suddenly became afraid and ran.
  2. *Fear and Discouragement*
    - a. According to James 5:17, "Elijah was a human being, even as we are." In 1 Kings 19, we find proof that Elijah was indeed just a man. No doubt, he was physically and emotionally exhausted from the contest. Perhaps, he was also surprised and disappointed that Ahab and Jezebel were not overthrown. Utterly depressed, his faith was replaced by fear. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us when we think we are standing firm to be careful that we do not fall. Among other temptations, spiritual victories often seem to be followed by periods of discouragement.
    - b. Elijah was so depressed that he dismissed his servant, went a day's journey alone into the wilderness, and prayed that he might die. He was not the only Bible character to have felt this way. Moses, Job, Jeremiah, and Jonah all had this experience (Numbers 11:15, Job 3:20-21, Jeremiah 8:3, Jonah 4:3).

### 3. *Provision*

- a. The Lord met Elijah's needs in several ways. Elijah slept soundly and was provided miraculously with two good meals. Then, the Lord sent him to Horeb (another name for Sinai, where Moses also met with God) and there, God met Elijah's deepest need through His word.
- b. The Lord's first word to Elijah was to ask why he was there. Elijah expressed his fear, sense of loneliness, and discouragement over the state of Israel.
- c. Following a powerful display of the elements, the Lord spoke to Elijah again. This word came in the form of a "gentle whisper" (19:12). Some have suggested that the elements and the gentle whisper signified part of God's message to Elijah. One suggestion is that, although God had used him in bold ways in the past, He was giving Elijah a gentler role in the future (through the training of Elisha). Another suggestion is that Elijah was being shown not to expect the Lord to work exclusively through mighty miracles. Considering Elijah's state of mind, perhaps it is best to simply conclude that God's quiet voice of comfort was what Elijah needed to hear more than anything else.
- d. The Lord told Elijah that He was not done using him ("go back the way you came" [19:15]). Although the contest on Mount Carmel dealt a blow to Baalism in Israel, it had not put an end to it. The Lord sent Elijah to anoint three individuals who would put to death those who were threatening His prophets. Over a period of many years, Hazael, king of Aram, Jehu (Ahab's replacement), and Elisha, Elijah's new attendant accomplished this.
- e. Although Elijah felt alone, the Lord assured him that he was not. 7000 of his fellow Israelites had not bowed their knees to Baal. Additionally, Elisha would provide him with human companionship.

### **D. Elijah's Other Activities**

#### i. A Voice to the Kings

1. According to 1 Kings 21, Elijah encountered Ahab on at least one other occasion. At that time, he foretold the end of Ahab's dynasty, the deaths of all Ahab's male descendants, and that dogs would devour Jezebel's body (verses 21-24).
2. After Ahab's death, Elijah intercepted the messengers of Ahab's son Ahaziah and also told foretold his death (2 Kings 1:16).

3. Although Elijah's ministry was primarily in Israel (the northern kingdom), 2 Chronicles 21 tells of a letter he sent to Jehoram, king of Judah, confronting him for putting his brothers to death and leading Judah into idolatry (verses 1-15).
- ii. Elijah and Moses: Enoch is the only individual besides Elijah that the Bible records as having gone to heaven without experiencing death, yet it is not Enoch but Moses with whom scholars often compare Elijah. Moses and Elijah were Israel's spiritual leaders at critical times in Israel's history. Both were men of faith and prayer, and committed to monotheism. Both were prophets and mighty miracle workers. Both met with God on Mount Horeb (Sinai) and both were fed supernaturally. The lives of both men ended in mysterious ways (Deuteronomy 34:4-7) and both appeared together at Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13). Together, these two men represent the Old Testament: Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets.

**Summary Statement:** Elijah pointed Israel back to Yahweh by speaking the word of the Lord to them and by responding to the word of the Lord when he received it.

The phrase "*the word of the Lord*" is mentioned ten times in connection with Elijah in these chapters. When he was so discouraged that he wanted to die, it was the word of the Lord that Elijah needed most. The word of the Lord was also what the Israelites needed to hear. Nevertheless, it was Jezebel's voice to which they were listening.

Although we may like to think of ourselves as independent thinkers, in reality, we are all easily influenced. The Bible repeatedly portrays people as sheep who need a shepherd. As a result of technology, people today are influenced as never before by the voices of movie stars, singers, broadcasters, politicians and advertisers. Subtly (and sometimes not so subtly), they attempt to influence the way we think, how we feel, and what we prioritize. I wonder, are these voices louder in our ears than the word of the Lord?

Jezebel's influential voice was heard loudly and clearly in Israel. By encouraging participation in the lewd worship of Baal, she attempted to free the Israelites from their moral inhibitions. Sadly, as we will see in the next lesson, the Israelites discovered that moral freedom only led them into bondage (2 Kings 17:6-23). If only they had listened to the word of the Lord given by the prophets!

**Principle:** *The word of God is our final authority and it directs us to worship Him alone.*

**Application:** Which voices are influencing you and *what or whom are they directing you to worship?* An idol is anything that is worshipped "ahead of, instead of, or alongside God."<sup>vi</sup>

It is imperative that we conduct ongoing inventories of the voices that influence our thinking and the objects of worship they promote. Have you been taught to prize accomplishments, including your daily “to do” list (whether written or mental), more than communicating with the living God? Do you think more frequently or with greater fondness about your next meal than you do about the Lord? Do you fear bad luck, magic, or evil spirits more than you fear the Lord? Is self-worship a cultural phenomenon that you may have bought into? Do your parents, your spouse, or your children hold the place in your heart that belongs to God alone? Upon whom or what have you learned to rely for help in trouble?

The word of the Lord is the final authority of believers and it directs us to worship Him *alone*, not alongside other idols. *Only He can possess us without destroying us.* What do others conclude that we worship by listening to our conversations and observing our priorities? Are we pointing them in the right direction?

**Transition:** Elisha carried on the work that Elijah had begun.

## II. The Ministry of Elisha – 1 Kings 19 – 2 Kings 13

### A. The Company of the Prophets

- i. Nature of the Company of Prophets: The first Biblical mention of a “company” (or group) of prophets occurs in connection with Saul (1 Samuel 10:5, 10-12, 19:20). In 1 and 2 Kings, this group is referred to as the “sons of the prophets.” Apparently, the “sons (or company) of the prophets” were young men who were the disciples of an older prophet (2 Kings 5:22; 9:1, 4). Some scholars believe that formal schools were instituted for their training. Although some of these “companies” may have lived together in community (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 15; 4:38; 6:1-2), it is also possible that the training was of a less formal nature.
- ii. Role of Elisha and the Company of Prophets: According to 1 Kings 18:4, Jezebel had killed many of the Lord’s prophets and most of the rest had gone into hiding. However, by the time Elisha ministered, the prophetic guilds appear to have gathered openly. Nevertheless, Baalism was still alive and well in Israel. Elisha and the company of prophets continued to be used by the Lord to point the people back to Himself.

### B. Passing of the Mantle – 2 Kings 2

- i. Elijah’s Translation
  1. In some way that is not explained, the company of the prophets knew that the Lord was about to translate Elijah from earth to heaven (2:1, 3, 5). Perhaps, they knew simply because they were prophets.
  2. As Elijah made a final journey from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan River, he repeatedly told Elisha to stay behind, but



Elisha refused. He may have been testing Elisha's trustworthiness as his successor.

3. When the two arrived at the Jordan, Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up, and struck the water. Reminiscent of crossing of the Red Sea in Moses' time (Exodus 14:16-31), the Jordan divided and Elijah and Elisha crossed on dry ground.
  4. After they crossed, Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he was taken. Elisha replied, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit" (2:9). Firstborn sons traditionally received a double portion of their father's inheritance and also the privilege of family leadership. Elisha was asking to be Elijah's firstborn in a spiritual sense. He may also have been asking for the position of leadership over the company of prophets, but since he presumably knew he was Elijah's successor, it seems more likely that he was just asking for the spiritual power he would need to fill Elijah's large shoes. Elijah told Elisha that if Elisha saw him when he was taken, that would be a sign indicating his request was granted.
  5. Unexpectedly, a chariot of fire and horses of fire (signs of God's power) appeared and separated Elisha from Elijah. Then, Elisha saw Elijah being swept up to heaven in a whirlwind. Even in Elijah's death, the Lord gave evidence through the whirlwind that He, not Baal, is the God of storms.
  6. Elisha cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" In that day, chariots and horses were the most powerful of military weapons. Elisha was mourning the loss of a man who had been the spiritual power driving Israel from Baal to Yahweh. He was mourning his own personal loss as well as Israel's loss.
- ii. Elisha, Elijah's Successor: As an indication that he understood he was indeed Elijah's successor, Elisha picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah, struck and divided the Jordan (as Elijah had done), and retraced the steps of their last journey (2:18, 23, 4:38).

### C. Elisha's Miracles – 2 Kings 2-9

- i. Comparison to Those of Elijah and Jesus: Except for the Lord Jesus, more miracles are attributed to Elisha than to anyone else in the Bible.
  1. Some of Elisha's miracles were the same as those of Elijah. For example, both men provided food supernaturally for a widow in distress (1 Kings 17:7-16, 2 Kings 4:1-7), both raised a boy from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:8-37), both divided waters (2 Kings 2:8, 14), and both called down a curse from heaven that immediately fell on those who threatened them (2 Kings 1:9-12, 2:23-25).

2. Elisha's miracles are also reminiscent of the signs given by Jesus. Elisha raised a widow's son from the dead (2 Kings 4:32-36); Jesus also raised a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). Elisha healed Naaman of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14); Jesus healed a man of leprosy (Luke 5:12-13). Elisha suspended the laws of nature by making the head of an ax float in water (2 Kings 6:1-6); Jesus walked on water (Mark 6:45-50). Elisha miraculously fed a large crowd (2 Kings 4:42-44); Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed 5,000 (Mark 6:30-44).

ii. Other Miracles

1. Of course, Jesus performed many other miracles. Elisha also performed a few others: he healed the bad waters of a town (2 Kings 2:19-22), cleansed a bad pot of stew so that it was edible (2 Kings 4:38-41), transferred leprosy from one man to another (2 Kings 5:25-27), blinded an entire army (2 Kings 6:18-20), and was involved in two victories of Israel over enemy armies, one in which a valley was filled with water (2 Kings 3:16-24) and another in which Israel's enemy was mysteriously frightened away by the sound of chariots and horses (2 Kings 7:5-7). On another occasion, Elisha asked the Lord to open the eyes of his servant so that the servant could see the heavenly armies surrounding them (2 Kings 6:15-17).
2. 2 Kings 2:23-25 tells of a group of young men who jeered at Elisha, calling him "baldy." Although some older translations refer to them as "little children," scholar Walter Kaiser explains that the Hebrew expression is best rendered "young men," indicating boys that were between twelve and thirty years of age. Since this apparently took place early in Elisha's career, while he was relatively young, it is unlikely that Elisha was actually bald. Perhaps they were making reference to some mark Elisha took to represent his prophetic role. Their taunts, "Go on up" (get out of here) may also have been a disrespectful reference to their disbelief in Elijah's translation, as if to say, "Blast off! Blast off! You go too. Get out of here. We are tired of both of you."<sup>vii</sup> Given the spiritual climate of Israel at the time, it is hardly surprising that these young men had so little respect for the Lord and His spokesmen. Elisha called down a curse on the youths and a bear came out of the woods and mauled 42 of them.

- iii. Periods of Miracles in the Bible: The Bible is full of miracles, but interestingly, most of them occurred at three specific times of transition or crisis: the days of Moses (when Israel did not really know her God and had been greatly influenced by the gods of Egypt), the time of Elijah and Elisha (when God’s plan to use Israel was most at risk because of their idolatry), and the time of Christ. Jesus’ miracles and those performed early in church history authenticated His message and validated this new “Way” that the disciples taught after Jesus’ ascension. David Howard points out that this clustering of Biblical miracles at certain times and places may be a reason to be less perplexed today about why miracles seem to have occurred in certain postbiblical times and places, while they have been more scarce in others.<sup>viii</sup>

#### **D. Elisha’s Involvement in National and International Affairs – 2 Kings 3, 6-9**

In addition to being a miracle worker, Elisha was also God’s spokesman to kings. Elijah had attempted to influence Ahab, but Elisha was primarily active during the reign of Ahab’s son Joram (also known as Jehoram).

##### i. Elisha and Joram, King of Israel – 2 Kings 3, 6, 8

1. Although Joram had Elisha’s help, he largely ignored it. In 2 Kings 3, Joram asked Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to go to war with him against the Moabites. When the kings of Israel and Judah and their armies ran out of water, both kings (and the king of Edom who was fighting with them) sought Elisha’s assistance. Elisha told them that the Lord would fill the valley with pools of water. Not only did this provide water for their armies, but when the Moabites saw the water reflected at a distance, it looked red to them (like blood) and they wrongly assumed the three kings’ armies had slaughtered one another.
2. On another occasion, Elisha blinded the Aramean army and led them to Joram (2 Kings 6:18-23).
3. Later, the king of Aram laid siege to Samaria and Elisha foretold the end of the siege (2 Kings 6:24 – 7:2).
4. One particular incident shows how influential Elisha had become. King Joram asked Elisha’s servant Gehazi for information about the great things Elisha had done. Just as Gehazi finished telling him about the widow’s son whom Elisha raised from the dead, the widow happened to come into the palace to make an appeal to have her land restored to her. Merely on the basis of Elisha’s reputation, Joram granted the widow’s request.

- ii. Elisha and Naaman – 2 Kings 5: Elisha became involved in another international affair when he healed Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army, of leprosy.

- iii. Elisha and Jehu, King of Israel – 2 Kings 9-10: Elisha was involved in ending Ahab’s dynasty. The Lord had told *Elijah* to anoint Jehu as Israel’s new king. Elijah passed that responsibility to Elisha and Elisha fulfilled it via a messenger (9:1-10). Jehu put to death Ahab’s descendants and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 19:17; 2 Kings 9-10).
- iv. The Fulfillment of Elisha’s Prediction Concerning Hazael – 2 Kings 8, 13: The Lord had also told Elijah to anoint Hazael king of Aram. Again, Elisha was the one who fulfilled this instruction. Hazael was sent to Elisha by the ill king of Aram, Ben-Hadad (8:7-15). Elisha surprised Hazael by telling him that he would succeed Ben-Hadad. Elisha was grieved by the events he foresaw regarding Hazael’s treatment of Israel (those events were fulfilled in 2 Kings 13, when Hazael oppressed Israel in the days of King Jehoahaz).
- v. Elisha’s Deathbed – 2 Kings 13
  1. Elisha prophesied on his deathbed, telling Jehoash, king of Israel, of the number of times he would defeat Aram. Jehoash wept over him, using the same words Elisha had used concerning Elijah: “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” (13:14). Elisha was indeed Elijah’s worthy successor.
  2. His final miracle occurred after his death. The body of another dead man was accidentally thrown on top of Elisha’s bones and the man came to life and stood up on his feet! (13:20-21)

**Summary Statement:** God’s spokesman Elisha was a living signpost who pointed people inside and outside Israel to God. He often did so through miracles.

The subject of miracles is often discussed by theologians and apologists but is of no less interest to the common person. As already mentioned, the miracles in the Bible seem to be largely clustered around specific times of crisis or transition for the purpose of authenticating God’s message. Apologist Norman Geisler believes that since the divine revelation of the Bible is now complete, no reason exists for individuals today to have the God-given *gift* of performing miracles (such as was given to Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and the apostles). Most who share his view do not claim that miracles no longer occur, but rather that the “*sign gift*” (the ability to “raise the dead on command... heal diseases immediately that were naturally incurable... instantly exorcise evil spirits... and pass on supernatural gifts to others to assist them in their mission”<sup>ix</sup>) ceased after the death of the apostles and their close associates. Since they view the gift of miracle-working to have ceased, those who take such a view are referred to as “cessationists.”

Although the church is divided regarding the issue of “sign gifts,” few today deny that miracles still occur. While it is true that the divine revelation of the Bible is complete, and therefore no *new* revelation needs authenticating, some of today’s miracles may still serve the purpose of affirming the gospel message. Others bring help to those in need or remove hindrances to people’s ministries.<sup>x</sup> However, all bring glory to God. One such miracle occurred during the years my uncle, John Bechtel, was especially active in worldwide missions.

**Illustration:** John and two Christian co-workers were in the city of Changsha, China, visiting missionaries in the 1980s. At that time, travel in and out of Changsha was difficult. The threesome was disappointed to hear that their return flight to Hong Kong was cancelled, and because of the Chinese New Year, no further flights there would be scheduled for a while. This was a problem since their ministry obligations required them to catch another flight from Hong Kong to the Philippines in just a few days. The only way they could figure out to get to Hong Kong would be via a 400-mile train ride to Canton.

When John and his coworkers arrived at the train station, they found people lined up for three blocks in every direction, waiting to get in. Once inside, they offered ticketed passengers up to ten times the purchase price, but no one was willing to give up their seat. They even attempted to bypass a policeman to get into the VIP lounge, where they had hoped to have better success, but all they accomplished was stirring up his anger.

While John waited for his travel mates to make a bathroom trip and pondered what to do, a small, dignified looking Chinese woman with a blue hat approached and address him in perfect British English. He was shocked to see such a woman in Changsha. “Good evening,” she said. “How are you? Is there any way I can help you?” After John had explained his plight and the other two had returned, the woman said, “Come with me” and led the small group back toward the VIP lounge. The policeman was still there, but much to their surprise, he saluted the woman and let everyone in the group pass. After guiding them through a couple of additional doors, at which the woman was again saluted, the three found themselves on the train platform. She led them to their own private compartment, and with a “Have a nice trip!” she turned and left.

John had no sooner put away his luggage than he realized that he should have tipped the woman. He hurried to the place where they had entered the platform and asked a door monitor where the woman went who had brought the three of them to the train. Even after he briefly described her, the door monitor insisted, “No one brought you through here.” “Did you see us pass by you?” John asked. “Yes,” she replied, “but there were only three of you, not four.” John thought he was surely at the wrong door, so he approached a second attendant at another door and asked, “Did you see me come through this door a few minutes ago?” This woman pointed back at the first door and said, “*That* is the door you came through.” “Did you see the four of us?” he asked. “No,” she said, “there were only three of you.” Again, he

described the small Chinese woman with her blue hat. When the attendant reiterated that no such woman was with them, John returned to the train utterly confused. Taking one of his two companions with him this time, he approached the door monitor again and had his friend repeat the questions, but she continued to deny seeing the small woman.

Shortly after their train got underway, food was brought to them. When they inquired about it, the man told them a note in the kitchen simply instructed him to bring them food. Again and again, food was brought to them during the long journey.

In China, at least at that time, one presented their ticket on both ends of a journey, not only at the beginning. When the three arrived in Canton, they had to admit that they were ticketless. The ticket collector replied, “I know you don’t. Thank you very much,” and he waved them on. To this day, the only conclusion to which John and his partners have ever been able to arrive is that the small Chinese woman was an angel in disguise.

All believers are encouraged by such stories and praise God for His miraculous provisions. However, it is important to keep in mind with regard to our role as living signposts, that *miracles do not always produce genuine faith* in those who witness them. Ahab saw the fire from heaven that consumed Elijah’s sacrifice, yet it did not cause him to turn to the Lord! The apostle John wrote, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37). These individuals will one day be condemned for having rejected such evidence.

**Principle:** *Miracles themselves do not save people; the gospel saves people.*

Of course, our salvation itself is miraculous, but the Bible is clear that salvation is by faith, and miracles do not necessarily evoke saving faith. Jesus rebuked His generation for requesting signs (John 4:48), but I must admit that I have sometimes wished, or even prayed, that a hard-hearted, unsaved loved one might witness a miracle.

Personally, I have never known someone with the spiritual gift of signs/miracles. I do not have this gift, and yet, I am still required to be a living signpost. Thankfully, God has given believers the power we need to represent Him effectively. Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses (Acts 1:8). Each of us has the power of the Holy Spirit for personal life transformation and witness. Furthermore, each of us has the power of the written word of God. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seeds for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

## Conclusion

Today, we are God’s representatives in a confused and immoral generation. There are plenty of voices out there. We have the power and the privilege of pointing to the Only Way, Truth, and Life.

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<sup>i</sup> House, P. R. (1995). *1, 2 Kings* (Vol. 8, p. 211). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Strong, J. (2001). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>iii</sup> Denyer, David A., Professor Emeritus of Alliance Theological Seminary. Teaching notes on Elijah, from the personal library of D.A. Hammond.

<sup>iv</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (p. 135). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>v</sup> H. H. Rowley (‘Elijah on Mount Carmel’, BJRL, 43 [1960], 190–219) as quoted in Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed.) (2 Ki 2:1–18). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>vi</sup> House, P. R. (1995). *1, 2 Kings* (Vol. 8, p. 248). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>vii</sup> Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 233). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

<sup>viii</sup> Howard, David (1993). *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (p. 196). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>ix</sup> Geisler, Norman (2000). *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (p. 468). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

<sup>x</sup> Grudem, Wayne (1994) *Systematic Theology* (p. 371). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press.