

Elijah's *and* Elisha's Mantle



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 19:1–19; 2 Sam. 10:3, 4; Ezek. 16:15, 16; 1 Kings 21:21–29; 2 Kings 2:1–18.*

Memory Verse: “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (*2 Corinthians 7:10*).

Few biblical characters have had a more colorful existence than the prophet Elijah. What an incredible story of faith, of trial, and of God's overwhelming power in this world.

Today, in Judaism at least, he still looms large. In fact, in Jewish tradition he has been glorified more than perhaps any other biblical figure.

Each Passover, for instance, a special cup of wine is filled and put on the Passover table. During the Passover itself, the door of the house is opened, and everyone stands in order to allow Elijah the prophet to enter and drink. At circumcisions, a chair, “the chair of Elijah,” is set aside as part of the ceremony. Also, as the Sabbath ends, Jews sing about Elijah, hoping he will come “speedily, in our days . . . along with the Messiah, son of David, to redeem us.”

An example of Elijah's prominence in Jewish thinking is found in the Gospel of Matthew, when Peter says that some had thought Jesus Himself was Elijah (*Matt. 16:14*).

This week we'll look at Elijah and the mantle he wore and see what spiritual lessons we can draw from him and it.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 7.*

“A Still Small Voice”

Elijah’s life, recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, includes instances where he bravely faced kings and their threats on his life. There was, however, one notable exception—the time when, scared by threats from a nasty queen, he ran for his life.

In 1 Kings 18, he called down fire from heaven onto Mount Carmel, had the prophets of Baal slaughtered, and warned Ahab of the approaching rain. The power of the Lord came upon him, and after he tucked his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab for the 20 miles to Jezreel.

By the next chapter, however, this same man of God appears in a whole new light.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–4. What lessons can we take from this passage regarding how, no matter what our relationship with God has been, no matter what great triumphs of faith we have experienced, none of us are immune from deep spiritual lows?

The Lord, though, wasn’t done with Elijah, not even after his rather desperate and somewhat pathetic prayer. He still gave Elijah powerful evidence of His love for him and His interest in Elijah’s life.

Read 1 Kings 19:5–19. What is the significance of Elijah’s wrapping his face in the mantle?

It’s fascinating that though Elijah saw a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire, none of these caused him to wrap his face in his mantle. It was only the presence of the Lord in “a still small voice” that brought this response to him—a response of fear, respect, and self-protection.

What Elijah needed to learn was that, mighty and moving though these forces be, they do not of themselves portray a true picture of the Spirit of God. Elijah heard the voice of the Lord in a quiet and subtle way, telling him what to do, and it was this voice that he obeyed.

How can we learn to recognize the voice of the Lord speaking to us? More important, however, is this question: do you obey what you hear, or do you squelch that “still small voice” speaking to your soul? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

The Change of Garments

After the magnificent demonstration of God’s power at Mount Carmel, Elijah complained that he was the only one left who loved the Lord. The Lord, it seems, ignored Elijah’s whining, but when he finished his speech, the Lord then gave him instructions: he was to anoint two kings and Elisha.

Following the Lord’s directions to find a successor, Elijah went to the farm of Shaphat, Elisha’s father, and found Elisha plowing with oxen. Maybe Elijah waved to Elisha to get his attention, and Elisha stopped his work and waited to hear Elijah’s message.

Read 1 Kings 19:19. How was the call of Elisha demonstrated there in the field?

We aren’t given the exact words of Elijah or Elisha’s response to the call of Elijah, but we do know that he responded positively. Elijah now cast his mantle, a symbol of his responsibilities as a servant of God, on Elisha’s shoulders (*see Num. 20:28*). The symbolism is pretty obvious. Elisha was now given a sacred calling.

In other incidents of the Bible, a mantle (or cloak or some similar garment) was not always used as an indication of God’s invitation to serve Him. How is the idea of a mantle used in these verses: Job 1:20; Psalm 109:29; Jude 22, 23; 2 Samuel 10:3, 4; Ezekiel 16:15, 16?

Elijah’s mantle here meant devotion, commitment, and dedication. “As Elijah, divinely directed in seeking a successor, passed the field in which Elisha was plowing, he cast upon the young man’s shoulders the mantle of consecration. During the famine the family of Shaphat had become familiar with the work and mission of Elijah, and now the Spirit of God impressed Elisha’s heart as to the meaning of the prophet’s act. To him it was the signal that God had called him to be the successor of Elijah.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 219, 220.

Think about how a single object can have both good and bad connotations, depending on how it is used. What are you doing with the things in your own life? What kind of meanings are you, by your actions, giving them? What have they come to symbolize to you, and why?

The Wearing of Sackcloth

In the Elijah narratives, clothing comes into play with other characters, as well.

Ahab, the king of Israel, wished to purchase a vineyard that was next to the palace. It belonged to Naboth, a Jezreelite. When Naboth refused to sell it and Jezebel heard about it, she became incensed and cleverly laid a plot for Naboth's demise. After Naboth's death, Ahab took possession of the vineyard, not realizing that Elijah had been instructed to meet him there.

“You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’” And you shall speak to him saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours’”’ (1 Kings 21:19, NKJV).

Elijah's mission to face Ahab on several serious issues should have produced a fair amount of stress, but he seemed strong and willing, at least here, to follow the instructions from his Lord even though he knew his life could be in danger. Now he must tell Ahab what denunciations the Lord has pronounced on him besides the one about the dogs licking his blood.

Read 1 Kings 21:21–29. How are we to understand Ahab's response, especially in light of what those verses say about the kind of man he was?

When Ahab heard these words, he presented himself to the Lord in an exceedingly humble way (1 Kings 21:27), which included him tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth, and even refusing to eat. The rest of the chapter implies that his repentance and humility must have been genuine. The tearing of his robe, a common action in that time to represent horror and sorrow, revealed that he truly accepted the truth of what Elijah said to him. How deep, how long lasting that repentance went, the text doesn't say; what it does say is that the rending of his robe revealed the sincerity of his heart at that time.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Cor. 7:10, NIV). Read the immediate context of that verse. What is Paul saying here, and how can we apply this warning to our own lives?

The Taking of Elijah

Whatever one can say about Elijah, he certainly had an interesting and dramatic time of it (though, no doubt, he's having more fun now). Second Kings 1 tells a fascinating story which leads into an even more fascinating one in the next chapter. If it could be said that anyone, to use the cliché, went out in a blaze of glory, it was Elijah.

Read 2 Kings 2:1–18 and answer the following questions:

1. What reasons might Elisha have had for refusing to separate from Elijah, despite the master's three requests that he do just that?

2. Why did Elisha tear his clothes here? Was it for mourning or something else? If so, what?

No doubt Elisha's response was one of extreme excitement and gratefulness. Yes, he *did* see the chariot and the horses. Yes, he *would have* a double portion of Elijah's power. Although, generally, the tearing of clothes meant mourning, this time Elisha may have been so overwhelmed that he tore his clothes in gratitude. He had in his hands Elijah's cloak. His tearing of his clothes also could have been symbolic of his getting rid of his own and putting on Elijah's.

When Elijah first put his mantle on farmer Elisha, both men knew that this act symbolized a calling to work for God (though Elisha must have given it back to Elijah at some point). Elisha now had this special garment in his own possession, signifying that he must carry on the responsibilities of leadership as Elijah had done.

Look, too, at Elisha's request of his mentor. (What request does this remind you of?) Elisha's words reveal something of his character, showing that he was a worthy successor to wear the mantle of the great prophet who was about "to be taken" from this world.

What broader picture of existence does this story present to us? That is, how often do we tend to hold a narrow, materialistic view of the world, forgetting the ever-present reality of the supernatural realm, which also exists in this world and which interacts with us?

The Cloak

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over” (2 Kings 2:13, 14). What story does this make us think of? What important symbolism is seen there?

Read 2 Kings 2:15–18. Try to put yourself in the place of these prophets from Jericho. Why might they have reacted as they did, trying to find Elijah, even though they knew that he had been taken?

It is obvious from earlier texts that the prophets knew Elijah was going to be taken. The text doesn't say if they themselves saw the event. In one sense, it doesn't really matter, because they knew that the “Spirit of the Lord” had taken him. To where, though, was another matter. For some reason they believed that Elijah still could be found “on some mountain or in some valley” (*vs. 16, NIV*). Perhaps not prepared for the idea of someone being whisked off to heaven like that, they assumed the Lord did something else with him. And though they had the words of Elisha not to bother trying to find him, they insisted on it anyway. Perhaps, only then, after not finding him, did they realize what happened. Yet, even then there was room for doubt. Maybe the Lord set him down on some mountain or valley they hadn't checked?

In the end, no matter the experiences or miracles we have seen, we still need to exercise faith, or else, sooner or later, doubt will creep in and seriously challenge our Christian experience.

Think about some powerful experience you had with the Lord. No question, at the time and right after, your faith was strong. Over time, however, what happened, especially as the experience itself started receding in the stream of time? Thus, why is it important that you, on a daily basis, do things that can help keep your faith strong?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Seth and Enoch,” p. 88, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “From Jezreel to Horeb,” “What Doest Thou Here?” and “In the Spirit and Power of Elias,” pp. 155–189, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Elijah, who had been translated to heaven without seeing death, represented those who will be living upon the earth at Christ’s second coming, and who will be ‘changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump;’ when ‘this mortal must put on immortality;’ and ‘this corruptible must put on incorruption.’ 1 Cor. 15:51–53. Jesus was clothed with the light of heaven, as He will appear when He shall come ‘the second time without sin unto salvation.’ For He will come ‘in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’ Heb. 9:28; Mark 8:38.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 422.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are practical things we can do to help us hear “the still small voice”? What things do we do that make that difficult, if not impossible? How does willful sin, in a big way, make us “hard of hearing,” so to speak?
- ❷ When you experience despair and discouragement that are almost more than you can bear, how do you know, as Elijah did, that the Lord is near and watching over you?
- ❸ The mantle of Elijah symbolized the succession of his ministry to Elisha, which brings up the question of succession in the church today. How does the process work, and how can we be sure that the right people are, to use an Elisha cliché, “handed the mantle”? Or can we?
- ❹ “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Cor. 7:10, *NIV*). In class, talk about what this text means and what we must learn from it ourselves about what true repentance is as opposed to a repentance that, itself, needs to be repented of?
- ❺ In this quarter’s lesson on clothing and garments, we are dealing with a lot of symbols. What are symbols, how are they interpreted, what meanings do we give to symbols, and what do those meanings tell us about ourselves?

Curses and Blessings

João grew up in Angola in southwestern Africa. His family attended a Christian church, but their beliefs were mixed with spirit worship. When his mother became seriously ill, family members were sure her husband had cursed her. She fled with her four children to Namibia.

Life was hard, and João's mother sent her children to live with other people. João had to quit school and herd cattle. João was unhappy and ran away; he found his way back to Angola and lived with two of his aunts. But his aunts made and sold homemade beer, and soon young João was drinking beer too.

A friend gave him a little New Testament, and João began reading it. He stopped drinking and returned to his family's church. But something was missing.

One day he heard a radio program sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The teachings caught his attention. He had never heard of the Sabbath before and asked the priest at his family's church about Sabbath. When the priest didn't answer his questions, João stopped attending church. He compared what he heard on the radio programs with his New Testament and realized that the Adventists taught the truth. But he hesitated to visit an Adventist church, for his family said Adventists were witches. He visited several other churches, but none of them satisfied his thirst for truth.

One day João noticed a new church near the edge of town. He saw a sign announcing evangelistic meetings, so he decided to attend. João was impressed with the messages he heard, and, at the end of the series, he surrendered his life to God.

But his relatives were unhappy about his decision, for they still believed that Adventists were witches. João continued attending the Adventist church in spite of their accusations. He wanted to prove that Adventists were not witches. In time he was baptized, fully aware that life at home would be difficult.

Schools in Angola hold classes on Saturday, but God impressed him to honor the Sabbath day instead of study. His mother urged João to stop attending the Adventist church, because it went against the family's traditional beliefs. But João told her that Adventist beliefs were in line with the Bible, which was God's firm word.

Eventually, his mother allowed João to attend worship services in peace. Today he enjoys an active ministry that includes translating material for the radio program that led him to the church in the first place.

Our mission offerings support outreach efforts such as evangelistic meetings and radio and television broadcasts in Angola and around the world.

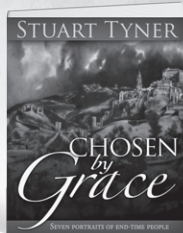
JOÃO QUINTAS DA SILVA shares his faith in Lubango, Angola.

Chosen by Grace —Stuart Tyner

"So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace"

(Romans 11:5, NIV).

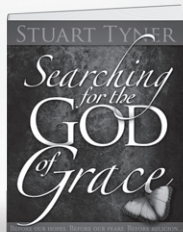
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Moses and Hayk are best friends. They live in Armenia. Moses has grown up in the Adventist faith. When his family moved to a small village, Moses met Hayk. The boys quickly became best friends. Moses realized that Hayk didn't attend church, so he invited his new friend. Hayk loved Sabbath School and began inviting his friends to come too. Soon the Sabbath School class was filled with children eager to learn about God.

The children in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia don't have lesson quarterlies they can study during the week. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide children's Sabbath School lesson guides in the languages of these three countries so that more children can learn that God loves them.

I'm glad that my church cares for its children. I'm glad I can help. For me it's personal.

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