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THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2021

UNIT: History of Israel (1–2 Kings & 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

OVERVIEW:

Sometimes common sense is not so common. The kings of Israel and Judah often jettisoned God’s common sense. A few good kings and godly prophets called for reforms in God’s troubled kingdom. Students will learn to embrace God’s wisdom, pray earnestly for revival, witness God’s miracles, and avoid the heartache of disobedience.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Arrows point to the lesson aim and text boxes. **Arrows indicate the week of each lesson.**

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Arrows point to the application and discovery sections. **Use the Discovery questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.**

WEEK OF JULY 18, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Know by the
testimony of prophets
the Lord is God.**

UNIT: History of Israel (1-2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 1 Kings 18:31-39; 2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Chronicles 24:19; Psalm 100; Acts 3:18-19;
2 Kings 17:13

THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHETS

BY MARK SCOTT

The prophets of the Old Testament were the mean junkyard dogs of Israel. They nipped at the heels of kings, priests, and the people to keep them on the straight and narrow. They functioned like prosecuting attorneys against Israel. Their goal was to give Israel an accurate picture of God and to bring them back to him (2 Chronicles 24:19; 2 Kings 17:13).

Though no Bible books are named for Elijah or Elisha, they are two of the most significant prophets of the Old Testament. Both men made it into Jesus' ordination sermon (Luke 4:25-28), and some of their miracles are templates for miracles of Jesus (e.g., 2 Kings 4:18-37 with Luke 7:11-17). Their testimonies play large in this lesson.

God of Israel

1 Kings 18:31-39

Elijah burst on the scene during the reign of wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 17:1). The king had sold out to the idol gods and the people followed Baal (1 Kings 16:31-33). Since the drought failed to get the attention of the people, a contest was arranged at Mount Carmel. Sacrifices were made on altars. The prophets of Baal went first, but fire failed to come down from heaven to acknowledge their sacrifice.

Elijah then stepped forward. He took *twelve stones* (one for each tribe) and *built an altar*. He dug a trench around it and arranged the wood on it. He butchered a bull and laid it on the altar. Then he "baptized" the altar with *four large jars with water* three separate times. Finally, he prayed a simple but decisive prayer in which he acknowledged who God was, who he (Elijah) was, and what God had commanded. He pleaded with God to answer with fire so that Israel would turn *their hearts back* to God. Elijah's prayer was answered dramatically. The fire that fell from heaven consumed everything, including the stones, the soil, and even the water. The people were convinced and cried, "*The Lord—he is God!*"

God of the Prophets

2 Kings 2:11-14

Leadership transitions are always important. Elijah had already called Elisha to follow him in prophetic ministry (1 Kings 19:19-21). Now it came time for that prophetic mantle of leadership to be passed to Elisha in such a way that other prophets would affirm it (2 Kings 2:15).

As Elijah began his journey to the Jordan River, Elisha seemed aware something big was about to happen. Second Kings 2 described how the two journeyed east from Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho, and then to the Jordan River. Elijah struck the river with his cloak and it parted. (The same place where Israel had crossed over into the Promised Land and the same place where Jesus would be baptized?) Elisha requested a double portion of the Spirit that rested on Elijah. In reply, Elijah said, in effect, "Keep your eyes open" (v. 10).

The moment arrived when Elisha saw the *chariot of fire and horses of fire* (symbols of God's presence and power in battle). Then a *whirlwind* (storm or tempest) took Elijah to heaven, and Elisha saw *him no more*. Elisha used Elijah's torn garment—all that remained of the senior prophet—and tried it out on the Jordan River. History repeated itself. The waters parted, and Elisha walked across back into the land of Israel.

God of the World

2 Kings 5:9-15

After coming up from the Jordan Valley, Elisha performed several miracles to affirm he was God's new representative (2 Kings 2:19—4:44).

Elisha's influence spread to Aram (modern-day Syria), where bands of raiders from there would cross into the land of Israel. Due to Israel's disobedience, these raids were successful. Some Israelites were taken captive. One was an unnamed little girl who knew of Elisha's ministry.

Naaman was a commander in the king of Aram's army, but he had leprosy. The little girl informed Naaman's wife that Elisha could heal him. So Naaman took gifts and ultimately made his way to Elisha's place.

Elisha did not even greet Naaman (a sign of disrespect in that world?). Instead, he sent a *messenger* to tell the commander to *wash . . . seven times in the Jordan*. Naaman objected and felt he was being treated with disrespect. But Naaman's servants calmed the commander, and he complied with Elisha's strange request. "*His flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.*" Not only did Naaman's skin change, so did his attitude. He acknowledged *there is no God in all of the world except in Israel*.

The testimony of the prophets is that Israel and the whole world should know that God is God. ■

APPLICATION

WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO SAY

BY DAVID FAUST

Have you ever been speechless? Maybe your friends threw a surprise party, and you were too stunned to speak. Or some shocking news took your breath away. On the memorable days when my children were born or adopted, I struggled to put my feelings into words. At least I got my voice back quicker than the old priest Zechariah, who couldn't speak for months until his son John was born.

What if you're a preacher without any fresh ideas to share, and Sunday is coming? It's tough being speechless when it's your job to give speeches. I have been a preacher for many years, but occasionally when I'm asked to speak, my first reaction is to think, *I have nothing to say!*

Public speaking isn't for everyone. We're not all like Elijah, whose bold prayer brought Heaven's fire to the mountaintop. Or Peter, who preached and saw thousands baptized. Or Paul, who addressed influential philosophers in Athens. But if we watch for opportunities, we all can be like Philip, who shared the gospel with an audience of one . . . an Ethiopian in a chariot.

Just as authors have to overcome writer's block, God's ambassadors have to overcome preacher's block. Whether your audience is large or small, what should you do if you have the opportunity to speak, but feel like you have nothing to say? Here are some suggestions that have helped me.

Recognize you're in good company. Moses didn't consider himself a great speaker. Neither did Jeremiah. The apostle Paul showed classic symptoms of stage fright when he came to Corinth "in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). You don't have to be an eloquent orator to deliver God's message. If the Lord used a fig-picker like Amos and a fisherman like Peter to communicate his Word, he can use you.

Seek God's help. Your own prayers—and the prayers of others—can help you get unstuck. Paul urged his friends to pray that God would open a door for the gospel and help him "proclaim it clearly" (Colossians 4:3-4).

Keep it simple. When I get stuck during sermon preparation, I ask myself, *Why am I struggling? Am I trying too hard?* The goal is to express the Word, not to impress the crowd. Jesus communicated profound truth by using uncomplicated language and down-to-earth illustrations. In a world starving for hope, the theme of DBR is always relevant: Death, Burial, and Resurrection—the bad news of sin followed by the good news of Christ.

Speak from your heart. Listeners can detect even a hint of phoniness, but sincerity and conviction make the message harder to resist.

Do your job. Paul instructed Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). Pats on the back are not the goal. Like faithful postal workers, our job is to deliver the mail and share God's message in every season, undeterred by "snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night."

Trust God with the results. We plant and water seeds, but the Lord makes them grow. Remember, it pleases God "through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). If you and I feel speechless now and then, it doesn't mean God has nothing to say.

Personal Challenge: What opportunities has God given you to be an ambassador of the gospel? What step will you take this week—either one-on-one or in a group—to communicate biblical truth to someone who needs to hear it? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you serve the Lord last week?
2. What challenge did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Kings 18:31-39** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then repeat the process with **2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15**.

Ask a third person to retell the stories from these three passages. Remind them to keep it simple.

3. What do you learn about the ministries and purposes of these prophets from these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What repeating phrases or concepts do you find in these passages, and what do they demonstrate to you?
 - What were the main topics of Elijah's prayer (1 Kings 18:36-37)?
 - What was the result of his prayer?
 - How would you describe the leadership transition between Elijah and Elisha?
 - Naaman's pride, plans, and preferences nearly prevented him from being cured. Why are humility and submission so vital to our healing?
 - In what ways is Naaman's story an illustration of God's gracious (unmerited) work in saving sinners?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. It's been said that "faith that doesn't lead to obedience isn't faith at all." What do you learn about the connection between faith and obedience from these passages?
8. Like Elijah and Elisha, we can be God's ambassadors to help people know that the Lord is God. What step will you take this week—either one-on-one or in a group—to communicate biblical truth to someone who needs to hear it? (For six suggestions on how to do this, see Dave Faust's Application article in this lesson.)
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge are you facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Chronicles 36:11-23** as we continue studying the history of Israel. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■