

Week 18: *What We Can Learn from Elijah and Elisha*

Hook



Main Point: The prophets pointed to Jesus, who perfectly reveals God’s justice and mercy.

Q: Are there things you do that feel completely futile, yet you still know they matter? (For example: trying to keep a tidy house with little ones, clearing weeds that always grow back, or attempting to finally reach “inbox zero.”)

William Tyndale understood what it was like to labor in what seemed like a losing battle. A 16th-century reformer, he risked – and ultimately gave – his life to translate the Bible into English so ordinary people could read God’s Word for themselves. Forced into exile to continue his work, Tyndale remained committed not to personal success but to completion of the task itself. At one point, he even offered to return to England and abandon his translation work entirely if the king would approve an English Bible. That request was denied. Eventually betrayed, arrested, and imprisoned for 450 days, he was executed by hanging and burning. From a human perspective, his work appeared to end in failure. His final recorded prayer was, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” ¹ Years later, the same king who so opposed Tyndale, Henry VIII, approved an official English translation called “Matthew’s Bible” – a text that was built on the work of Tyndale.

Transition: As we conclude our Elijah and Elisha study, we will be reminded that what often looks like limited impact in the moment is never wasted in God’s hands.

RECAP: In the first lesson we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God’s messengers calling His people to repent and how they pointed ahead to Jesus.

In lessons 2–5, we saw the ups and downs of Elijah’s ministry: Israel’s idolatry and the covenant consequences for it, God’s provision and care for the vulnerable, His sovereignty and superiority over false “gods,” and His care for Elijah as he ran for his life. We saw that God not only works in big, miraculous shows of power but also speaks in the still, small whisper to comfort and encourage His people.

In lessons 6–7, Elijah called Elisha to succeed him, and Elisha left his old life behind. Elijah prophesied the deaths of Jezebel and Ahab and the end of his dynasty. He was taken up to heaven in the whirlwind and Elisha took over, expanding the ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In lesson 8, we learned what it meant when Elisha asked Elijah for a “double portion” of his spirit. In lessons 9–10, God brought judgment on those who rejected His prophets and His message but brought life, healing, and blessing to those who came to Him in faith. In lessons 11–12, He performed several miracles that pointed to His provision and sovereignty. In lessons 13–14, God supernaturally fought the battles of Israel with Aram. In lesson 15, we saw His care for the vulnerable again when He restored the land of the Shunammite woman. In lesson 16, we saw Elijah’s prophesy fulfilled – Jehu rose to power and destroyed the entire house of Ahab and Jezebel. In lesson 17, Elisha gave his final prophecy, revealing God’s compassion on Israel despite their disobedience. Then, Elisha died and yet, even after his death, God still used him, performing a miracle through his bones, showing us His incredible power and purpose – to resurrect His people to eternal life.

In this lesson, we will conclude by summarizing some of the main theological points we have learned from this study of Elijah and Elisha.

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Main Point: The prophets pointed to Jesus, who perfectly reveals God's justice and mercy.

1 Kings 17:24; John 1:1–4; and Hebrews 1:1–4 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Prophets are God's messengers; Christ was the ultimate messenger.

Q: What made the widow realize Elijah was truly sent from God?

Q: How was Jesus' ability to speak God's Word more than a typical prophet?

In times of idolatry, injustice, fear and suffering, God raised up prophets to declare His truth, confront sin, and call His people back to covenant faithfulness. Their miracles did not exist for spectacle but to validate God's message and show that He alone is the living God and draw His people back to Him, because in His presence is blessing and fullness of joy.

At the beginning of this study, we learned the primary role of the prophet was to be God's messenger, His spokesperson. The Hebrew word *nabi* ("prophet") literally means "to bubble up," illustrating the way God's Word arises from within and is proclaimed outwardly. Though the prophets did many things, their message was primary; everything they did supported and/or illustrated the message. Miracles showed the people the prophet was sent from God so they would believe the message, like the widow declared when Elijah raised her son, "Now I know" you are a man of God and His word is truth (v. 24).

Though the details may have been different, every Old Testament prophet's core message was essentially the same. They were "covenant mediators." They told the people how they had broken God's covenant, called them to repent, and told them what covenant "curse" or consequence would happen if they didn't or what consequence was already happening to prompt them to repent. Not all of their messages were negative; they also preached messages of hope to come. But even those messages were centered on repentance – what the future would be like when they turned back to the Lord, both in the near-future return of the remnant to the land and the far-future messianic kingdom. Repentance was the message of John the Baptist, too; "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). He came in the same spirit and power as Elijah (Luke 1:17).

Jesus was the "prophet like Moses" whom Moses prophesied would come and speak God's Word faithfully as an intermediary between God and humanity (Deuteronomy 18:15–19). But He was more than just a prophet. The writer of Hebrews and the opening of the Gospel of John explain how. Jesus was not just a human prophet; He was

God Himself made flesh (John 1:14). He was the exact imprint of God's nature (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus didn't just speak the Word of God; He *was* the Word of God (John 1:1). Elijah, Elisha, and the other prophets spoke the words God told them to speak, but when they weren't sharing His message, they were just human beings, capable of making mistakes. But Jesus *was* God, so *everything* Jesus *said* and *did* embodied and expressed the Word of God.

The lives of Elijah and Elisha point beyond themselves and their own time to the greater reality of the big picture of God's story with humanity – His relentless commitment to make Himself known to His people. Through the prophets, God spoke into real moments of rebellion, pain, and need, not to condemn without hope but to restore relationship. Their voices were urgent because the stakes were real: to turn away from God was to choose death but to return to Him was to find life. They remind us that God's Word is not distant or silent but living and active, persistently calling His people back to Himself. The prophets were never the focus; they were vessels through whom God made His heart known. Their lives urge us to listen carefully, respond humbly, and trust fully in the God who still speaks.

Ultimately, they lead us to Jesus, the final and perfect revelation of God. Where the prophets declared God's Word, Jesus *is* the Word. Where they called for repentance, He *makes repentance possible*. Where they warned of judgment, He *bore it* on behalf of His people. In Him, the message and the messenger are perfectly united. As we reflect on the lives of Elijah and Elisha, we are left with a question that echoes through every prophetic word: will we listen? The same God who spoke through them has spoken through His Son, calling us to repent and follow Him.

Q: If prophets were to come to modern America, how might they call us to repent, both the worldly culture and the Church (remember, those hearing Elijah and Elisha's message were supposed to be God's people)? What specific messages might they bring?

Q: How can you be a bold voice for truth in your circles of influence? What specific messages might they need to hear to bring them to Jesus?

1 Kings 17:1 and 21:25–29; Romans 3:21–26; and 2 Corinthians 5:21 [Read]

Talking Point 2: God's sovereignty is displayed in both judgment and mercy.

Q: Why did God show mercy to Ahab, even after all the evil he had done?

Q: Romans: What does it mean that God is both just and the justifier?

Throughout this study we have seen that God is both just and merciful. God judged those who rejected His Word, mocked His messengers, and persisted in idolatry, yet He repeatedly showed compassion to the vulnerable (the widow, the hungry, the fearful)

and the repentant – even Ahab, the most wicked king in Israel’s history! Elijah and Elisha’s ministries reveal a God who disciplines His people not to punish but to restore. This balance finds its fullest expression in Jesus, who bore our judgment on the Cross so mercy, healing and life might be offered to all who believe (Isaiah 53:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

The ministries of Elijah and Elisha unfolded during one of the darkest periods in Israel’s history, when idolatry, injustice and spiritual rebellion had become entrenched in the nation. Yet it was precisely in this setting that God’s sovereignty was most clearly displayed. He was not absent or indifferent; He was actively ruling, both in judgment against sin and in mercy toward those who turned back to Him. Through these two prophets, God demonstrated that He alone is Lord.

In Elijah’s ministry, God’s sovereignty was revealed through decisive acts of judgment as the consequences of breaking the covenant. Elijah’s announcing the drought to Ahab showed that everything in creation, including the rain the pagans attributed to Baal, is under Yahweh’s command. The drought was not random; it was listed in the law as a consequence of breaking the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:24). Yet God showed long-suffering love for His people. He didn’t punish them the first time they committed idolatry; He waited hundreds of years to enact the consequences of their disobedience. Even then, He did it not for the purpose of punishment but so the drought and Elijah’s message might lead them to repent and return to Him.

On Mount Carmel, God answered by fire, exposing the powerlessness of false gods and the futility of divided allegiance. These moments were not merely dramatic; they were theological. God was asserting His exclusive right to be worshipped and obeyed. He alone is God; there is no other (Isaiah 45:5). God’s judgment was not arbitrary; it was a necessary response to Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness. Yet even within judgment, His mercy was present. Elijah’s invitation to the people to commit fully to God and stop “limping between two opinions” revealed God’s desire for His people to return to Him rather than perish (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Elisha’s ministry, while still containing elements of judgment, was more focused on God’s compassion, provision and restoration. Through multiplied oil, healed waters, raised life, and the feeding of many people, God showed Himself attentive to the needs of individuals as well as the nation. These acts of mercy are not disconnected from His sovereignty; they reveal its fullness. God is not only powerful enough to judge; He is also gracious enough to save, sustain, and restore. Even His judgment, when it came, was purposeful and always accompanied by opportunities for mercy.

Together, the stories of Elijah and Elisha give us a unified picture: God's sovereignty is expressed not in cold control but in righteous justice and steadfast love for His people. He is not an unfeeling judge but a loving Father. The Lord disciplines the one He loves (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6). The Hebrew term *chesed* ("lovingkindness" in the NASB; "steadfast love" in the ESV) describes the deep, covenantal loyalty, compassion and mercy of God toward His people when they don't deserve it. God confronts sin because He is holy and just, yet He extends mercy because He is faithful to His promises and His covenant love. Neither aspect can be separated from the other without distorting His character. Judgment without mercy would leave no hope; mercy without justice would ignore the reality of sin. In these prophets, we see both judgment and mercy held together in perfect tension.

The ministries of the prophets point beyond themselves to a greater fulfillment in Christ. Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus confronted sin, called for repentance, and performed works that authenticated His message. But He did so with a completeness they could only anticipate. In Christ, God's sovereignty was revealed most fully: The judgment sin deserved was not set aside but borne by Christ Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). Romans explains how the law and the prophets bore witness to the righteousness which came through Christ. In Christ's work, God shows Himself to be both the *just* and the *justifier*, both Judge and Savior (Romans 3:26). The mercy long extended through prophetic calls was secured through His life, death and Resurrection (Ephesians 2:1–10). Elijah called down fire and Elisha multiplied bread, but Jesus took judgment upon Himself and *became* the bread of life for all who believe (John 6:35).

The ministries of Elijah and Elisha are not merely historical accounts; they are theological signposts. They reveal a God who reigns in both judgment and mercy, and they direct our attention to the One in whom those realities meet perfectly. In Christ, we see God's ultimate purpose is not simply to judge or spare but to redeem – to bring His people back into right relationship with Himself, where His sovereignty is no longer resisted but joyfully embraced.

Q: How have the consequences of sin led you to repent and turn back to God? How has God used these situations to guide you to Him?

Q: If you were explaining the Gospel to an unbeliever, how would you share the truth of the balance between God's justice and His mercy?

Malachi 4:5–6 and Luke 24:13–27, 44–47 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The prophets lack of "success" pointed ahead to our need for Jesus.

Q: Chronologically, Malachi is the final prophet. Whom did God promise to send through Malachi? What does this tell us about God's work through the prophets? His plan?

Q: What did Jesus tell the disciples on the Road to Emmaus about the law and the prophets?

Elijah and Elisha's ministries stand at a pivotal moment in redemptive history, not only confronting Israel's rebellion but also preparing the way for something far greater. In the big-picture story, God rescued Israel from Egypt (Exodus–Deuteronomy) and brought them into the land to live with Him in peace and harmony (Joshua). But they didn't have the happy ending they expected. As soon as they entered the land, they started worshipping other gods (Judges). David established worship at Jerusalem, but that quickly fell apart when his son, Solomon, married foreign wives and started worshipping their gods (1–2 Samuel, 1 Kings). The kingdom split, and Israel (N) consistently worshipped golden calves instead of Yahweh for their entire history of more than 200 years. At this point, they had even started worshipping Baal and The Asherah, the gods of the Canaanites. This is why God sent Elijah at this moment.

By the end of Elijah's ministry, even though he had proven God's superiority over Baal at Mount Carmel, the people were still worshipping Baal. By the end of Elisha's ministry, they had ended Baal worship, but the people had not returned fully to the Lord; they were still worshipping the golden calves. Israel (N) would be destroyed by Assyria a few years later and be lost as a people forever. This reality may make us feel Elijah and Elisha's ministries were unsuccessful. The people did not turn their hearts back to God. Most of the Old Testament prophets were not "successful" as we think of success. They were often ignored, mocked or persecuted. But that doesn't mean they didn't accomplish their mission. Even their lack of "success" points us to our need for Jesus.

The Old Testament prophets didn't do a bad job of sharing God's message of repentance. They did a great job, but the people's hearts were hardened (Isaiah 6:10). They needed a new heart, a heart of flesh, not a heart of stone (Ezekiel 36:26). This is what Jesus could do that none of the prophets were able to do – because He was God Himself. Instead of just calling for obedience, Jesus changed people's hearts. The lack of Elijah and Elisha's "success" – the fact that the people did not return to the Lord even with such great miracles – shows us the depraved depth of humanity's sin. It shows us we need more than a call to obedience; we need someone who can change our hearts. It prepares us for the message of the Gospel, that we cannot be saved by our own works but only the work of Christ.

Elijah prepared the way; Elisha expanded the work; but Jesus fulfilled it. Elijah's role was preparatory. He cleared the ground, exposed sin, and called for repentance, themes that echoed forward into the ministry of John the Baptist, who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" to prepare the way for Christ. The ministries of the Old Testament prophets were ultimately anticipatory. They were meant to be incomplete and unsuccessful

because they point to the coming of Jesus Christ, who did not merely continue their work but brought it to completion. Like Elijah, Jesus calls people to repentance and confronts false worship, but He does so with unmatched authority, not as one who speaks for God but as God Himself. Like Elisha, He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and raised the dead, yet His miracles were not only signs of God's power; they were revelations of His identity as the source of life itself. Jesus surpassed Elijah and Elisha as the true Prophet, perfectly revealing God's Word; the true Priest, reconciling humanity to God through His own sacrifice; and the true King, reigning with all authority over creation.

Elijah and Elisha's ministries invite us to participate in sharing God's Word with the world in our time and place the way that the prophets did. We stand in the new covenant era, where all of Christ's followers are empowered by the Holy Spirit, not just those who were uniquely anointed. The same Spirit who empowered Elijah and Elisha now dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). We have been given a mission to make disciples of all nations means to call people to *repent* and follow Jesus (Matthew 28:19–20). Every believer is called to speak the hard truths of God's Word to the world and to one another as the prophets did (Ephesians 4:15).

The story doesn't end with Elijah, Elisha or even the apostles. It is an ongoing narrative of God's redemptive work through His Spirit-filled people. As we faithfully proclaim His truth and reflect His mercy, we point to Christ as the prophets did. The pattern remains: God speaks; God acts; and God restores. Through His people, the message continues to go forth, inviting the world to turn to Him – the true and living God, revealed fully in Jesus Christ. Knowing the prophets were often rejected, mocked, and persecuted can encourage us as we live on mission for the Gospel. If we are rejected, mocked, and persecuted, we are in good company. "Rejoice and be glad, ... for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11–12).

Q: When you think about Elijah and Elisha being "unsuccessful" by measure of the repentance of the people, how does that affect the way you define faithfulness and success in your own life and calling?

Q: Since people need heart change, not just behavior modification, how might this affect the way we share the Gospel with people? How might it impact the way we do ministry?

Q: How should we respond when people we share the gospel with harden their hearts toward God?

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Main Point: The prophets pointed to Jesus, who perfectly reveals God's justice and mercy.

To be "successful" in Jesus is to abide in Him and walk in faithful obedience.

In Matthew 28:19–20, He commands us:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The promise is not immediate results – it is His presence. That's exactly what we see in Elijah and Elisha. They preached, confronted sin, and served God – yet often without seeing lasting change in their lifetime. And still, they were not failures. They were faithful.

Have you been obedient even if you haven't seen the fruit? When was the last time you had a Gospel conversation? Prayed for a wayward friend or coworker? Lived generously despite a lack of wealth?

When the Gospel is rejected, when ministry feels slow, when obedience seems unnoticed – keep going. In God's economy, no act of obedience is ever wasted – even when the harvest is unseen.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on all you have learned from the stories of Elijah and Elisha. What had you never heard before? What things make more sense to you because you studied them in a more in-depth way? What were some of the strangest things we saw in these lessons, and what did they teach you about God? How did these stories point to the justice and mercy of God? How did understanding the historical context of Israel at the time affect your understanding of Elijah and Elisha's message? How can we preach God's prophetic truth in our culture today?

PRAY: Pray for the truth of God's Word to sink deeply into your heart. Ask for a deeper understanding of the stories of Elijah and Elisha and how they point us ahead to Jesus and the Gospel. Pray for boldness to speak the hard truths of God's Word to the world around you and even within the Church.

ACT: Share what you learned. Take the opportunity this week to share with someone at least one thing you learned from this study.

¹ <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/william-tyndale-apostle-of-england/>