

# Setting the Scene

by Denis Lyle

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*Elisha's life and ministry serve as a reminder of the importance of living in the present, trusting in God's sovereignty, and experiencing saving grace.*

**Scripture:** Luke 4:27

**Topics:** "Old Testament", "Saving Grace"

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## Description

Denis Lyle preaches on the neglected prophet Elisha, highlighting the reasons for his neglect in history and the importance of recognizing his significant ministry. Elisha lived in a politically unstable, morally corrupt, and religiously unsound society, similar to challenges faced in modern times. His ministry was distinctive, pointing forward to Christ, and effective in bringing blessings to a variety of people. Elisha's life reflects the truth of saving grace, emphasizing the importance of God as our ultimate Savior.

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## Transcript

Readings: 1 Kings 22:51-53 2 Kings 1:1-4 1:17-18 SETTING THE SCENE Most people resent being neglected. Elisha is one of the neglected prophets of the Bible. (1 Kings 19:16) Over 65 years ago a famous preacher gave a series of sermons on "The Neglected People of the Bible". He preached on Laban, Simeon, Levi, Barzillai, Obadiah and even Ebed - Melech. But he left out Elisha. Some years a book was published called "Men from God's School". The author is an outstanding Christian called JO Sanders.

This book deals with eighteen Bible characters, but Elisha is not numbered among them, yet far more miracles were wrought by Elisha or were granted in answer to his prayers than any other of the OT prophets. Why then has Elisha been neglected Three attitudes may be responsible for this apparent neglect: (1) ELISHA HAS BEEN UNDERMINED BY CRITICAL PROPAGANDA: In many quarters today the claim that the recorded events of the life of Elisha should be regarded as serious history would be dismissed with a derisive smile.

This attitude is due of course to the miraculous element which occupies so large a place in his story. My ...in an age when the miracles of Christ Himself are denied, its not surprising that the marvels associated with some shadowy figure which looms out from the mists of a much more distant past are themselves denied. Some men claim that the Bible CONTAINS the Word of God. On that theory you can cut out Elisha. We believe the Bible IS the Word of God, and that claims Elisha to be an historical character.

Our Lord Himself speaks of " Eliseus the prophet". (Lk 4:27) (1) (2) ELISHA'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY IS RECORDED IN DISJOINTED PIECES: The history of Elisha is not given in one connected piece of O.T. narrative. Allusions to his life are therefore difficult to piece together. Although there is twice as much about Elisha as there is about Elijah, very few scholars have written or preached about the TOTAL ministry of Elisha. Have you heard a series of messages on the life of Elisha (1) (2) (3) ELISHA HAS BEEN OVERSHADOWED BY A COLORFUL PREDECESSOR: I wonder parents does one of your children overshadow the other Do you know what I'm talking about You see Elisha has been overshadowed by Elijah.

Elijah was the prophet of fire. His ministry was dynamic and startling, but it has been said, "Elisha is a faint reflection of his predecessor". Now I believe that these three attitudes namely, (1) (2) (3) have led to this "holy man of God", being neglected. Now we want to rectify that in this series of studies. So we want to look at "A HOLY MAN OF GOD". This morning is all about: " SETTING THE SCENE". And in trying to set the scene for everything that will follow I want you to note 3 things: (1) THE TIMES IN WHICH ELISHA LIVED Now always remember that the appearance of a prophet was always a mark of apostasy and rebellion in Israel.

The prophets raised their voices in loud protest against the prevailing idolatry, corruption, and blindness of their times calling the nation back to God. The prophet was first of all a man with a message from God for his own generation, a "Forthteller", rather than a " Foreteller". Now what was the climate like in which Elisha lived Well, (a) POLITICALLY: It was unstable! You see the two books of Kings deal with the nation of Israel in three ways. (1) The UNITED KINGDOM: (2) The DIVIDED KINGDOM: (3) The SURVIVING KINGDOM: Do you recall what happened after Solomons death in 930 BC The Northern Tribes broke away to form a seperate Kingdom Israel (1 Kings 11& 12) Ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom, Two tribes comprised the Southern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:20-21) In the North there were 19 Kings: In the South there were 19 Kings and 1 Queen: In the North all the rulers were BAD: in the South some of the rulers were GOOD (8) but most were BAD!

Now it was to the Northern Kingdom that both Elijah and Elisha ministered. Elijah was raised up during the reign of one of the most wicked kings of Israel. " Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him". (1 Kings 16:30) Do you recall who Ahabs wife was Jezebel! Ahab was one of the worlds hen - pecked husbands, for he became the tool of a crafty, unscrupulous woman! Now Elisha who was Elijahs sucessor began his ministry during the reign of Ahabs son and of Jehoram we read "And he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord but not like his father, and like his mother". (2 Kings 3:2) So POLITICALLY Elisha lived in an UNSTABLE CLIMATE!

A climate similar to our own, where we don't know what will happen next (a) (b) MORALLY: It was unclean! You see when Jezebel came to Israel she didn't come alone. (1 Kings 16:31) She brought her gods with her and it was not long before Baal worship was established in the land. Now this was nothing new to Israel for Baal worship had been the religion of the Canaanites before Joshua conquered the land. Baal was the son of El who was thought to give increase to family: flocks: crops... fertility rites played a large part in Baal worship: chambers existed for male and female prostitutes.

A main Baal altar was accompanied by an Asherah, a pole carried in honour of the goddess of that name the consort of Baal. Baal worship included prostitution: pornography and all kinds of sexual sin. And this was the day in which Elisha lived! Is it not similar to our own day Do we not live in a society without fixed standards Do we not live in an age when everyone is doing that which is right in their own eyes

Homosexuals are being ordained to the ministry: lesbians are demanding their rights to have children: child abuse is on the increase: and our women cannot walk the streets of our cities at night for fear of being raped.

Ills: I was in Edinburgh a few weeks ago and a Christian publisher spoke about how he was nearly closed down by the gays protesting outside his shop because he was exposing them. (7/9/96) What an age we live in (a) (b) (c) RELIGIOUSLY: Unsound! You see although Jehoram did not go the same extent of evil as his father and mother before him, yet of him we read, "he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat". (2 Kings 3:3) What were these sins IDOLATRY! For it was Jeroboam who set up a golden calf in Bethel and in Dan. (1 Kings 12:28) The nation of Israel was still overwhelmed with a floodtide of idolatry.

My, these were (1) Politically it was unstable: Morally it was corrupt: Religiously it was unsound... Are we not living in similar times Days of uncertainty: days when Biblical standards are thrown away: days when false prophets abound on every hand and various forms of idolatry even pervade our own lives. (1) (2) THE TASK FOR WHICH ELISHA LIVED What kind of task or ministry did Elisha exercise Well the ministry of Elisha: (a) WAS DISTINCTIVE: It was in sharp contrast to that of his predecessor.

My, Elisha did not have the same task or ministry as Elijah. God does something new in each generation. That is why it is not healthy for us to live in the past. We may LEARN from the past, but we must never LIVE in the past. There is no better time for me being alive than now, no better place for me to be living than right here, for being alive in this time and in this place is God's will for me. (a) Now there is nowhere in Scripture that this is set forth more powerfully, than in that great scene at Mount Horeb. (look at 1 Kings 19:9-12) You see the ministry of Elijah was symbolized by the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire.

The wind rent the mountains: the earthquake caused Sinai to tremble: the fire devoured everything that came within its reach. Now this tremendous upheaval was intended to mirror to Elijah the prophet, his own reforming methods. With the same turbulent energy Elijah had swept through the land as a messenger of judgment from the Lord of hosts, but now Elijah was gone and God chooses a DIFFERENT MINISTRY, the ministry of Elisha, the ministry of the still small voice to fulfil His purposes.

Elijah was the prophet of JUDGMENT: Elisha was the prophet of GRACE, you see instead of Israel being DRIVEN BY FEAR, they were now to be DRAWN BY LOVE. (a) Do you recall what Paul says to the Corinthian church "For the body is not one member, but many". My, God created us to be different from one another. Now if we let this truth sink down into our hearts we'll be cured of jealousy for the rest of our lives. You see the gifts that God has given to me He has not given to you and the gifts God has given to you He has sovereignly withheld from me.

Do you recognise that Do you realise that God does not make duplicates, He only makes originals And your ministry is distinctive.a (b) WAS PROSPECTIVE: It seemed to point forward to the ministry of Christ. Elijah was the O.T. John the Baptist, or should we say that John the Baptist was the NT Elijah. Do you recall the words of Christ, speaking of John the Baptist He said, "This is Elias, which was for to come". (Matt 11:14) Elijah seemed to prefigure John the Baptist, and Elisha's ministry seems to prefigure the ministry of the Lord Jesus for it was a ministry of gracious power following a ministry of searching judgments. (a) (b) (c) WAS EFFECTIVE: For the Lord was in "the still small voice". (1 Kings 19:12) God was there with Elisha who was justly called, " the man of God".

We're going to see that all sorts of people came to Elisha,... kings, captains, lepers, great women, bankrupt widows and they were blessed in coming. He met friends and foes, good and bad, Israelities and

Gentiles and freely bestowed his benefits on them all. His was a ministry that was fraught with blessing! A variety of people experienced a variety of blessings through his ministry! What about your ministry Is it effective Is it fruitful Is it fraught with blessing You see God blesses us that we might be a blessing to others. (2 Cor 1:4) (1) (2) (3) THE TRUTHS BY WHICH ELISHA LIVED What's in a name Well, the name Elijah means " Jehovah is my God".

Israel rejected Jehovah for idols, Elijah rejected idols for Jehovah. Elijah lived up to his name. Now the name Elisha means, "God is my Saviour", or "God saves". You see Elisha experienced: (a) THE TRUTH OF SAVING GRACE: God was Elisha's Saviour personally and exclusively! He had no other Saviour for he had no other gods. My, have you experienced SAVING GRACE "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and..."(Eph 2:8) Israel may turn to a multiplicity of gods but Elisha adhere's to: trusts in: and lives for the one true and living God! Now who or what is your God Christian... Remember that your God is what you love: seek: worship and allow to control you! Whatever you make most of is your God What are you making most of?

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