

## Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

### May 29 – John 1: 19 – 37

At the time when Jesus was born, the Israelites were expecting for Elijah to return. At the end of Elijah's life, Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, and since Elijah hadn't died the Israelites were expecting him to come again and usher in the time of the Messiah. The prophet writing the very last words of the Old Testament also pointed the Israelites in this direction.

**Malachi 4:5-6** *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

But as the New Testament opens, the Gospel writers make it clear for that the return of Elijah that Malachi spoke of was actually to point us to the ministry John the Baptist.

**Luke 1:13-17** *But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. <sup>16</sup> Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

Jesus also compared John the Baptist to Elijah.

**Matthew 11:12-14** *From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.*

Elijah certainly was a picture of what was to come in John the Baptist. John the Baptist was in a very real sense the last of the

Old Testament prophets who were sent by God to point the way to “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”

### May 30 – 1 Kings 18: 1 – 40

This account from Elijah’s life is perhaps one of the most dramatic accounts in the entire Bible. Elijah feels like it is him against the world (verse 22), and he challenges wicked King Ahab and the prophets of Baal to a winner take all shootout on Mt. Carmel (verse 24). As you read the story you can almost chuckle as Elijah taunts the prophets of Baal and their fruitless efforts to have their god bring fire down to consume their sacrifice. When it is Elijah’s turn, he adds to the drama by having his sacrifice doused with gallons of water. But, as Elijah prays fire comes down from heaven and consumes not just the sacrifice, but the wood, the water and even the stones. When God does something he really does it right! But look at Elijah’s prayer in verses 36 – 37. What is that Elijah is really praying for? Is it that the sacrifice will be burned? Not really, dig a little deeper and we will see that Elijah prayer is that people will know through what happens that the Lord is God. Look at verse 39, as the fire comes down from heaven and consumes everything that is indeed the conclusion that people arrive at.

In the New Testament we have the account of Jesus walking up another hill, the hill of Mt. Calvary, to offer a sacrifice. On the cross Jesus was completely consumed by the wrath of God so that the debt for our sins could be paid. Before Jesus went to the cross, this was the prayer he offered for all to hear:

**John 12:27-33** *"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.*

Just as the true purpose of Elijah's sacrifice was so that the people would know that the Lord is God, Christ was offered for that same reason. It was so that God would be glorified, and people would know through Christ's death and resurrection that Lord is God.

Sometimes as we read the Old Testament, we are shocked at the violence that we find. This passage from 1 Kings is no exception. After Elijah's stunning victory, he has the prophets of Baal slaughtered and wiped out of Israel. The reason why is because evil has to be eradicated. But stop and think about this. What did Jesus do to eradicate evil? He offered himself as a sacrifice to be slaughtered. Why are we so taken back when those who are evil are slaughtered, but the fact that Jesus was slaughtered for our sin doesn't seem to phase us at all? We are the ones who deserve to be slaughtered for our sin and idolatry, just as the prophets of Baal were, but Jesus was slaughtered in our place.

### **May 31 – 1 Kings 19: 1 – 18**

You would think that Elijah would be sitting on cloud nine after the events that happened on Mt. Carmel. In one short afternoon, through the power of God, Elijah had discredited the Prophets of Baal, exalted the Lord, and even made it rain! In the process, Elijah had become so filled with the Spirit and the power of God that he had even been able to outrace King Ahab's chariot back to Jezreel. But, Elijah was a man just like us, and because of that Elijah didn't stay on cloud nine for very long. As you read this passage, you can see that Elijah becomes filled with fear and despondency. Look at verses 3 – 5; Elijah was ready to give up and die. Look at verse 10; Elijah feels alone, and because of that he feels threatened on all sides. In spite of all of the wonderful things he had just been able to do through the power of God, Elijah suddenly felt very powerless. But as God comes and speaks to Elijah, He reveals to Elijah that Elijah is not alone, and God assures Elijah that God is in control and at work carrying out His plan.

Elijah wasn't alone, but he felt that way, and that made him want to give up and die. As Jesus came to the time when he was about to go to the cross, he too felt alone, and he really was. Not only did Judas betray him, and Peter deny him, and his other disciples abandoned him, but God the Father also forsook him.

**Matthew 27:40-50** *"You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"* <sup>41</sup> *In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.* <sup>42</sup> *"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.* <sup>43</sup> *He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"* <sup>44</sup> *In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.* <sup>45</sup> *From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.* <sup>46</sup> *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* <sup>47</sup> *When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."* <sup>48</sup> *Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.* <sup>49</sup> *The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."* <sup>50</sup> *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*

Jesus was truly alone as he hung on the cross. Even God, his father, turned his back on Jesus. Now stop and think about why God had to do that. It was because of our sin. Our sin that Jesus took to the cross so defiled Jesus that his relationship with the Father was broken. As you consider how even a great man, like Elijah, behaved when he felt alone and powerless, or how you may react when you feel alone and powerless, think how easy it would have been for Jesus to just give up as he hung on the cross. Think how easy it would have been for Jesus to say this isn't worth it and just walk away from the cross. But his love for us, and his desire to please the Father, held him there.

### **June 1 – 1 Kings 19: 19 – 21**

At the end of yesterday's reading, God told Elijah to go and anoint Elisha to succeed him in his ministry of calling Israel to repentance. As Elijah comes to Elisha, Elisha is busy in the fields, plowing with a team of 12 oxen. As Elijah calls Elisha, Elisha asks for permission to first go and say goodbye to his family. In verse 20, Elijah grants that request to Elisha, but he warns Elisha to consider what it means to have been called by God to follow in Elijah's footsteps. That's what Elijah's words, "Go back, what have I done to you" mean in verse 20. After Elisha says his goodbyes, Elisha does something very interesting. He slaughters the oxen and uses the

plowing equipment to make a fire to burn the oxen as a sacrifice to God. By doing this, Elisha was affirming his complete commitment to leave his previous life, and follow God's call to be a prophet to Israel. What Elisha does is very similar to what the disciples did as Jesus called them to come and follow him.

**Matthew 4:18-22** *As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

But not everyone is so enthusiastic about responding to God's call on their lives.

**Luke 14:16-24** *Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. <sup>17</sup> At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' <sup>18</sup> "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' <sup>19</sup> "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' <sup>20</sup> "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' <sup>21</sup> "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' <sup>22</sup> "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' <sup>23</sup> "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup> I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"*

There is much for us to consider here. If you are a Christian, you are called by God. Are you too busy to respond to that call? Or are you willing, like Elisha and the disciples, to drop everything and follow Jesus?

**Matthew 10:37-39** *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

What are you holding on to rather than Jesus? What do you love more than Jesus? Like Elisha, and the disciples, we too must realize that everything else in our lives pales in comparison to Christ, the more we see that the more willing we will be to drop everything and follow Jesus.

## **June 2 – 2 Kings 2: 1 – 18**

In today's reading, God transfers Elijah's ministry to Elisha. As God prepares to take Elijah from the earth, Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for Elisha before he is taken up into heaven. Elisha asks for a double portion of God's Spirit that was on Elijah throughout his ministry. Elisha knows that God has given him a big job to do, and he knows he will not be able to do the job in his own strength. He knows that the power to minister comes from the Spirit of God, and to be able to do what God has called him to do, Elisha knows that he desperately needs that Spirit to fall upon him. Do you remember what happened to Elijah in 1 Kings 19? He felt alone. He forgot that God's Spirit was with him. He forgot that the power to do what God had called him to do would come from God. Elisha knew that, and that is why he asked for a double portion of the Spirit of God to be on him. Anytime we try to go out and serve God in our strength we will soon run out of resources, that is why we must rely on the Holy Spirit as our source of strength. We would do well to remember what Jesus said to his disciples as he prepared to leave this world.

**Acts 1:4-8** *On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." <sup>6</sup> So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The work that Jesus calls us to do is spiritual work, and therefore it can only be done with spiritual resources.

**Ephesians 6:12** *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

If we merely rely on our own strength and own resources we will not have the power we need to carry out the work that Jesus has given us to do. We too must pray that God would pour out a double portion of His Spirit on our lives, so we can do that which we are called to do.

### **June 3 – 2 Kings 4: 1 – 7**

To really understand what is going on in 2 Kings 4, we have to understand just how desperate this widow's situation was. At this time in Israel, there was no government programs to take care of widows and the poor, and there was no way for a widow to really be able to take care of herself and her children. This widow's situation is so severe that her creditors are on their way to come and take her two young sons and sell them into slavery. In Old Testament Israel, this was an acceptable way for debts to be settled, but you can imagine the trauma that this widow must have felt at the thought of her whole family being taken from her. In her distress, she turns to Elisha for help. Olive oil was a staple in Israel at that time. It was used to burn in lamps, and used for cooking, and a little bit of this oil was all that this woman had left to her name. Through a miracle of multiplication (much like Jesus did with the 5 loaves and 2 small fishes in John 6) Elisha causes this oil to multiply and fill every available container the woman can get her hands on. As she runs out of containers the oil finally stops flowing, and Elisha tells the woman to take the oil and sell it to settle her debts. Through this miracle, her financial need was met. What seemed to be an impossible situation was cared for by God in an extraordinary way. Why did this miracle happen? This miracle was used by God to help to establish the fact that Elisha was a prophet of the same stature as Elijah, but God also used this miracle to meet the desperate needs of this widow and her children.

In Luke 5, Jesus' disciples had a very similar experience.

**Luke 5:1-11** *One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."*

<sup>5</sup> Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." <sup>11</sup> So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Just as the miracles that Elijah and Elisha performed authenticated their ministries, and validated the fact that they were indeed men of God, this miracle did the same for Jesus. Look at Peter's response in verse 8. Peter knows that there is something special about Jesus. He was no ordinary man. Peter didn't fully realize or understand who Jesus was or what Jesus came to do, but, as a result of this miracle, Peter recognized that Jesus was a man of God and as a sinful man, Peter did not feel worthy to be in his presence.

Through this miracle, Peter and the other disciples began to see Jesus as a man sent by God, but also stop and think about the practical implications of this miracle. Just as the widow could take the extra oil that was made through the miracle Elisha performed and sell it to pay her debts, the families of these new disciples of Jesus would be able to take this miraculous catch of fish and sell them to provide for their families' needs in the months to come. Just as the miracle Elisha performed freed the widow from the bondage of her debt, the miracle Jesus performed freed the disciples and allowed them to follow Jesus faithfully knowing that their families were cared for financially. The bottom line is this, whether through "normal" or miraculous means, God always cares and provides for those He loves.

**Matthew 6:24 - 7:1** *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. <sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are*



*you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? <sup>28</sup> "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

## **June 4 – 2 Kings 5**

In today's reading a servant girl brings healing to a man whom she should have hated. Namaan was a commander of the King of Aram's army, and the Arameans were causing the Israelites great problems. Because of Israel's sin, God had allowed the Arameans to grow powerful and to come and torment the Israelites. They never conquered Israel, but they sure caused lots of problems for them. In one of the Aramean raids on Israel, a young Israelite girl was taken away from her family and her homeland and forced to be a slave in Namaan's household. More than likely Namaan had been the commander of the army that had attacked her family and carried her away. You would think that this girl would hate Namaan, and wished for his demise, but instead she turns the other cheek and blesses him. She tells Namaan about a prophet in Israel who can heal him of his leprosy, and in doing that she points Namaan on the path to salvation. Not just physical salvation, but spiritual as well.

As you read this account you see Namaan going from a being a man who is very sick, both physically and spiritually, to being made whole again. Namaan's leprosy was a physical death sentence, and his pride was a spiritual death sentence. As you read this account you can't help but notice his pride. In verses 10 – 12, we can see his pride as he is insulted that Elisha doesn't even come out to talk to him, and further insulted that Elisha has told him to bathe in the Jordan River.

But God is interested in not just physically healing Naamaan; God wants to heal him spiritually as well. Until Naamaan is humbled, he will never be willing to accept God as God. We can see Elisha working in concert with God to heal Naamaan's heart as well as his leprosy. In verse 8, Elisha makes it very clear that he is acting so that Naamaan will know that there is a prophet of the true and living God in Israel. In verses 15 – 19, we see that, as Naamaan is physically healed and humbled, he does in fact, become a worshipper of God, but it all started because of a girl who was a willing servant of both Naamaan and God. In being that willing servant, she is a picture of the willing servant Jesus.

**Isaiah 52:13 - 53:11** *See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. <sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were appalled at him--his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness-- <sup>15</sup> so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. <sup>NIV</sup> **Isaiah 53:1** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. <sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.*