

ELIJAH'S MANTLE

By Norman Holmes

One of the most important goals a person can accomplish is to help prepare and empower the next generation. To be successful in the long run people need to equip their successors to carry on what they have achieved, and to multiply and develop their achievements into greater things. Parents prepare inheritances for their children, while businessmen train their proteges to move their company towards higher heights. Teachers train their students in the hopes that they will go on to achieve greater things than they have. Society aims to progress through the generations to bigger and better things.

This principle of generational multiplication and development was first instituted by God in Genesis 1:28 when He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and take dominion over the earth. Although their first responsibility was only to tend a garden, by the end of the Bible in Revelation 21 mankind's developing inheritance and responsibility includes having a city that is over two thousand kilometers long, wide and high!

This generational principle was spiritually applied by Christ when He told His disciples to "*go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey all things I have commanded,*" Mt.28:19. The Apostle Paul followed this when he told his spiritual son, Timothy, "*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,*" 2 Tim.2:2.

One of the most biblically important transfers and multiplications of ministries can be seen in the ministry of Elijah. This great prophet had one of the most outstanding ministries in the Old Testament as his prayers with his calling down fire from heaven started a national revival. Then Elijah multiplied his ministry to the next generation through the impartation of his prophetic mantle to Elisha and many other disciples.

Elijah's Mantle Given to John the Baptist

The transferring of his ministry, however, did not stop there. The last message given by God in the Old Testament was "*I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse,*" Mal.4:5-6. This makes it clear that Elijah's ministry did not end during his lifetime on earth, nor with his immediate successors.

At the beginning of the New Testament we find that Elijah's ministry was passed along to John the Baptist. When the archangel Gabriel announced John's birth, he declared that John would prepare the way of the Messiah "*in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,*" Lk.1:17. Then when Jesus' disciples asked Him why the scribes said that Elijah must come before the Messiah, Christ replied to them, "*Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already....Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.*" Mt. 17:11-13.

Elijah's Mantle for the Last Days

Christ's disciples learned from this statement that John the Baptist was a fulfillment of Elijah's ministry. However, Christ also alluded to the fact that Elijah's ministry is still to have a greater future fulfillment. This corresponds with Malachi's prophesy that Elijah will come "*before the great and dreadful day of the Lord,*" which clearly refers to the Second Coming of Christ.

While Bible scholars look for the literal return of Elijah before the Second Coming, as depicted in Revelation 11:3-12, many also feel that a spiritual mantle of the spirit and power of Elijah will again

be released. Just as John the Baptist was anointed to preach repentance to the nation of Israel before the first coming of Christ, in the Last Days the Lord will anoint many ministries to prepare *all* the nations for Christ's return. And not only will Elijah's ministry have its complete fulfillment in the Last Days, this will also be the case for all the mantles, giftings, and spiritual inheritances of the body of Christ. The transgenerational multiplication and development of the worldwide Church is all pointing towards the grand finale of when the victorious Church of the Last Days will have evangelized the world, triumphed over the gates of hell, and prepared the nations for the Second Coming of Christ.

Who will qualify to receive mighty mantles in these Last Days? Who will God choose to anoint with powerful ministries to help prepare the Church as a spotless bride for the marriage of the Lamb? We can best learn about this as we study how Elijah's mantle was transferred and multiplied to the next generation of ministers who carried on God's work after him.

How Elijah's Mantle was Transferred to the Next Generation

As we study 1 Kings chapters 17 and 18 we can see that Elijah had a lonely job when the Lord first called him to bring repentance to his backslidden nation. For those first years the Lord hid him alone at a brook, and then in a foreign land, as King Ahab searched everywhere for the prophet who had stopped the rain.

Yet when Elijah publically reappeared and started a national revival on Mt. Carmel, there may have been many who wanted to follow and help the famous prophet. Elijah only chose one young man to become his servant, whom he sent seven times to look east across the sea as he travailed in prayer for rain. When the prophet's fervent prayers began to be answered by God, Elijah then sent him with a message for the king to quickly drive home before the heavy rain came. What a day this servant of the prophet had enjoyed! First he saw Elijah boldly confront the prophets of Baal, and then start a mighty revival when he prayed and God's fire fell. Next he saw how Elijah secretly prevailed in prayer until the rain came. And finally, he was sent as the prophet's personal messenger to the king of Israel!

When Elijah and his servant were back at the capital the next day, his servant was probably expecting more glorious times. Yet when Queen Jezebel sent Elijah a death threat, instead of arising in God to meet the new challenge, Elijah fearfully fled for his life! As he headed south into the Sinai desert to hide, he left his servant at the last town before he disappeared alone into the bleak countryside where he asked God to take his life, 1 Kngs 19:1-4.

On the previous day of glorious revival, Elijah's servant probably thought he was the most privileged young man in Israel. He had the chance to closely observe and be trained under the prophet that had just started a national revival. Yet his zeal to be a faithful servant and disciple faded away the next day when Elijah was a depressed and fearful man who only wanted to run away and die! As a result this young man only served Elijah for part of two days. Because he did not remain faithful to stick with Elijah on his day of failure, this first servant of Elijah dropped out of the picture to remain unnamed to us and untrained for ministry. His life had been touched by Elijah's mantle, yet he did not qualify to receive that mantle.

Elijah then met with God afresh during his time at Mt Sinai and was recommissioned to complete his ministry and impart it to the next generation. As recorded in 1 Kings 19:16-21, Elijah followed God's instruction and placed his prophet's mantle upon a young farmer named Elisha. This prophetic act was understood by Elisha, who then followed Elijah for many years as he prepared to inherit the prophet's mantle and ministry.

Second Kings chapter two tells us about Elijah's departure for heaven and those he left behind to carry on his ministry. We first read there, *"And it happened when the Lord was to take Elijah up into Heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, 'Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Bethel.' And Elisha said, 'As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel."*

The first thing Elijah did was to invite Elisha to remain behind as he went onwards. Elijah's first servant had failed this same test when Elijah had gone alone down into the Sinai desert. Yet Elisha knew that he needed to be fully faithful to Elijah if he was to receive the mantle that he had been invited to obtain at the start of his apprenticeship.

Elisha was requested to remain at Gilgal, a place that held many good memories for the people of God. It had represented a place of consecration and victory from the time when Joshua and his army had first camped there during their conquest of the Promised Land, Josh 5:7-9, 10:9-10 & 42-43. Gilgal represented a good spiritual blessing that Elisha could have obtained if he stayed there, yet Elijah was aiming for the much greater inheritance of Elijah's mantle.

So instead of remaining there, Elisha followed his mentor as they traveled together to the city of Bethel. Then we read, *"And the sons of the prophets at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from your head today?' And he said, 'Yes, I know. Keep silent.' And Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, please stay here. For the Lord has sent me to Jericho.' And he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.' So they came to Jericho."*

Elisha was again tested as to whether he would fully follow Elijah. This time he was offered a better place to stay among the sons of the prophets at Bethel. This city, named the "House of God," could have been a good place for him to remain and develop his ministry among a group of Elijah's disciples. Yet again Elisha was aiming for something higher as he headed on to Jericho with his master.

We next read in 1 Kings 2:5-8, *"And the sons of the prophets at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from your head today? And he answered, 'Yes, I know. Keep silent.' And Elijah said to him, 'Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jordan.' And he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.' And the two of them went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went on and stood afar off across from them. And both of them stood by the Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the waters. And they were divided here and there, so that both of them crossed over on dry ground."*

In Jericho as well as in Bethel we find that Elijah had trained many disciples in what have been called the schools of the prophets. These men had developed their prophetic ministries, as evidenced by their knowledge that Elijah was departing from them on that day. Yet we find that these other disciples of Elijah were not ready to follow him all the way, as Elisha was. Fifty of these sons of the prophets followed Elijah and Elisha out of the city, but did not go down and cross the Jordan River with them.

Crossing the Jordan River spiritually speaks of dying to self and being crucified with Christ. While these fifty disciples had entered into a Pentecostal anointing (as evidenced by the number 50, which speaks of Pentecost), they were unwilling to cross the Jordan and be crucified with Christ so that they could gain the greater anointing and mantle that Elisha soon obtained from his mentor. Sadly, many anointed servants of God today still resist the full work of the cross in their lives, and only obtain part of the anointing and ministry that God has available for them.

This story goes on in 1 Kings 2:9 to say, *"And it happened when they had gone over, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken away from you.' And Elisha said, 'please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.'"* This double portion was the birthright inheritance of every firstborn son in an Israelite family, Deut.21:17. Through asking for this, Elisha was declaring that through his full faithfulness to Elijah he had become his most mature spiritual son and rightfully should receive a double portion from his spiritual father's anointing.

Verses 11-15 then record the fulfillment of this request: *"And it happened as they went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire came and separated them. And Elijah went up in a tempest into heaven. And Elisha....took up the mantle of Elijah which had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan. And he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and*

struck the waters, and said, 'Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' And he also hit the waters, and they parted here and there. And Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets across in Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha!' And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him."

Because Elisha had been fully faithful to Elijah, he received the full mantle and anointing that caused the other prophets to receive him as their new leader. Many of these other prophets went on to do notable exploits, but it was Elisha who became the national prophet that took Elijah's place, 2 Kings 3:11-12. Elisha also went on to work twice as many miracles as Elijah had, as he and the other prophets multiplied the results of the prophetic ministry that Elijah had imparted to the next generation that carried on his work.

The Faithful Receive the Mantles

From this story we see the crucial importance of being faithful to both God and our leaders in order to receive a mantle or ministry. Elijah's first servant, who followed him for part of two days, left Elijah at the first trial they faced. While the first servant gained some exciting testimonies from his short time with the prophet, he received no ministry or mantle from Elijah.

The sons of the prophets who studied under Elijah were more faithful to their mentor and received a portion of his mantle and ministry. Yet they did not follow him fully, as Elisha did. They only followed Elijah part way and consequently received a smaller portion of Elijah's prophetic ministry as the less mature spiritual sons of the great prophet.

It was only Elisha who was completely faithful to Elijah. Through fully following his mentor in the difficult times as well as the easy, he matured more than all of Elijah's other spiritual sons. As a result he gained a double portion of Elijah's anointing and mantle through which he became the next national prophet of Israel.

The biblical accounts of Elijah show him to be a man who would not have been easy to follow. From the heights of great revival one day he sank to the depths of depression and defeat on the next day. He repeatedly told his servants to remain behind and stop following him. As the book of James says, "Elijah was a man of like passions as we are," and we can easily see the areas of his character that could have deflected his followers. So it is crucial for young people who are training for the ministry to keep their eyes on the mantle, and what they can inherit in God if they are properly faithful to their mentors.

The end of the Church Age will soon be upon us, when every mantle, ministry and gifting in the body of Christ will have come to full development. Who will again be ready to call upon the God of Elijah and receive his mantle, as did Elisha and John the Baptist? Or who will call on the God of other great Christian leaders of generations past? Who will receive from the anointed mantles that many great servants of the Lord have passed down to the coming generations? Let us seek to have a full faithfulness and consecration so that we may each receive a glorious portion- even a double portion- of God's Spirit for these coming days of great trial and triumph.