

August 16, 2020
Wayne Veenstra
2 Kings 2

When the Lion Departs: Losing Leaders Without Losing Hope

I. Introduction: The Lion Has Departed

It was winter. Johannes Vos, son of theologian Geerhardus Vos, was walking down the street in Princeton, New Jersey, where his father taught. Johannes, then a teenager, noticed a man walking down the street. He was bundled up in an overcoat, scarf, and a fedora stuffed on his head.

Suddenly, without any warning, the man stopped in his tracks, clutching at his chest in distress, and crashed to the ground.

Johannes ran into the house to call for his mother Catherine (a former Grand Rapids librarian). An ambulance came and the man was brought to the hospital, but it would not save him.

A heart attack had killed Dr. B. B. Warfield, professor of systematic theology at Princeton and one of the greatest exponents of Christian orthodoxy in the 20th century.¹

Warfield's influence for truth was substantial. He had written several works that have proved significant in upholding the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible, as well as the person and work of Christ, against the attacks by modernists and other enemies of the gospel.

It was for good reason that Warfield, this defender of the faith, was known as "The Lion of Princeton."

Warfield's death was grieved by many in the church, including his colleague at Princeton J. Gresham Machen. In a letter to his mother, Machen wrote of "...the great loss which we have just sustained in the death of Dr. Warfield. Princeton will seem to be a very insipid place without him. He was really a great man. There is no one living in the Church capable of occupying one quarter of his place."

Still grieving the loss of Warfield, Machen wrote again to his mother several days later:

"Dr. Warfield's funeral took place yesterday afternoon at the First Church of Princeton... It seemed to me that the old Princeton—a great institution it was—died when Dr. Warfield was carried out... Nearly everything that I have done has been done with the inspiring hope that Dr. Warfield would think well of it... I feel very blank without him... He was the greatest man I have known."²

¹ R. C. Sproul, "B. B. Warfield: Defender of the Faith," Tabletalk Magazine, April 2005. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/bb-warfield-defender-faith/>

² Wayne Sparkman, "The Death of B. B. Warfield," The Aquila Report, <https://www.theaquilareport.com/the-death-of-b-b-warfield/>

With the loss of Warfield in 1921, along with the deaths of the great Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck within that seven month span, it seemed that the lines defending the cause of truth had sustained overwhelming casualties.

But as great a blow as the loss of B. B. Warfield may have been, he would have been the first to say that it was nothing compared to the loss (and here I choose my words carefully) of the prophet Elijah from Israel.

James 5:17 tells us that “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...” He had weaknesses and sins like you and I do. As we saw, he grew weary and tired, sometimes he felt despair and anger. He was not some sort of super-spiritual alien entirely different than you and I. He was just a man.

And yet, while a man, beset with weakness and sin, clearly Elijah was a great man. He was a man of great courage, facing down the murderous Ahab and Jezebel. He was a man of great faith, exercising that faith in a ministry of fervent prayer (James 5:17). He was a man who had been the conduit of God to perform great miracles—providing food for the starving widow at Zarephath, raising her son back to life, sending fire from heaven (twice).

Elijah was *the* great defender of Yahweh worship in his day. While idolatry was spilling and oozing into the kingdom from its leaders, and from the surrounding nations, Elijah was the man of God who held the line.

What’s more, from our passage, it seems likely that Elijah’s influence was also felt as a seminary professor of sorts. In vv. 3 and 5 we read of the “sons of the prophet” at Bethel and Jericho. These were young men who were disciples of the prophet, prophets in training. It is reasonable to assume that Elijah, as the most prominent prophet in Israel at that time, was a spiritual father of sorts to these men.

So our passage is a significant moment in the life of Israel for it tells us of Elijah’s *translation into* glory. He doesn’t die but is miraculously transported into heaven.

What happens now?

Maybe you’ve asked that question before. What happens when we lose a great man or woman, a spiritual giant, a mighty instrument of God? What happens when a beloved pastor retires? Or a parent or spouse or a friend who has been a great instrument for spiritual good in your life is suddenly taken by death?

What confidence do you now have for the future?

The people to whom the book of Kings was first addressed were hard-pressed. The people of God were in exile. They faced pagan opposition and influence on every side. And there was no mighty Elijah in their midst. We could sure use an Elijah right now, they were maybe thinking, because being faithful in exile it ain’t easy.

And here's what God says to his people, in search of his protection, his presence, his power: take heart, my power is not bound up in or limited by the people I use. I'm not dependent upon the Elijahs to carry out my purposes for you. The Elijahs of the world are dependent upon me. So here's what you, people of God, need to see:

Passage Theme: As Elijah goes up in God's power and Elisha goes out in God's power, the God of Israel—who is the One, True, Living God—will not forsake his people, but he gives his Spirit to them so that his Word might continue to go out and his purposes be accomplished.

And since this is the case—that God's power and presence is not bound up in man, but they are experienced by his Spirit—it means that our life and mission as the people of God does not hang on any man or woman, but it depends upon the power and presence of the Holy Spirit at work in us and through us.

In short, this passage is meant to bolster the confidence of God's people by taking our hopes off the servants of God, and setting them upon the Spirit of God.

II. The Dreaded Departure

So let's look more closely at our passage: "Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal..." (v. 1) There is no hiding what is about to take place. There is, however, a mounting anticipation of Elijah's dreaded departure. I say 'dreaded' not because we have any evidence Elijah dreaded it—I think he anticipated it—but because the church dreaded it. This was a day that God-fearing men like Elisha wished to postpone indefinitely.

A. Repetition

One of three things that builds our expectation for Elijah's departure is the pattern of repetition the author uses. Three times—in vv. 2, 4, and 6—Elijah tells Elisha that he should stay behind while Elijah journeys onward. Three times, Elisha carries on with his master.

But in the first of these two instances the local prophets ask Elisha if he realizes that this is Elijah's last day. Elisha knows that this is goodbye for Elijah but he doesn't want to speak about it, so he shushes them up.

The goodbye is about to happen.

B. Geography

We're also prepared for this dreaded departure by geography. We're given very clear place markers in this chapter.³ Most important is the fact that Elijah and Elisha crossed over the Jordan River, the place where Moses, the great prophet of Israel, had been taken from Israel (Deuteronomy 34). Moses would be succeeded by Joshua. Moses would lay his hands on Joshua so that Joshua would be filled with God's Spirit (Deuteronomy 34:9). Joshua, as Moses' successor, would lead God's people across the Jordan and into the Promised Land.

Crossing the Jordan is meant to be a clue, connecting in our minds the leadership hand-off between Moses and Joshua, so that we're teed up to see the baton of spiritual leadership being passed in Israel once again.

C. Request

The third way our story builds anticipation for Elijah's departure is by the Elisha's request. After crossing the Jordan, Elijah asks Elisha, "Before I go, what can I do for you?"

To which Elisha responds in a way that may seem strange to us: give me a double portion of your spirit on me. This is inheritance language (Deuteronomy 21:15–17).

"...but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his."⁴

What Elisha asks for then, it seems, is that he would be Elijah's heir, the one who would inherit not only Elijah's *office* or *role* as prophet in Israel, but also the spiritual power that fit Elijah for that calling.⁵

Elisha will get this, Elijah says, *if he sees Elijah being taken from him*.

All of this—the repetition, the journey beyond the Jordan, and the last request—are meant for us to feel: this is it. The mantle of spiritual leadership is about to be passed. Elijah, this lion for true religion in Israel, is about to depart... and its a departure that is dreaded by the godly in Israel.

III. The Dramatic Departure

When Elijah and Elisha leave the 50 sons of the prophets behind and cross over the Jordan, it sets up one of the most vivid, miraculous scenes in the Bible. Mid-conversation there comes a sudden roar as these flaming chariots touch down, cutting Elisha off from his master. And Elijah is taken up into heaven (not in the chariots of fire) but in the whirlwind or windstorm.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, While it begins in Gilgal (v. 1) and ends in Samaria (v. 25), Elijah and Elisha make significant stops along the way. Going from Bethel, to Jericho, to the Jordan was to rewind the journey that Israel had taken into the Promised Land. Elijah and Elisha *leave* the Promised Land and stand on the farside where Moses would die. Elisha then

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 21:17.

⁵ Paul House, *1, 2 Kings*. NAC Commentary. Vol. 8. P. 258.

Now, one of the questions that strikes me as I read this story is why the fanfare? Why the chariots of fire? There is only one other man in Scripture—Enoch in Genesis 4—who does not experience death.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David... all major characters in the Bible. Each one a man who trusted in God and was loved by God; yet, it's Elijah who joins Enoch in avoiding death? It's Elijah who is escorted up by chariots of fire as he's transported to heaven in a whirlwind. Why?

God chose to take Elijah in the whirlwind, avoiding death, because [1] it vindicated Elijah's ministry and [2] it established Elisha's ministry. Or maybe it's better to put it this way: God chose this manner for Elijah's departure because in this way he was showing [1] that Elijah's God was the true God and [2] that Elijah's God now went with Elisha.

Let's unpack those two ideas.

A. Vindication of Elijah/Proof of God over Baal

God chose this manner for Elijah's departure because he was vindicating Elijah's ministry or showing that the God whom Elijah had preached to Israel was the true and living God. All of Elijah's prophetic career was spent battling the intrusion/infestation of Baal worship in Israel.

Baal—as I've said before—was one of the "gods" of the surrounding nations. He was thought to be the god of fertility and life because he was the god who sent the rains that caused the crops to grow. Baal was *the storm god* and we have certain ancient texts that refer to Baal as life-giving god who was the '*rider of the clouds*'.⁶

Elijah's entire career as a prophet was spent telling the people that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the one, true, life-giving God, and him alone. Elijah insisted to the people that Baal could not deliver on his promise to bring rain or give life. So is Elijah's departure is not just miraculous, but it is a fantastic exclamation mark on all of Elijah's ministry, that *his God* would appear on the clouds of the whirlwind to snatch his servant from death.⁷

B. Transfer to Elisha/Proof of God's Presence with His People

Elijah's dramatic departure is also, however, required because it is the answer to Elisha's request to be empowered as Elijah was for his prophetic task. Though the Spirit who

⁶ Koowon Kim, "[Rider on the Clouds](#)," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). "The Ugaritic phrase "Rider on the clouds" (*rkb rpt*) occurs 15 times in the Ugaritic corpus, mostly in mythological texts (Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts*, 290). It directly refers to Baal's role as the bringer of rain (Pardee, "Ba'lu," 248; Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*, 61–62). In the Aqhatu story, for instance, Dani'ilu invokes Baal as "Rider on the clouds" in his prayer to end the drought that the premature death of Aqhatu has caused. Although the epithet is primarily associated with Baal as a storm deity, it often occurs in the context emphasizing Baal's role as a warrior... Ancient Near Eastern gods—especially weather gods—are often depicted as riding on various vehicles, including clouds."

⁷ The whirlwind should be understood as a theophany or divine appearance. C.f. Job 38/40.

empowered Elijah was not his to give, yet he says that if Elijah sees him being taken then Elisha shall know that his request is granted.

When v. 12 tells us that Elisha *'saw it'* it's telling us the handoff has happened. God was giving a visual assurance that Elisha was his spokesman and He, the Lord, would go with him in power.

But Elisha's response to Elijah's ascension reminds us again of just how great a loss this would have appeared to the people of God. When Elijah is taken and Elisha cries out "The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!", he's referring to Elijah!

Elijah was like the chariots of Israel and its horsemen! He was, as one commentator put it, like a one man army in Israel, and now he's gone!⁸

Elisha tears his clothes in grief, steps up to the Jordan, and asks the critical question: "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" Is he still present to be with Elisha? With Israel? (v. 14).

IV. A Dynamic Ministry

Elisha's grief and his question on the banks of the Jordan sets up the rest of our chapter and launches a dynamic (powerful) ministry in Israel.

The three miracles that Elisha performs in vv. 14–25 as he retraces Elijah's steps are meant as the answer to the question: where is the LORD, the God of Elijah? The answer is that though Elijah's gone, God is still with his people by his Spirit who is working through Elisha.

The instrument has been put away, but the master craftsman is still at his workbench. And He is not dependent upon his instruments – that's the point!

A. The Jordan Parted (v. 14)

Elisha's first miracle is a duplication of Elijah's last miracle – the parting of the waters. He has taken up Elijah's mantle and his request—to be Elijah's successor—has been granted.⁹

B. The Water Healed (vv. 19–22)

Then, after the sons of the prophets carry out a desperate and fruitless search for Elijah, Elisha is confronted with a problem in Jericho.

⁸ We should understand Elijah as the reference in v. 12 because the identical phrase is used later in 2 Kings by the king of Israel to refer to the death of Elisha. There—where no other chariots are in view—the reference is clearly to the prophet. So it is in 2 Kings 2:12.

⁹ It is possible to explore the typology further here – Elisha, like a Joshua figure, comes into the land. Exploring this additional layer of typology would likely prove confusing within the limitations of the sermon.

The water is cursed, causing sickness and death. It may be that this was part of the curse that God had warned would result if anyone should rebuild the city (Joshua 6:26¹⁰; 1 Kings 16:29–34) [you can read more about how this happened during Ahab’s reign in 1 Kings 16].

Here, though, God through Elisha miraculously cures the spring, rolls back the curse and it is accompanying death. It is an act of grace. Elisha’s second miracle shows that God’s is still present—at work through his prophet—to carry out a work of grace, of healing, of restoration.

C. The Boys Mauled

Still retracing his steps, Elisha comes to Bethel. Like Jericho, Bethel was symbolic of Israel’s rebellion against the LORD. Bethel was a center for idolatry in the land. Under one of Ahab’s predecessors, a golden calf had been set up as a place for the people to worship.¹¹

And here we have the frightful story about the boys mauled by two she-bears. It’s the type of story you can imagine Jewish mothers (or maybe balding Jewish fathers) using to scare their children into compliance.

But such shallow applications miss the point. Elisha, walking in Elijah’s footsteps, filling Elijah’s office as prophet, and anointed with the same Spirit of God that had animated Elijah’s ministry, is now the living embodiment of God’s Word among the people.

So when this large pack of boys leaves the city intentionally to mock God’s spokesmen this wasn’t just a case of boys being boys or harmless teasing.¹² The children—likely a reflection of the adults of the city—were jeering at the mouthpiece *of God*.

Elisha calls a curse on these hoodlums not because he’s personally offended, it’s because the cause of God is being mocked. Terrifying as it is to us, the rampaging bears are a sign of God’s judgment upon those who would reject him in Israel.

While God showed that he was at work by his Spirit, now through Elisha, for purposes of grace in Jericho, he shows at Bethel that he’s still actively carrying out his ministry of judgment by that same Spirit.

God’s grace and God’s just judgment – the two notes of Elijah’s ministry – are still being sounded by Elisha through his Spirit-empowered ministry.

V. Application

The reason God placed this story here is because he wanted his dearly loved people to find hope in this: that the salvation purposes of the true and living God are not dependent upon

¹⁰ Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, “Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. “At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation,

and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.”

¹¹ 1 Kings 12:25f. Jeroboam’s calves were not about the worship of foreign gods but the worship of God in ways that God had not prescribed (place, priests, and time).

¹² The fact that 42 boys were injured suggests that there were likely many more. You can imagine a cluster of boys scattering upon such an attack. It seems reasonable to assume that some would have gotten away and that the pack was actually quite larger.

human instruments, but his purposes *are dependent* upon his Spirit's power at work in and through his people.

1. A word to beleaguered exiles

Exiles in pagan Babylon who didn't have an dead-raising, fire-dropping Elijah needed to see this great scene and be reminded again that not only was Elijah's God the only true, life-giving God, but he wasn't tied to his messengers.¹³

What the Jews needed in exile (and when they returned home) was not another Elijah, or an Elisha. What they needed was God. They needed the Spirit of God to be at work by his power. If they had that, they would have all they needed.

2. Our Particular Need & Tendency to Celebrity Culture

Family, I think this is a much needed word for us today.

Peter identifies the church now as spiritual exiles (1 Peter 1:1). While our citizenship is in heaven, we live in a world that is flooded with idols and hostile to Jesus and those who would follow him with the whole-life allegiance he calls us to. We feeling the pressures of our exile status in ways that the church in this part of the world has not felt.

Wouldn't it be nice to have an Elijah around?

But that's where this is an important word of challenge but also of hope for us, Harvest.

That's because the American Church has a penchant for celebrity worship.¹⁴ What I mean by this is that we are fascinated by the big-names, the headliners. We determine that a conference or a book or an event will have value because this person will be there or that person endorses it.

On a more local level, this can express itself in a number of ways. One obvious one rears its head on the warm Sunday afternoon when you are trying to decide whether you're going to in interrupt a perfectly nice afternoon on the patio.

"It's 5:00 PM. Are we going to church?" someone asks.

"Whose preaching?"

The question is asked as part of the calculation of whether going to church will be worthwhile (as if a man could really make church worthwhile in the way that counts!).

I use this as an example not to scold, but because I suspect that some of you—perhaps many of you—have asked this question or at least thought it. It is a wrongheaded question, but

¹³ Ian Hamilton, "God's Power Is Not Tied to His Instruments" - <https://www.cambridgepres.org.uk/resources/app/type/sermons/name/ian-hamilton/book/2-kings>

¹⁴ Carl Truman, "Messiahs Pointing to a Door," Reformation21, <https://www.reformation21.org/articles/messiahs-pointing-to-the-door.php>
Truman writes, "there is one other aspect of American culture which is perhaps most obvious at this particular moment in time: the cult of the individual celebrity." After an extended look at examples in sport and politics, Truman turns to the church, "The American church reflects the culture: ministries built around individuals, around big shots, churches that focus on god-like guru figures, all of them pointing to one door."

I must admit it is one that I've asked myself. That dialogue points out to us our own mini-celebrity culture. Our dependence upon God's instruments.

And so it's not surprising that when the church finds the difficulties of exile mounting, we take comfort in the exceptional preacher or the charismatic leader. All I'm doing here is trying to draw our attention to our tendency to place great importance upon "the guy".

Before I go any further, let me qualify what I'm saying: there are some leaders who have been given exceptional gifts from God and who are faithful stewards of those gifts. It's appropriate to give thanks to God for such people and to seek whatever spiritual benefit we can get through their ministry. Such men should have our encouragements and our prayers. I'm not saying that any influence or notoriety is wrong.

Also, I'm not saying that we shouldn't be diligent about having leaders in the church who are both *qualified* and *competent*. I think we should exercise care and discrimination as we're able when selecting leaders. Whether it be a group leader or the preacher, we want those serving not simply to be a warm, well-intentioned body, but we want people who are competent, tested (2 Timothy 2:15). The church must exercise care and discretion when appointing leaders and teachers.

But with those qualifiers in mind, it seems to me that our tendency to error is to place our dependence upon the instruments which God works through and not upon God who works through these instruments.

Our story corrects us at this point by showing us that [1] that Elijah's God is the true and living God and [2] he's not dependent on any particular servant to accomplish his purposes. It's not the presence of Elijah that made the difference at the end of the day, but the presence of God's Spirit on Elijah, and then on Elisha.

2 Kings 2 draws us to a better confidence than the extraordinary ministry of men. It calls us to place our hope in God and his extraordinary power that works through weak men.

3. The ascension and Pentecost in the history of redemption

But, you say, Elijah passes the mantle to Elisha who appears to be a pretty great man in his own right. Isn't this just passing the mantle from one superstar to another? Like replacing All-Star QB Drew Bledsoe with Hall-of-Famer Tom Brady? Maybe the assurance is just that God will supply the mighty servants that his people need...

No, I think the story is meant to give us a better confidence than that because the story points us to the other great ascension story in the Bible (there aren't that many, you know!). Elijah's life, but this story in particular, foreshadow the coming of a greater prophet.¹⁵ Elijah's

¹⁵ Peter Leithart, 1 & 2 Kings, Brazos, 171. The Elijah-Elisha narratives are multilayered in terms of typology. In some important ways (ways picked up by Scripture), Elijah is a type/foreshadow of John the Baptist who sets the stage for the coming of Elisha (in the NT, Jesus). Elijah is the lone voice in the spiritual wilderness of Israel, while Elisha is surrounded by disciples. Elisha's miracles (raising the dead, providing a meal

life was an anticipation of Jesus' life. Jesus as the prophet par excellence is baptized in the Holy Spirit and in the power of that Spirit teaches and performs miracles that astound those who witness him.

But Jesus, the Scriptures tell us, is not *merely* a prophet. He is God-in-the-flesh. He even shows supremely that he is the Lord of Life when he rises from the dead three days after his crucifixion.

How can it get any better?

But, as we read earlier in the service, Jesus, as he told his disciples, would not stay with them (not bodily anyway). In the presence of his disciples, like Elijah in the presence of his disciple, Jesus ascends into heaven.

If the disciples weren't speechless, they would have done well to say, "The chariots of Israel and its horsemen! Where is the LORD?"

But just like in our story, God does not merely vindicate the death-defeating ministry of Jesus by his ascension into glory, he also gives the same Spirit who had rested upon Jesus and empowered his ministry to his followers (Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).¹⁶

At Pentecost, in Acts 2, in a scene filled with wind and fire, the followers of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised they would. Why? So that the disciples of Jesus would now "be [his] witnesses...to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) and continue on Jesus' ministry of making God known in the world. They would be the prophets of God declaring him to the world as the only life-giving God, the God to whom all people owe their deepest loyalties.

And that Spirit, who fills the disciples with power and propels them to be God's spokesmen in the world, is not concentrated in one person, but he is given to all who believe. While the gifts of the Spirit are not distributed in equal measure to all, all who are joined to Jesus by saving faith *are* empowered by the Spirit of Christ Jesus.

As exiles ourselves, pressed on the outside by the idols of our age and threatened by the idolatrous tendencies of our own hearts within us, it is understandable that we would look for Elijahs. After all, the Enemy of Our Souls is fierce and unrelenting, isn't he? We need all the help we can get.

from twenty loaves, cleansing a leper) are all anticipatory of Jesus' ministry. And yet, we can also rightly see Elijah as a type of Christ and Elisha as representative of the followers of Jesus. Elisha is called to discipleship while plowing the field (Jesus' disciples must leave their fishnets and tax booths). He sticks with his master (which the disciples, mostly, do). More significantly, Elisha is granted the spirit of Elijah after his ascension for an even greater ministry. This has clear parallels with the Ascension-Pentecost in the New Testament.

¹⁶ I. Howard Marshall, "Acts" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by Beale and Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 527. "The opening chapter of Acts describes the events surrounding the departure of Jesus, presented as the beginning of a new stage in God's activity in salvation. The departure of Jesus is paralleled with the ascent of Elijah and the empowerment of his successor... [The word for taken up in Acts 1:1-2] provides a link to the narrative in 2 Kings 2:11...where Elijah 'went up to heaven in a whirlwind' in the sight of Elisha, his appointed successor, who proceeded to act as a prophet capable of mighty works in the 'spirit of Elijah' (2 Kings 2:15). The term thus directs attention to the parallel between the departure of Elijah and his commissioning of his successor who acts in his spirit and the departure of Jesus after commissioning his followers to continue his work and promising them the gift of the Spirit."

And again, it is a good thing to pray that God would raise up extraordinarily gifted men of integrity and courage and zeal for the Lord Jesus. May God send us Calvins and Whitefields and Spurgeons and Warfields for our own day!!

But what the people of God—what you and I in exile—need most fundamentally is not more great men but more of God. And the good news is that when Christ goes up into heaven he sends His Spirit down from heaven so that all who truly believe might have exactly that: God.

For to be a Christian means that by faith in Jesus we now have the Holy Spirit himself living *in us* empowering us that we might be kept in the faith *and* that we might be faithful messengers to our God in our exile.

We are empowered to stand firm but also to speak up, like Elijah, to our age and say: there is only one, true living God and you can flee the judgment your idolatry deserves and you can step into his abundant grace and love by coming to the Jesus.

Might we pray for mighty Elijahs? Yes. Should we? Yes.

But then we should also pray that the Lord would have our hopes set not on his servants, but on his Spirit; and, more importantly still, we should pray that His Spirit, who has been poured out on the church, would fill us in increasing measure for faithfulness to him and faithfulness for him.