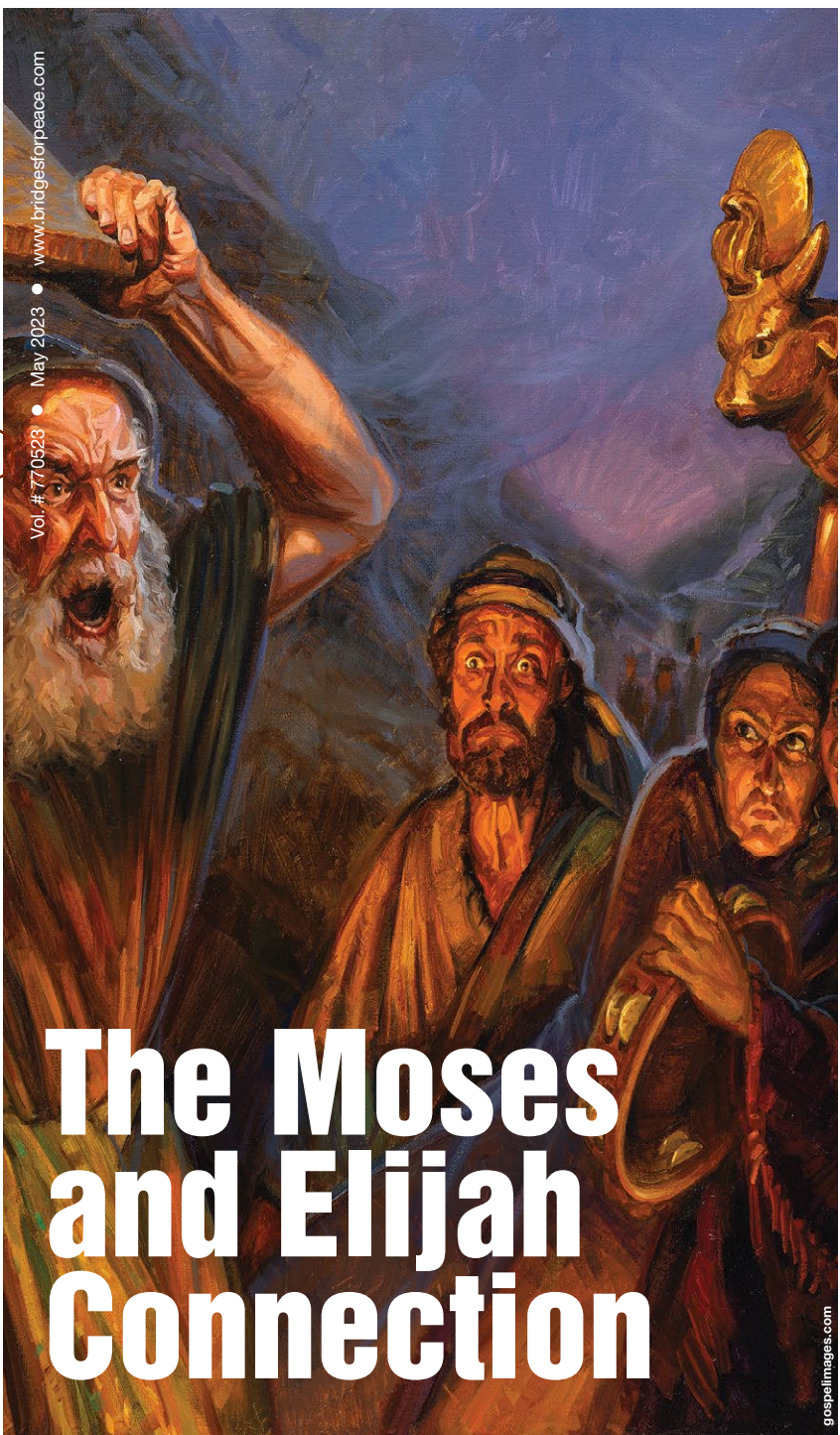


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

Vol. # 770523 • May 2023 • www.bridgesforpeace.com



The Moses and Elijah Connection

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WHEN WE MENTION MOSES AND ELIJAH, most Christians remember the transfiguration of Jesus (Yeshua). We read the account in Matthew 17:2–3, “*And He [Jesus] was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him*” (NASB). What do Moses and Elijah have in common? Both of them were taken by God in interesting ways. Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, while Moses died without anyone but God being present. Both prophets were used of God in miraculous ways to show His power. And both prophets had to deal with a rebellious people who at least dabbled in idolatry.

In the Jewish world, Moses is considered the greatest prophet, with Elijah in second place. Sorry, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel!

In the weekly *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) and *Haftarah* (portion of the Prophets read alongside a corresponding weekly *Torah* portion) reading schedule, there is a connection between the account of Moses dealing with idolatry in the incident of the golden calf and Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal.

THE GOLDEN CALF

We find the account of the golden calf in Exodus 32. While Moses went up onto the mountain to meet with God, the people pressured Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship. How quickly they turned to idolatry! When Moses came down from the mountain, he was carrying the two tablets inscribed by God with the Ten Commandments. It is ironic that the ten most important things God had to say started with: “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...*” (Exod. 20:2–5a NASB).

Moses returned from an intense spiritual encounter with God to a scene of idolatry. The Lord already knew what was going on and sent Moses down the mountain to deal with it. In Exodus 32:19, we read that Moses’s anger burned. He threw the tablets down, breaking them. He then took the calf, ground it into powder, scattered the powder on water and made the Israelites drink it. He called those who were still loyal to the Lord to join him, and then instructed them

to kill the offenders. Three thousand men were felled. Then Moses called the people to repentance before going to the Lord to confess what had happened. In verse 33, we read, *“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.’”* This is how much the Lord hates idolatry!



Two chapters later, we read, “Then God said, ‘Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live **will see the working of the Lord**, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you. Be sure to **comply with what I am commanding** you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. **Be careful that you do not make a covenant** with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their memorial stones, and cut down their Asherim—**for you shall not worship any other god, because the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**—otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they would prostitute themselves with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice...” (Exod. 34:10–15 NASB, emphasis added).

There are a few important themes in these verses. First, don’t make other covenants; you already have one with the God of Israel. Second, observe His commands; God will do miracles; and you will see the working of the Lord.

THE CONNECTION WITH ELIJAH

In the same week that the Jewish world reads the account of the golden calf, they also read 1 Kings 18. Clearly, these passages were chosen to be read together because of the correlations we find. In Elijah’s time, we see a situation where the people worshiped other gods, ignoring their covenant with the God of Israel. God refers to this in strong terms, calling it harlotry. Just as Moses and God had to respond to the idolatry in the desert camp, so too did Elijah and God have to respond to idolatry later on.

Elijah was an amazing character. The prophet Malachi speaks of him, saying, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the



prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5 NASB). Both Jews and Christians recognize this as a Messianic reference. Jesus (Yeshua) identified John the Baptist as the one who fulfilled this prophecy, while the Jewish people still wait for Elijah and the Messiah. At Passover, a place is set at every table for Elijah and someone even goes to the door to see if he is waiting to come in. There is traditionally also a chair reserved for Elijah at a *brit milah* (circumcision), because Elijah is considered the prophet of the *brit* (covenant).



ELIJAH'S STORY

King Ahab was married to Jezebel, who came from a neighboring country. She brought her idols as well as many priests of Baal and Asherah. She was a zealous advocate for her gods, and many in Israel followed her in worshiping these idols. God was angry.

In His wrath, God sent a drought on the land for three years. This was a dreadful punishment. Drought meant difficulty in growing food, while no food meant famine. Scripture tells us that this famine was severe. Man and beast alike were suffering. After three years, God told Elijah to meet with Ahab, after which God would send rain. Ahab greeted Elijah with a descriptive moniker: “troubler of Israel” (1 Kings 18:17). Elijah was not shy, and answered with a rebuttal, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:18b).

Then Elijah issued a challenge: a competition between the 450 prophets of Baal and the God of Israel, to be held in the sight of all Israel. Ahab accepted and sent a message to all the sons of Israel. They all came together at Mount Carmel, where the prophet addressed them with a stern warning: “And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21).

The pagan prophets spent all day trying to get their ‘gods’ to send fire to burn up their sacrifice. The day was almost over when it was Elijah’s turn. God’s prophet made the challenge even harder by having water poured on the sacrifice and in a trench around the altar. How hard that must have been for people experiencing drought! Then Elijah prayed. My father used to ask people how long a prayer it took to bring down fire from heaven. Let’s try it out. Read 1 Kings 18:36–37 out loud and time yourself. I’ve done it before. It takes about 25 seconds. The answer is that when you have a lifetime connection to God like Elijah did, the length of the prayer is not so important. Elijah had faithfully obeyed God, followed His commands and was in relationship with Him. He was acting under the power of God.

ELEMENTS OF ELIJAH’S PRAYER (1 KINGS 18:36–37)

First, Elijah identified who God is: YHVH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their fathers or ancestors. This was the God of the covenant, and by mentioning the patriarchs, Elijah was reminding them of that covenant. YHVH is the four-letter name of God found throughout Scripture. Most translations substitute it with LORD.

Second, Elijah identified who God ruled over, calling Him the God of Israel. This is a statement of territory. Israel is God’s land. In the days of Elijah, this was important. All the surrounding territories had gods attached to them who the people worshiped. By connecting God to Israel, Elijah emphasized to his listeners that the gods Jezebel brought with her were not local. It was a reminder that Israel was already in covenant with the God of Israel.

Third, Elijah emphasized his own identity and defined himself as God’s servant.

Fourth, Elijah clarified the authority under which he served, saying, “*at Your Word.*” This was a declaration that God was running the show and that Elijah, as the servant of God, was following the Almighty’s instruction.

Fifth comes Elijah’s request, and it is simple. “*Hear me, O LORD, hear me.*”

Sixth, Elijah shares the purpose of the prayer: “*That this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.*”

This brings us back to the themes identified in Exodus 34:10–15: don't make other covenants; observe His commands; God will do miracles; and we will see the working of the Lord.

Just as Moses emphasized the importance of not making other covenants, so did Elijah. Just as Moses pointed out the importance of observing God's commands, Elijah told Israel to *"follow Him"* as he challenged the people to choose between the false gods and the one true God (1 Kings 18:21).

In the Exodus passage, God promised to do miracles, and in Elijah's encounter with the priests of Baal, we see a miracle happening.

The purpose of the miracle was to see the working of the Lord, to see who God is and to understand that He is at work.

The conclusion of the story? *"Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!'"* (1 Kings 18:39b).

There is one more similarity. The prophets of Baal were slain at Elijah's command, just as the idolaters worshiping the golden calf were slain at Moses's command. God takes idolatry seriously. Only after idolatry was dealt with did the blessing of rain descend once again on the earth.

Today, God has not changed. He still wants all of our attention. He is still a jealous God. We might say that we are not guilty of idolatry today, but is that how God sees it? According to the Oxford dictionary, idolatry is extreme admiration, love or reverence



for something or someone. I recently heard of a preacher challenging his audience about their cell phones, saying they were becoming idols. People streamed to the front, placing their cell phones on the altar. I don't worship my phone, but I do admit to spending a lot of time on my computerized devices.

If we are guilty of putting anyone or anything before God, it may be an idol. He is calling us to remember the covenant, to remember His Word, to spend quality time with Him and to put Him first. He wants us to live His way, observing His commandments. Do you want to see miracles? Do you want to see God at work in your life? Take another look at what God is looking for. He wants us to say, "*The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God*" (1 Kings 18:39b). He wants the nations to see that He is God as He works miracles in the life of Israel and in the lives of all His followers.

Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.—Deut.)

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