

27. Defining the “Sons of the Prophets” (2 Kings 2–7)

About the time of Elijah and Elisha, we see the emergence of a caste of ascetics called the “sons of the prophets.” Like the later Dead Sea sectaries in New Testament times, they lived mostly apart from a corrupt society in a “callout” type of condition and devoted their lives to God. Some, additionally, were Nazirites, persons who took vows of consecration to God and abstained from certain foods and practices. They generally married but cultivated the gift of prophecy by seeking the tutelage of a man of God such as Elijah and Elisha to whom they looked as a spiritual “father.” The “school of the prophets” organized by the prophet Joseph Smith became a latter-day extension of this phenomenon and it has an important application in Isaiah’s end-time scenario.

We gain glimpses of Elisha’s relationship with his “sons” or disciples and how they survived. In one instance, Elisha neutralizes the toxicity of wild gourds one of them had collected for food: “Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot” (2 Kings 4:38–41).

In another instance, Elisha multiplies bread loaves for a hundred sons of the prophets: “There came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord” (2 Kings 4:42–44).

In another instance, Elisha multiplies olive oil for a widow of the sons of the prophets whose two sons were about to be taken by her creditor: “He [Elisha] said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed” (2 Kings 4:3–6).

From the apocryphal book, “The Ascension of Isaiah,” we learn of circumstances in which Isaiah and his prophet-disciples survived similar to those of the sons of the prophets in Elijah and Elisha’s day: “When Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw the lawlessness which was being perpetrated in Jerusalem and the worship of Satan and his wantonness, he withdrew from Jerusalem and

settled in Bethlehem of Judah. And there also there was much lawlessness, and withdrawing from Bethlehem he settled on a mountain in a desert place. And Micah the prophet, and the aged Ananias, and Joel and Habakkuk, and his son Jashub, and many of the faithful who believed in the ascension into heaven, withdrew and settled on the mountain. All were clothed with garments of hair, and all were prophets. And they had nothing with them but were naked, and all lamented with a great lamentation because of the going astray of Israel. And these ate nothing save wild herbs which they gathered on the mountains, and having cooked them, they lived thereon together with Isaiah the prophet” (Ascension of Isaiah 2:7–11).

From the Book of Isaiah itself we learn that the time will come when the truth of God is had only among God’s end-time servant and his prophet-disciples, of whom Isaiah and his disciples anciently served as a type: “Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples. I will wait for Jehovah, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and expect him” (Isaiah 8:16–17).

Revelations received by the prophet Joseph Smith established the precedent for an end-time brotherhood resembling the ancient fellowship of the sons of the prophets. Persons received into the school of the prophets covenanted with one another to observe the highest spiritual standard: “Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever. Amen” (Doctrine & Covenants 88:133).

We note the applicability of this school of the prophets as it looked forward to the revealing of the Lord’s “arm”—his end-time servant—in whose day the Jews and the whole house of Israel would come into God’s covenant: “As also through your administration the keys of the school of the prophets, which I have commanded to be organized; That thereby they may be perfected in their ministry for the salvation of Zion, and of the nations of Israel, and of the Gentiles, as many as will believe; That through your administration they may receive the word, and through their administration the word may go forth unto the ends of the earth, unto the Gentiles first, and then, behold, and lo, they shall turn unto the Jews. And then cometh the day when the arm of the Lord shall be revealed in power in convincing the nations, the heathen nations, the house of Joseph, of the gospel of their salvation. For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed forth upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Doctrine & Covenants 90:7–11).