

‘Historical wormholes’ shed light on larger story

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SAN ANTONIO—Preaching from a passage recounting the passing of the prophetic mantle from Elijah to Elisha, the field coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Texas encouraged Baptist women in ministry to draw strength from the bigger picture.

In addition to her current CBF role, Ellen Di Giosia served as founding chair of the conference host, Texas Baptist Women in Ministry.

In the final keynote of the biannual EmpowHer Conference, held at Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in San Antonio, Oct. 17-19, Di Giosia advised attendees to “widen the lens a little bit” to see the larger story, by following Elisha’s walk with Elijah up to his new, prophetic role.

Taking as her main text 2 Kings 2:1-15, she highlighted the strange way Elijah “anointed” Elisha as his successor—by throwing his mantle, or cloak, at Elisha. After this unusual selection process, Elisha follows Elijah. But, he isn’t discussed again for almost another 10 years, Di Giosia said.

It was a long road for Elisha from “anointing” to appointment as prophetic successor, an experience with which women in ministry can relate, she noted.

A word of warning

“Among sisters,” Di Giosia said she felt compelled to warn the ministers in attendance who are just starting out there will be people who will oppose them along the way, even in great churches that claim to support women in ministry.

She shared a personal story of hateful comments she received regarding a post on stepping away from a pastoral position some years ago. Initially on the X post (then Twitter) she had written, she responded to comments calling into question the validity of her pastoral position with a touch of defensiveness.

However, a few responses in she was down to a simple one letter response of “K,” meaning, “OK, whatever,” or “hush,” and after that no response at all.

“I will defend to my very last breath the right and responsibility of women to lead and serve and preach and care for people in whatever way God has called them, but what I will not do anymore is defend myself to people,” she said.

“I have learned that when someone says, ‘You’re not called,’ when someone says, ‘That dream of yours is dead,’ or ‘You’ve misinterpreted what God is saying,’... the best response is exactly what Elisha says: ‘hush.’”

Instead, naysayers may be advised to sit back and watch, because as the apostles responded in Acts: “If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail. But if it’s of God, you will not be able to overthrow it. You might even be found to be fighting against him.”

Di Giosia explained, if someone says she’s not called of God, “they can just wait a minute.” Because if her ministry bears fruit, they’ll be proved wrong. If her ministry does not, “they can pat themselves on the back all the way to glory.”

A page out of Elisha’s book

But she’s going to be “busy following where God leads,” she explained. And, stopping to talk to everyone questioning her will waste all her energy, though she pointed out some situations may require advocacy or stronger

demands of respect.

However, with the “randoms of the world” who speak out against women in ministry, the best response is to guide them “toward the spiritual discipline of silence,” she said.

This is the same response Elisha gave the company of prophets who questioned his choice to continue following Elijah, even when everyone in the story knew the end of Elijah’s prophetic ministry had come, she said.

Elisha responded to the company of prophets to “keep silent.”

And he continued to follow Elijah along his “farewell tour” of sites important to the settlement of the Holy Land and cities where he had established prophetic companies—all the way to Jericho.

“An era is ending and something new is going to have to take its place.” Elisha wants to be there for it, she explained.

Elijah parts the Jordan with his mantle like it was a mundane undertaking. But when the prophets get across, they have left the mundane and are alone in the wilderness—a place where God has a habit of “showing up in spectacular, surprising ways,” Di Giosia continued.

Elisha asks for a “double helping” of the spirit, or to be Elijah’s prophetic “eldest son.” And he sees God, who will protect his people, coming with chariots of fire to take his master away.

Because Elisha followed Elijah to the end, despite the hecklers and even the urging of Elijah to let him go it alone, he sees the Lord, Di Giosia pointed out.

Historical wormholes explained

Di Giosia explained a “historical wormhole” is when a living person can be traced back to a distant historical figure, like how President Joe Biden can be traced all the way back to Queen Elizabeth through a series of handshakes, or how “there are whales alive today that were alive before Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick* in 1851.

“The fax machine was invented while wagons were crossing the Oregon Trail in 1843,” she explained.

Historical wormholes function “like a camera pulls back so we can see more of the scene,” in a movie. The wormholes provide context, helping readers to see the broader picture of history and how events connect over time.

Elijah’s journey “on the last day of his life on earth” traces the events of the history of his people, like a wormhole, tying his ministry to the ministry of Moses and other prophets of old.

Then, because he doesn’t die, Elijah’s spirit “actually haunts” much of the rest of the Bible, even showing up with Jesus on the mountain, “making our view of salvation history wider and wider,” she explained.

So many times, Elijah said: “It’s just me. Nobody else is standing up to power. I can’t do it on my own.” But if he could have “pulled the camera back,” he could have seen the prophets before him and the ways God had shown up for his people over and over, from the garden to the flood and in the wilderness, she said.

“He might have recognized that this difficult gift of prophecy came with the assurance of God’s presence in every moment,” but as great as he was, he didn’t seem to get it.

Yet, Elisha is starting his ministry having seen God as protector and defender. God will fight the fight against idolatry, not Elisha, she noted.

She said, “when we shift our focus from the right here, right now,” to a broader look at history, it’s possible to see things that couldn’t be seen from up close—tracing a history that shows how “everything is caught up in the great story of redemption that God is still writing today.”

“If we follow doggedly like Elisha, if we are willing to face the whirlwind ... we will see the Lord God coming in glory to defend us, to remind us that we are not alone in the task—that God is not depending on us to win the day.”

Being faithful isn’t about knowing all the answers. It’s about picking up the mantle “that has been laid at our feet” and going back to life ready to see God move.

Di Giosia explained as God said “yes” to Elisha: “The spirit belongs to you. And you are called, and you are never, never alone.”