Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath School Lesson

[Title]  Elijah’s and Elisha’s Mantle
[Text]  1 Kings 19:1-19; 2 Samuel 10:3, 4; Ezekiel 16:15, 16; 1 Kings 21:21-29; 2 Kings 2:1-18
[Use]  May 7, 2011

It’s the biggest news event of 2011 to date. What could top the Royal Wedding or the deadly twisters that have wreaked havoc on the southeastern United States? Osama bin Laden is dead. He was killed last Monday in Pakistan by Joint Special Operations Command forces working with the CIA. Osama was hiding in a secret compound deep inside the country.

Few leaders have had a more colorful existence than bin Laden. His life is an incredible story of power in the world. Love him or hate him, bin Laden loomed large. Reactions to his death are mixed, but many Jihadists have glorified their fallen hero. Like all great leaders (I do not mean honorable, just highly influential) Osama carried a mantle. For the former leader of Al Qaeda, his was a mantle of violence.

As the mastermind behind the September 11 attacks on the U.S., bin Laden used sophisticated technology to communicate his deadly intents to loyal followers around the world. He understood the power of the media and his believers took oaths of allegiance to their master in ridding the world of western influence, especially the hated United States.

While many Americans danced in the streets, “Jihadis around the world reacted on Monday to the news of Osama bin Laden’s with a mix of sorrow, disbelief and determination that Al Qaeda and its affiliates would continue their struggle against the West and its allies.”

“Some jihadis expressed doubt that bin Laden was dead, citing what they called doctored photographs that shot around the Web on Monday. But most conceded that the news appeared to be true. Many insisted that the news was not unexpected, and tried to shift the focus to the organization the Qaeda leader helped build.”

“Bin Laden is dead, but the movement is not,” said one member of an Al Qaeda affiliate active in North Africa and Europe, speaking by phone Monday. “And if one Osama is dead, there are thousands more Osamas.”

Many Americans feel that justice has been done. But, “…some Muslim leaders such as Imam Johari Abdul-Malik worry that this revenge will only reap more revenge. Abdul-Malik, who serves at a mosque in Northern Virginia, says he is bracing for an angry Muslim reaction—if not in the U.S., then abroad.

"That mantle of violence will only be picked up by someone else seeking revenge, rather than seeking justice," he says. He says killing bin Laden is not a silver bullet that will cure the problems of Muslims in the U.S. "I don't believe that it's going to make Muslims in America any more accepted if they dance on the grave of Osama bin Laden." And yet, he agrees with President Obama—that bin Laden was a mass murderer who killed more Muslims than anyone else—and harmed Islam in the process."

Did the U.S. really get him? There are doubts. “Facial recognition technology confirmed the body was bin Laden, and on Monday morning a DNA match removed virtually any doubt. ‘Now we can say with 99.9 per cent confidence that this was bin Laden,’ said Brennan. The body was flown to an aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea, where it was washed, wrapped in a white sheet and placed in a weighted bag. Then the world’s most infamous man was sent to the bottom of the ocean. In the words of one U.S. official, bin Laden had been hiding in plain sight, but he now has vanished without a trace and without a shrine to remember him by."
This week's Sabbath school lesson focuses on a great prophetic leader in Israel, Elijah, who passed his mantle of leadership to Elisha. We learn from Scripture that the students who served Elijah stood in awe of this godly man who was taken away. It was hard for the prophet's followers to believe he really was gone. He seemed to have vanished without a trace. But he left a garment … a mantle that Elisha picked up and used to carry God's work forward.

Osama bin Laden's mantle is also being passed. Some say no one could ever take his place. While many pray that is so, we must ask, "What characteristics in Scripture mark the passing of the mantle of leadership? What do we learn from this story of transition of one leader to another?" That is the focus of this week's lesson.

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1. NY Times
2. NPR
3. CBS

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Paul Richardson, Director
Center for Creative Ministry
www.creativeministry.org
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