



ELISHA: Man of God

And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said . . . I will follow thee. . . . then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him

God is continually seeking those who have wandered from the faith and those who are lost. He goes to great lengths to bring them home.

I can say this with confidence. God's mercy is continually portrayed in the Scriptures. This can especially be seen in the amazing ministries of the Old Testament prophets — Elijah and Elisha. They are two of the more notable prophets sent by God to the wayward northern kingdom of Israel. Their combined ministries lasted 86-years and ministered to six kings.

Often missed during this time period are the school of prophets stationed in at least three cities in the northern kingdom. They were headed by both Elijah and Elisha. Those schools resided in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho.

The first king of the northern kingdom (Jeroboam) made it impossible for the biblical priesthood, Scribes and Levites to be faithful to their call and remain in the north. Therefore, they left Israel and moved to Judah. However, God did not abandon the people. The schools of the prophets remained in the north, ministering to the wayward nation.

Fifty-four years after Israel divided into two nations, the religious conditions in the north worsened. It became so bad under the reign of King Ahab that a man by the name of Obadiah hid 100 of the prophets in a cave in order to keep them from being killed by the king.

The nation's disregard of God led to flagrant acts of sin. Open paganism filled the country. Sexual perversion, violence and corruption erupted at every level. Justice on the whole failed.

Under King Ahab and Jezebel, the nation reached a new spiritual low. It was so bad that even the great prophet Elijah believed he was the only one left. But God revealed to him that there were 7000 who had not yet bow their knee to Baal.

God used Elijah to show Israel the powerlessness of paganism. The three year drought brought crushing blows to Israel's faith in Baal, the storm god. The water shortage brought the people to their knees. This was climaxed with the destruction of 450 prophets of Baal along with another 400 prophets of Ashteroth. This all happen in one day. It was a major defeat for paganism.

God then instructed Elijah to anoint his successor, (Elisha) and the next King of Israel, (Jehu) and the king of Syria (Hazeal). Their reigns continued to loosen the grip of persecution and violence that plagued the land. Though paganism was not abolished, there would be more room for the message of God to spread in the north.

Through these acts we can see God is continually seeking to reach those that have wandered from the faith or are lost. He goes to great lengths to bring them home.

If you are struggling with your faith, please note that God has not given up on you. If you think God has given up on your love ones, think again. God is still reaching out to them.

Today, we will look at the ministry of Elisha. He is Elijah's successor. In many ways He is strikingly different than Elisha.

Elijah dressed in camel hair clothing and lived in poor and rural areas. Whereas, Elisha was from a wealthy family and more comfortable dressed in the common apparel while dwelling in cities and towns.

Both prophets boldly confronted kings. However, Elijah was more confrontational, even challenging the prophets of Baal and Ashteroth to a showdown. He was designed to challenge and strike down paganism.

While Elisha still confronted paganism, his ministry focused on rebuilding the school of the prophets and restoring the faith of the remnant in the north. He knew that by strengthening the faithful, they in turn would be able to bring the message of life to a wayward nation.

In our lesson today, we find God remembering his own. Furthermore, we find God still reaches out to the lost and hurting, even in times of apostasy and open rebellion.

1. What do we learn of Elisha's dedication to the Lord in 1 Kings 19:19-21?

ANSWER:

Elisha, whose name means "God is salvation," was apparently from a wealthy family. Otherwise there would not have been servants behind twelve pair of oxen pulling twelve plows lined up in an echelon formation across the field. Casting the mantle on this young farmer was Elijah's ceremonial way of drafting him for the prophetic task to which God had called him. Elisha obviously knew what it meant. "He left the oxen and ran after Elijah" (v. 20).

Like the reluctant followers in Jesus' parable, Elisha asked for the privilege of first saying goodbye to his parents (cf. Matt. 8:21; Luke 9:61). It is not exactly clear whether Elijah willingly granted his petition or not. What did Elijah mean when he said, "Go back again, for what have I done to you"? Seeing it as a favorable response to Elisha's request, one commentator translates the comment: "Go (kiss your parents). Then come back, for (remember) what I have done to you (i.e. casting my mantle on you)." Elisha must have understood it this way. Not only did he go back to tell his parents farewell but he also symbolically put his entire past life behind him by sacrificing his oxen and burning them with a fire kindled from the wooden plow. The plow was probably the simple run-rig type still common among Palestinian peasants today.

2. When we read 2 Kings 2, eight years have past since we first heard of Elisha. There is only one passage that gives us any insight to those eight years. It is found in 2 Kings 3:11. **What do we learn about Elisha and leadership?**

ANSWER:

He is identified here as the one "who poured water on the hands of Elijah" (v. 11). This picturesque phrase was used to identify a servant who held the jar of water while his master washed his hands. It means that Elisha was known as the servant of the great prophet Elijah, and therefore, "the word of the LORD is with him" (v. 12).

3. **What can we learn about the school of the prophets in the following passages. (2 Kings 2:3, 5; 4:38; 5:22.**

ANSWER:

The Hebrew term "sons of the prophets" occurs eleven times, all during the period of Elijah and especially Elisha, and only in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. The term is a technical one referring to the members of a prophetic order or guild, and has no reference to physical descent from a prophet.

There were several different schools or branches of the same guild located at various places: (1) at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), (2) at Jericho (2:5), (3) at Gilgal (4:38), (4) in the hill country of Ephraim (5:22). Yet they were all "ruled" by the same prophet whom they called master (2:3, 5). When the master died or was taken, as Elijah was, one of the school members took his place as the new master. The promotion had to be recognized by the guild members, and the

test was whether the new master had the powers of the old master (2:8, 14) and whether the spirit of the old master rested on the new master (2:15). The guild may have lived in a community. They erected community buildings (6:1ff.) and shared a common table (4:38-44). Yet some were married (4:1ff.). Some of their work was done at the command of the master (4:38; 9:1), and often they sought his approval before doing something (2:16-18; 6:1ff.). Yet they could act on their own (1 Kings 20:35).

Though the technical term **בְּנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים** does not occur elsewhere, there may be other indications of prophetic guilds. Such may be the case with the “band of prophets” in Saul’s and Samuel’s day (1 Sam 10:5ff.; 19:20). Likewise, where a large number of prophets is mentioned (1 Kings 18:4, 19; 22:6) this is indicative of a guild. Groups acting in concert and designated only by “prophets” are prob. also prophetic guilds (2 Kings 23:2; Jer 26:7, 8, 11). Thus prophetic guilds continued throughout the monarchy.

Finally, the phrase **בֶּן־נְבִיא**, “the son of a prophet” (Amos 7:14), though in the sing., should also be understood as referring to membership in a guild of prophets. Thus Amos affirms he is not a member of a prophetic guild.

The above is from R. B. Y. Scott, The Relevance of the Prophets (1942), 46-49; H. H. Rowley, The Servant of the Lord (1952), 97-134.

God is now calling Elijah home, therefore, Elijah brings Elisha with him as he says goodbye to the various schools of the prophets. They begin at the school in **Gilgal** — **2 Kings 2:1**. Then they head to the school in **Bethel** — **2 Kings 2:3**, and finally on to the school in **Jericho** — **2 Kings 2:5**. There, 50 men from the school followed Elijah and Elisha to the Jordan River. Remember 8 years before many of these men had to flee for their lives and were living in caves. They lost everything for the sake of speaking forth the word of God. Elijah was the man God used to deliver them from their peril.

It is hard to say goodbye. I have on several occasions heard the final messages of men greatly used by the Lord. Such as the evangelist John R Rice, and the missionary-evangelist Jacob Gardenhaus. I have also heard the final message by a pastor dying from cancer, and even here at Calvary we heard two men, Bob Dowey, and Bob McKeever preach their final message before the Lord took.

In 2 Kings 2:8 we find the final miracle of Elijah. God allows Elijah to part the Jordan before he is taken in a whirlwind, and in 2 Kings 2:14 we see the first miracle performed by Elisha. The point is this: though one man may go off the scene, God will always provide for his people.

4. Elisha performed a number of unusual miracles for those associated with the sons of the prophets. He healed the polluted waters in Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22). He provided oil to a prophet’s widow. (2 Kings 4:1-7). He healed a pot of food that was accidentally poisoned (2 Kings 4:38-41). During the feast of firstfruits, he multiplied 20 loaves of bread to feed 100 guests (2 Kings 4:42-44), and he recovered a lost ax head by having it float to the surface of the water (2 Kings 6:1-7). In Bethel (a place where a school of the prophets resided) he cursed an blasphemous mob of young men and 42 of them were mauled by two she bears (2 Kings 2:23-25). **What was the purpose of these miracles?**

ANSWER:

Elisha was rebuilding a nation that was devastated by sin. It was a nation that had almost entirely turned their backs on God. Many of the faithful few were impoverished by the economic chaos created by the drought, and by the personal persecution inflicted upon them. They were just beginning to get back on their feet. The miracles solidify the ministry of Elisha over the school of the prophets and strengthen the faithful remnant.

5. Discuss the miracle found in 2 Kings 2:19-22 and its application.**ANSWER:**

This takes place at Jericho. The school of the prophets had settled in the new city of Jericho but the water supply was polluted. It caused the women and animals to miscarry, and the fruit trees to drop their fruit early. The poor water supply made the land affordable for the struggling students at the School of the Prophets, however they could not remain there for health reasons. Elisha asks for elements used in the Mosaic Law for purification – a new bowl and salt – 2 Kings 2:20. He then pronounces the “thus saith the Lord,” meaning, this is what God directed me to do, and God heals the spring for generations to come (2 Kings 2:21).

It demonstrated the type of ministry Elisha was going to have on the nation – a healing ministry. One that ministers to the needs of the people who were broken under the tyranny of paganism. As a result of the miracle, the school was able to stay. The city was able to thrive. The land began to heal.

Insight: This is another snapshot of God’s care for His people, even in hard times.

5. Discuss the miracle found in 2 Kings 2:23-25 and its application.**ANSWER**

Don’t think for a minute that Elisha went soft on paganism. For we have another demonstration of God’s divine protection, His divine jealousy for His people, and His divine wrath against those that turn from Him.

Bethel was still a wayward city, even though one of the schools of the prophets resided in its borders. Bethel was considered the center of calf worship for many years.

1Kings 12:32-33 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did **he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made:** and he placed in **Bethel** the priests of the high places which he had made. ³³ So he offered upon the altar which he had made in **Bethel** the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense. **There was a bitter spirit against God and any true prophet of God.”**

As Elisha was headed for Mt. Carmel from Jericho, he passed through Bethel. He was climbing the 2800-foot incline into the city. As he approached, a large number of children (young men) confronted him. A crowd like this could even threaten his safety.

First, the King James has caused some confusion by translating the term as "children." The Hebrew word can refer to children, but rather more specifically means "young men." Second, the fact that the bears mauled 42 of the youths indicates that there were more than 42 youths involved. This was not a small group of children making fun of a bald man. Rather, it was a large demonstration of young men who assembled for the purpose of mocking a prophet of God. Third, the mocking of "go on up, you baldhead," is more than making fun of baldness. The baldness of Elisha referred to here may be: 1) natural loss of hair; 2) a shaved head denoting his separation to the prophetic office; or more likely, 3) an epithet of scorn and contempt, Elisha not being literally bald. The phrase "go up" likely was a reference to Elijah, Elisha's mentor, being taken up to Heaven earlier in 2 Kings chapter 2:11-12. It was a disbelief in the story of Elijah's translation. These youths were sarcastically taunting and insulting the Lord's prophet by telling him to repeat Elijah's translation.

In summary, 2 Kings 2:23-24 is not an account of God mauling young children for making fun of a bald man. Rather, it is a record of an insulting demonstration against God's prophet by a large group of young men. Because these young people of about 20 years of age or older (the same term is used of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:7) so despised the prophet of the Lord, Elisha called upon the Lord to deal with the rebels as He saw fit. The Lord's punishment was the mauling of 42 of them by two female bears. The penalty was clearly justified, for to ridicule Elisha was to ridicule the Lord Himself. The seriousness of the crime was indicated by the seriousness of the punishment. The appalling judgment was God's warning to all who would scorn the prophets of the Lord.