

Freedom Way M.B.C.
Bible Study Lesson # 473
Date _____

Choosing a Mentor (Prophet Elisha)

Biblical Passage: 2 Kings 2:1-18

Supporting Passages: 1 Kings 19:19-21;
1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Biblical Truth: God calls and equips His servants for His purposes.

Context: A series of wicked kings brought about the need for prophets in Israel, and Elijah's ministry profoundly impacted the nation. Near the end of his life, God instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha as the prophet to take his place. Elisha sought to learn from Elijah and followed him everywhere he went. Elisha followed Elijah until the day Elijah was taken up to heaven. Then the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, equipping him to do all that Elijah could do.

INVESTIGATION

Elisha would take Elijah's place (1 Kings 19:16). With so many spiritual problems in Israel, the prophetic voice had to continue or the nation had no chance of survival. In 2 Kings 2:1-18, the writer explains how Elisha became a worthy successor to Elijah. In one of the most remarkable events recorded in Scripture, the Lord took Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. He did not die. Elijah's journey to heaven encourages believers in Christ today who will live forever with the Lord even though they will experience death.

Before Elijah left this earth he prepared Elisha to take his place. Elijah served as a mentor to the younger prophet. Elisha learned much from his teacher. God had called Elisha to the prophetic ministry, but he made sure Elisha developed the qualifications for the office. As the time neared for Elijah's exit, Elisha stayed by his side constantly and would not leave him. After parting the Jordan River and crossing over on dry ground, Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he left him. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He asked for great spiritual strength

and power to do the job the Lord called him to do. God granted Elisha's desire upon Elijah's departure to heaven. Any Christian who wants to be an effective worker for the Lord, must also possess spiritual depth and strength. Every Christian would certainly benefit from the wisdom of a mentor. Everyone needs knowledge and training. Above all, people need the Lord's Spirit to work through them. People can possess confidence to perform the tasks God has for them if they allow the Lord who called them to ministry to also equip them for ministry.

IMPORTANCE

Imagine watching someone's life and thinking, "I want to know God like that." Elisha felt that way about his mentor, Elijah. God had done amazing things through Elijah that showed His power to the nations. But his life on earth was coming near its end. Elisha had followed Elijah and developed a close relationship with the man of God. So when it came time for Elijah's life to end, God called Elisha to take his place of ministry.

Near the end of his life, Elijah asked Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" (2 Kings 2:9). Elisha answered him, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit!" (v. 9). That answer shows Elisha's belief that God is. God showed His power when He took Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire. Elisha realized the responsibility left to him and acknowledged his need for the Spirit of God to come upon him.

This passage also touches on other key truths: People are God's Treasure and The Bible is God's Word.

INTERPRETATION

2 Kings 2:1 The time came for Elijah's ministry to end. It was no secret that Elisha would succeed him. Everyone in the nation must have assumed Elisha would take Elijah's place when he died. Yet Elijah would not die. The Lord would take him directly to heaven. Just before that event occurred, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.

Two possible locations for Gilgal exist. More likely, the reference here pertains to the Gilgal that lay between Jericho and the Jordan River.

This is the place the Israelites encamped when they made their initial entry into the promise land. Some scholars also suggest another place in the central hill country that stood nearer Bethel since the two prophets traveled together from Gilgal to Bethel. Neither place, however, was far from Bethel.

2 Kings 2:2–6 From Gilgal, the two prophets went to Bethel, to Jericho, and then to the Jordan River. Elijah informed Elisha that the Lord told him to go to these places. Elijah intended to travel alone. But Elisha refused to allow this. Elisha understood that the time of Elijah's departure was at hand. He wanted to spend every second with his mentor. Elisha's actions demonstrate his loyalty. They show his faithfulness to carry out his prophetic duties according to God's will.

The trip the two prophets took is significant. The Israelites took a certain route when they first came into the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Here, Elijah and Elisha followed in reverse the same route.

Why would the Lord ask Elijah to travel to these places? He may have wanted to comfort Elijah, reminding him that as Joshua effectively replaced Moses, so Elisha would serve as a worthy replacement for Elijah.

Elijah did seem to have an immediate purpose for his journey: to meet a community of prophets located at the different stops. Elijah may have wanted to say goodbye to the prophets. They likely had supported him in his campaign against Baalism. These prophets could serve as Elisha's allies as well. The prophets at Bethel and Jericho asked Elisha if he knew the Lord would take his "master" from him that very day. Elisha replied, "Yes, I know" (vv. 3, 5). Yet Elisha said he told the prophets not to speak about the matter. Elisha's response most likely reveals the sorrow he felt because he knew he would soon lose Elijah.

2 Kings 2:7–10 Elijah and Elisha reached the Jordan River. Then "fifty men of the company of the prophets" came to the river. The school of prophets consisted of a group of men who associated in a brotherhood. They lived a communal life but were not celibate. Schools existed in various locations during the time of Elijah and Elisha. They followed a leader who bore the title "father." Sometimes they engaged in

ecstatic or bizarre behavior. It is not clear what kind of relationship the prophets had with Elijah and Elisha, but they followed the two great prophets to some degree.

Standing at a distance from Elijah and Elisha, the company of prophets witnessed an amazing event. Elijah took off his cloak, rolled it up, and struck the water with it. The waters of the Jordan River parted, and Elijah and Elisha walked on dry ground to the other side. Elijah's parting the waters may remind readers of Moses' parting the Red Sea (Ex. 14:15–29). Yet Elijah's actions seem to have a connection with another lesser-known parting of waters. When Joshua led the people into the promised land, the Jordan River waters parted for them (Josh. 3:7–17). The Lord told Joshua He would perform this miracle so the people would know He would be with him in the same way He had been with Moses (Josh. 3:7). By parting the water, Elijah demonstrated to the company of the prophets that Elisha would make a worthy successor. The Lord would be with Elisha in the same way He had been with Elijah.

When they reached the other side of the river, Elijah asked Elisha if he had any final requests. Elisha asked for a "double portion" of the "spirit" Elijah possessed. This is not the request of an ambitious prophet who desired to outshine his mentor. According to the Deuteronomic Law, the eldest son received a double portion of his father's goods (Deut. 21:17). Elisha wanted to be recognized as Elijah's heir. He also wanted the spiritual power to perform the prophetic ministry he would soon inherit.

2 Kings 2:11–12 Suddenly, a "chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared" and took Elijah "up to heaven in a whirlwind." Elijah did not die. The Lord removed him from any further trials and troubles. Elijah's departure also proved once again that the Lord was superior to Baal. God, not the storm god, could control the whirlwind. God, not Baal, had power over death. Elijah and Enoch (Gen. 5:18–24) stand as the only Old Testament figures not to experience death. Both men went directly into the presence of the Lord.

Elisha expressed enormous grief at his mentor's departure. He tore his clothing. He called out to Elijah, "My father!" Then Elisha referred to Elijah as the "chariots and horsemen of Israel." What is the significance of this title? Israel's leaders had

long placed their trust in military powers to save them from their enemies. Yet the strength of the nation could not be discovered in the military power provided by chariots and horses. The designation Elisha gave to Elijah indicated the true strength of Israel. Israel's strength was found in the prophetic ministry and spiritual maturity of Elijah and those who would follow after him.

2 Kings 2:13–14 After he left this world, only Elijah's cloak remained. Elisha took it back to the Jordan and asked where Elijah's God could be found. Elisha struck the water with the cloak and the waters parted again. Elijah had gone, but the Lord had not departed. Elisha now had confidence the Lord would be with him in the prophetic ministry. The company of prophets witnessed the event and also recognized that Elijah's spirit and power now rested upon Elisha.

2 Kings 2:15–18 The company of prophets did not immediately embrace Elisha as Elijah's successor. They searched for Elijah three days despite Elisha's objections. The prophets did not find Elijah. He was no longer in the world. The prophets returned to Elisha in Jericho. This suggests they had accepted the fact that the Lord had taken Elijah to heaven. They were then ready to recognize Elisha as a legitimate heir to Elijah.

IMPLICATIONS

Elisha knew his mentor would soon leave him alone in the world. He did not want to lose Elijah, but he stood ready to replace him. Elisha asked Elijah to appoint him as his heir. He asked to receive the Lord's Spirit that indwelt Elijah. Adults with believing parents who are aging will especially relate to this lesson. They, like Elisha, have a responsibility to step up after their parents and continue their legacy of faith. Encourage them to pray for wisdom to develop the characteristics they admired in their parents—even with a "double portion."

Elijah willingly passed the prophetic mantle to Elisha without any insecurity. Elisha was not an ambitious prophet who desired to outshine his mentor. The two prophets had a healthy relationship because they unselfishly performed the Lord's work. This lesson should challenge all believers to find someone younger than them—such as a teenager, newlywed, or new parent—to invest their lives in. New believers should feel

encouraged that God has a plan for their lives and desires to empower them to serve Him, and one of the ways He will do that is through another believer.