

2 KINGS 2; THE PASSING OF THE BATON – A CONFIRMATION OF A CALLING

Last week we saw that Israel is still involved in a struggle to determine who will be the God of Israel. That struggle will be ongoing for a while. And now we have a new player/ character entering the fray. He was introduced to us way back in 1 Kings, 19.

1Kings 19:16 ^gAnd Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and ^hElisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.

These words were spoken to Elijah at Mt. Sinai, as he was going through something of a crisis. He needed help and God told him that he was going to get help. Shortly thereafter, Elijah found Elisha and the two have been together ever since. However, we haven't read anything of Elisha, since they met. But now, we see him reenter the series in a big way. It is as if God is teasing us, regarding the prophet, Elisha. We will see why God did it this way.

In 1 Kings 19, we saw that Elisha was to replace Elijah. Here, in the beginning of 2 Kings 2, we see that it is time for Elijah to leave the story, even the planet. And it is to happen in a miraculous way. But this leaving of Elijah is stated in a very, "matter of fact" way.

2Kings 2:1 Now when the LORD was about to ^atake Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and ^bElisha were on their way from ^cGilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, ^d“Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, ^e“As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. ³ And ^fthe sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he said, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

- Gilgal – circle. Usually a circle of standing stones. More than one “circle.” There is one such place just East of Jericho, where Israel camped upon entering the Promised Land. Another is the one I believe is being referred to here, (due to the geographical context) – just a few miles north of Bethel, in the central highlands of Israel.
- The two prophet’s relationship – apprenticeship.
- “Stay here!” No, I will go wherever you go.” Typical relationship between a master and pupil. Think of Jesus and His disciples. It is also a good rule for life, to go wherever Jesus “goes.”
- Sons of the prophets – not literal “sons”, but the phrase meaning a “guild” of prophets. Think of a seminary type setting.
- Do you know the Lord will take your master from you today? Yes! Now keep quiet! Is it rude to ask this in Elijah’s presence?

2Kings 2:4 **Elijah said to him, “Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”**

- Repeat – more sons of the prophets. Stay here while I go to Jericho. No, I will go wherever you go. Do you know your master will be taken from you today? Be quiet!

2Kings 2:6 **Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the**

water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

- Repeat – Stay here, I have to go to the Jordan. No, I will go wherever you go. More sons of the prophets – 50 to be exact. This group follows Elijah and Elisha from a distance.
- Elijah rolls up his cloak, (mantle) and strikes the water in the Jordan. The waters separate and the two walk across on dry ground.
- Does this remind you of anything? Moses and the Red Sea crossing. Joshua and Israel crossing the Jordan to enter the Promised Land.
- What does the crossing of the water mean in this context? A new creation – something new, coming out of chaos. This links to our practice of water baptism.
- The imagery of Moses would have also clicked to the sons of the prophets as Elijah represents Moses and Elisha represents Joshua, as Moses' successor. This imagery is speaking to the sons of the prophets and cluing them into what is actually going on here.

*2Kings 2:9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.”¹⁰ And he said, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.”¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, *“chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”¹² And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more.**

- “Ask what I shall do for you...” This is something like a final blessing before the master/ leader/ patriarch is taken away/ dies. This is a common feature in the OT. Think of Abraham blessing his sons.

- If you see me go. Probably encouraging Elisha to hang around, which he has done so far.
- Double portion – Elisha is requesting what an eldest son would expect of a father in Israel: a double portion of the inheritance (see Dt. 21: 15 – 17).
- **“Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me”** (v. 9c). Some scholars believe that Elisha is asking for a double portion of Elijah’s prophetic ability (Leithart, 174), but most think that he is asking for the double-portion of the inheritance that is the right of the firstborn son (Deuteronomy 21:17). A double portion of an inheritance would not be twice the father’s material worth. On the contrary, the father would divide the inheritance into equal parts—the number of parts equal to the number of sons plus one. For instance, a father with five sons would divide the inheritance into six parts. He would give the firstborn son two parts and every other son one part. The firstborn son would thus inherit twice as much as any of his brothers, but far less than his father’s total worth—certainly not double his father’s worth.
- However, in this case the inheritance is not land, but spiritual power.
- **Chariots of fire and horses of fire – The divine army, last encountered waging war on Ahab (1 Kings 22: 1 – 38), has come for Elijah; Elisha sees it as he will see it again in 2 Kings 6: 8 – 23. Both chariotry and fire have strong associations with God’s self – disclosure. Both images come together here. We have seen the storm could be representing the divine chariot or throne (Ezekiel 1; Hab. 3:8) and the fiery lightning bolts representing divine weapons (Ps. 18:14; Hab. 3:11).**
- So, here we have God manifesting Himself in a mighty way, in a context for those who were there to see it. He is showing them, speaking to them in the language they, as prophets, should understand.
- God also speaks to us in ways we should understand. And the more we know His Word, the more we will understand.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. ¹³ And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he had struck the water,

the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

- Elisha tore his own clothes and took up the cloak/ mantle of Elijah. Tore his clothes – a typical mourning act.
- Took up Elijah’s cloak/ mantle. This is more than trying to replace his own clothes. Elisha is literally taking up where Elijah left off. He is taking up the mantle of Elijah.
- Elisha then takes the cloak and strikes the water, separating the waters again, so that he may go across on dry land. Once again, go back to the imagery of the Red Sea crossing and the Israelites entering the Promised Land. There is a new sheriff in town. A new chapter is beginning.
- “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” It seems that Elisha doesn’t quite understand what is next. He knows God has taken Elijah, but what next? He understands the moment, but not necessarily the future. How many of us have felt the same way? We understand the moment, but not what the moment means for us in the future. What are we to do? More on that later.

2Kings 2:15 Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. ¹⁶ And they said to him, “Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send.” ¹⁷ But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, “Send.” They sent therefore fifty men. And for three days they sought him but did not find him. ¹⁸ And they came back to him while he was staying at Jericho, and he said to them, “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go?’”

- Have you been paying attention to who continually shows up in this chapter, other than Elijah and Elisha? The sons of the prophets keep popping up in every locale. Why is this?
- The answer is given to us in verse 15. The sons of the prophets have come to realize that the spirit of Elijah now rests upon Elisha. They then bow in front of him.
- Once again, all the imagery wouldn't have escaped the sons of the prophets. They are seeing what is happening. More is being said through the imagery than you get by simply reading the text in a "flat" manner. Back to that in a minute.
- While the sons of the prophets are taking all this in, and getting most of it, they still aren't sure where Elijah is. They propose that their party should go look for him. They eventually shame Elisha into letting them go, but their efforts are fruitless. Elijah is no longer on the planet. They seem to understand the moment, but not what it means for the future.
- The whole purpose for this chapter is to present Elisha as Elijah's bona fide successor. God has confirmed to all these prophets, (sons of the prophets) that Elisha is the new sheriff in town. This is why God led Elijah and Elisha through all the towns where there were schools of the prophets. They needed to know. Israel needs a revival and that will only come through the proper spiritual leadership. In this case, the prophet through whom God will continue his work.
- This chapter has its own story, but it is also set-up for all that comes behind it.
- God confirms and backs those whom He has called and sent. Now, look at what Jesus said, concerning His disciples. Think about how what He says applies to us today.

(This is to be shown on the screen.)

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to

you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

John 15:12 ¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

So many of us have had instances like Elisha and the sons of the prophets. We have understood the moment but seem to linger on the future and the fact that we don't understand what is next for us. Jesus spoke these words to His disciples just before His arrest, trial and

crucifixion. They didn't understand all that was going to happen. They freaked out when He was arrested, tried and crucified. I'm afraid I would have done the same thing. Their response is the same as Elisha's. And it is the same as ours. But the good news is that God knew all this before any of it happened. Jesus told the disciples that He had chosen them, just as He had chosen Elisha. The future wasn't for them to know in full. They were to just be obedient, and let things happen. That should be a relief. We don't have to know the future. We just have to know that we were chosen for such a time as this. We just have to walk in obedience. We were called to this life, and God has confirmed it to us, as well as others. Walk in that truth. As Jesus just said, that is what gives us peace. Walk in peace!