

Lessons from the Life of Elisha, Part 1: Introduction and Call

I. Intro

A. Background

1. Elijah lived around 850-800 BC. He was a disciple and servant of Elijah and takes Elijah's place to prophecy to Israel, the Northern Kingdom.
2. Dark time. Solomon's kingdom had been split in two.
 - a) Rehoboem remains with Judah and Benjamin in Jerusalem in land of Judah in the south.
 - (1) Rehoboem had placed great burden on people after his father Solomon died. Was harsh and the people revolted. Rehoboem built high places, instituted false worship, did much evil provoking God.
 - (2) Succeeded by another evil king Abijam.
 - (3) Succeeded by Asa and then by Asa's son Jehoshaphat, both good kings, undid much of the evil their fathers had done. Jehoshaphat will appear in the story of Elisha.
 - b) Jereboam is King of Israel, takes 10 tribes to the north.
 - (1) Sets up alternate system of sacrifice: new alters, appoints priests not of Levi, marries foreign wife, worships Baal.
 - (2) Series of evil kings, culminating with Ahab "who did more evil than all the kings of Israel before him." (1 Kings 16:38)
 - (3) **Elijah and Elisha arrive on the scene during Ahab's reign and are prophets to this northern kingdom.**
 - (4) Elijah is better known
 - (a) Confrontation with the Prophets of Baal
 - (b) Fed by ravens, later by an angel who brings him a cake of wheat and a jar of water that sustained him miraculously for 40 days and nights
 - (c) Mighty in prayer. **James 5:17** – prayed that it would not rain and then that it would. A man just like us.
 - (d) Taken by whirlwind to heaven
 - (e) New Testament

- (i) Mt. of Transfiguration: Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Matt. 17)
- (ii) Who do the people say I am? John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets (Matthew 16:13-14)
- (5) Elisha was trained by this mighty prophet Elijah.
- (6) Why did God raise up these two prophets in the North during such an evil time? What are we to learn from them?
 - (a) Both miracle workers
 - (b) Both engage with individuals as well as with kings
 - (c) Both helped a widow in distress
 - (d) Both raised a child from the dead
- (7) Our study (over several lessons) will focus on Elisha as told in the book of 2 Kings

B. Goals of our Old Testament Study

1. That we as Christians are fully equipped (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

- a) Themes we will study: faith, obedience, greed, proper regard for God, justice, compassion, judgment, forgiveness, prayer

2. Understanding the Heart of God

Including God's

- a) power and might
- b) judgment
- c) care and compassion for those who are being treated badly and in desperate situations
- d) kindness to enemies
- e) mourning for those who do evil
- f) patience

3. Good and bad examples (to imitate and to avoid!)

- a) Elisha - Discipleship, compassion, unattached to the world, fearlessness
- b) Gehazi – struggled in faith, greed, cursed, yet is blessed in the end??
- c) Widow from Shunem - faith, determination, devotion and honor of God

- d) Naaman – a great and noble commander, weakness of pride, strengths of humility and obedience resulting in miraculous healing
- e) Disobedient and sinful kings

4. Foreshadowing of Christ

- a) Elisha as a type of Christ – you decide whether Elisha’s life, character, miracles and deeds point us to Jesus who would be born 800 years later.

II. Elisha's Call & a Double Portion

A. Elijah in despair, praying that he might die. He has murdered the prophets of Baal and is fleeing for his life from Ahab and Jezebel. God sends an angel who feeds him water and a wheat cake. Shows him the wind, the earthquake, fire, then gentle breeze. Tells him to appoint a new king over Syria and a new king over Israel (who will replace wicked Ahab) and Elisha as prophet in his place.

B. Read Scripture: 1 Kings 19:19-21, 2 Kings 2:1-18

C. What happens?

1. Elisha leaves family, appears to have been wealthy with 12 yoke (pairs) of oxen
 - a) Burns up a yoke and 2 oxen as a sacrifice to God.
 - b) Counts the cost
 - (1) Leaves security of wealth.
 - (2) Embraces and heads into a life of danger. (Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Baal, then fled in fear of Jezebel who vowed to kill him.)
2. **1 Kings 19:21** – “He then arose and followed Elijah, and ministered to him.” (God provides for Elijah, the servant heart of Elisha)
3. Elisha and Elijah walk together through many experiences:
 - a) Lord speaks to Elijah to confront Ahab. Tells him he and his household (including Jezebel) will be destroyed, eaten by dogs and birds.
 - b) Elijah stands up to King Ahaziah and the companies of 50 soldiers he sends 3x.
4. Elijah’s and Elisha’s closeness
 - a) 2 Kings 2:1-6 Elisha will not leave him. Do not speak of Elijah’s leaving!

b) 2 Kings 2:7-10

- (1) Elijah works a miracle, strikes mantle on Jordan and it divides and they walk over.
- (2) What do you want from me?

5. Elisha asks of a double portion of Elijah's spirit (the inheritance of the oldest son)

- (1) Elijah is not sure what will happen
- (2) Elisha is entrusted with God's Holy Spirit
- (3) 2:11-12 "Father!" as Elijah is carried away.
- (4) He tears his clothes in two. Elijah's mantle falls on Elisha. Elisha strikes Jordan River with mantle.
- (5) At first nothing happens.
 - (a) "Where is the Lord God of Elijah himself?" And the water divides and he crosses over.

6. The baton has been passed.

D. Lessons for us

1. Willing to go into a very dangerous situation, under God's provision

- a) Elisha leaves safety, family, financial security, and what he is familiar with.
- b) Goes into a very volatile, risky, unsecure situation!
- c) Much like Mk 1:16-20, Jesus' calling of the first disciples (leave family and profession and follow me)
- d) Will God provide?
 - (1) Matthew 6:31-33 Do not worry... about food and clothing... seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness...
 - (2) Luke 11:3 "Give us this day our daily bread..."
- e) **We were called to count the cost of following Jesus when we become Christians. But we are called to do so again and again, as God leads us to new places on our journey to serve Him and to imitate our King.**
 - (1) Me. About to turn 49. Nearly 50! Over half over.
 - (a) Many lessons learned.

- (b) Time to reassess.
- (c) So much work to do. What do I want to accomplish?
- (d) What needs to be re-evaluated? Changed in my life?
- (e) No more wasting time!
- (f) Time to count the cost again as to where I spend my time, money, energy.
- (g) Temptation to be anxious. Worry about God's provision.

f) Clement of Alexandria – Book III, Chapter VII (second century)

“Look, for instance, to Elijah, in whom we have a beautiful example of frugality, when he sat down beneath the thorn, and the angel brought him food. “It was a cake of barley and a jar of water.” Such the Lord sent as best for him. **We, then, on our journey to the truth, must be unencumbered....** We must, then, cast away the multitude of vessels, silver and gold drinking cups, and the crowd of domestics, receiving as we have done from the Instructor [Jesus] the fair and grave attendants, Self-help and Simplicity.

[**we are on a journey to heaven and must travel lightly,** not being burdened with possessions, instead giving them away to those in need and will be replenished by God.]

For he who has the almighty God, the Word, is in want of nothing, and never is in straits for what he needs. For the Word is a possession that wants nothing, and is the cause of all abundance. If one says that he has often seen the righteous man in need of food, this is rare, and happens only where there is not another righteous man. Notwithstanding let him read what follows: **“For the righteous man shall not live by bread alone, but by the word of the Lord,”** who is the true bread, the bread of the heavens. The good man, then, can never be in difficulties so long as he keeps intact his confession towards God. For it is appropriate for him to ask and receive whatever he requires from the Father of all; and to enjoy what is his own, if he keep the Son. And this is also is appropriate that he feels no want.

This Word, who trains us, confers on us the true riches. Nor is the growing rich an object of envy to those who possess through Him the privilege of wanting nothing. He that has this wealth shall inherit the kingdom of God.

- (1) I am challenged by this last paragraph – the true riches of wanting nothing – being unattached to this world. Yet this is the expectation for Christ's followers. And how much God can use such followers who want nothing but

the Kingdom of God and Christ!

- (2) Elijah trusted God for his food and traveled lightly, unburdened. We see Elisha willing to do the same (and we'll see that he was very successful as we study further). And God will use Elisha powerfully.
- (3) (We will see later how Elisha's servant will give in the temptation to pursue the treasures of this world, opposite of Elisha's example, and how God feels about this!)
- (4) The great challenge for us: to be in the world, but not of the world. Let's keep helping each other to travel light on our journey to meet our Lord.

2. Elisha asks for a good thing: God's Spirit

a) So much like **2 Chronicles 1:7-10**.

- (1) God to Solomon: What do you want? Solomon to God: wisdom (not riches).
- (2) Really good request!

b) **Luke 11:9-13** we should be asking for the Holy Spirit

3. Intense discipleship

- a) Walking together, quality and quantity of time together (raising kids)
- b) Depth of relationship
- c) Imitation (parting Jordan) and we'll see many other ways Elisha imitates Elijah in later chapters
- d) Seeking God's Spirit, not each other's (2 Kings 2:14 "Where is the Lord God of Elijah himself?")
 - (1) any group that spends lots of time become similar in good and bad ways
 - (2) our challenge – imitate each other to become like Jesus

E. Foreshadowing of Christ

1. What's in a name?

- a) Elisha = "my God is salvation"
- b) Jesus = "God Saves"