

Lesson 94

God Calls Elisha

Elisha left his home to follow Elijah and to become a prophet of God.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Elisha was farming when Elijah called him to become God's prophet. Elisha obeyed God's call by following Elijah and learning from him before Elijah was taken to heaven. Elisha received God's power to perform miracles as Elijah had done. Elisha's miracles helped people in need and brought glory to God.

Key Passages

2 Kings 2:11, 4:33–35

Memory Verse

Proverbs 3:11–12 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Elijah was known for being a great prophet of the one true God. He performed many miracles and challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. God delivered a great triumph, and the false prophets were executed (1 Kings 18:20–40). Instead of repenting, Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah's life, causing him to flee into the wilderness. In desperation, he prayed that he might die (1 Kings 19:2–4). But God provided food and water for him, and he continued his journey to Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings 19:8). In a cave on this mountain, Elijah again encountered God (1 Kings 19:9), learned that God had appointed Elisha to replace him (1 Kings 19:16), and was encouraged to know that God had kept 7,000 in Israel who were faithful to him (1 Kings 19:18).

So Elijah continued on to meet Elisha, who was plowing with oxen, and draped his cloak over his shoulders (1 Kings 19:19). Elisha would have understood that this meant that God had appointed him to be a prophet like Elijah. Elisha bade his family farewell and followed Elijah, becoming his servant (1 Kings 19:21). The second chapter of 2 Kings records the transfer of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. Elijah encouraged Elisha to let him go on alone, but Elisha persisted. Together they approached the Jordan River near Jericho, where Joshua and the Israelites had crossed into the promised land. Elijah rolled up his cloak and struck the river, causing the water to part so he and Elisha could cross on dry land (2 Kings 2:8). Once they had crossed the river, Elijah asked what he could do for Elisha. Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit, which would be granted if he saw Elijah taken away. This request was much like

Solomon's wish for wisdom. In both instances, the men were given the opportunity to ask for anything they desired, and they chose to ask for that which would benefit the kingdom of God.

Elisha witnessed Elijah's unique departure as he was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind while chariots and horses of fire separated the two men (2 Kings 2:11). Elisha took up Elijah's cloak, which had fallen from him, and returned the way they had come. Like Elijah had done, Elisha rolled up the cloak and struck the water, walking through on dry ground (2 Kings 2:14). Through these signs, the cloak of Elijah and the parting of the river, the sons of the prophets recognized that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha (2 Kings 2:15), meaning that he was now God's prophet to Israel. The sons of the prophets wanted to retrieve the body of Elijah for burial, but Elisha told them not to go, for they would not find him (2 Kings 2:16).

God continued to confirm Elisha as his prophet by performing many miracles through him. He cleansed the waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19–22), called two bears to maul some unruly youth (2 Kings 2:23–24), filled with water a dry streambed without rain (2 Kings 3:16–17), prophesied victory over Moab (2 Kings 3:18), caused a widow's oil to multiply (2 Kings 4:1–7), gave a son to a barren woman and later raised him from the dead (2 Kings 4:17,32–36), purified poisonous stew (2 Kings 4:40–41), healed Naaman of leprosy (2 Kings 5), caused an axe head to float (2 Kings 6:5–7), blinded the Syrian army and delivered them to Samaria (2 Kings 6:18–19), and prophesied the provision of food during famine (2 Kings 7). God spoke through Elisha and used him to do many incredible things. While deathly ill, he still prophesied (2 Kings 13:14–20). Even in death, Elisha continued to be used by God, reviving a dead man who touched his bones (2 Kings 13:21).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Elijah was a great prophet and is referred to many times throughout Scripture. He was a type of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14) and appeared at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:3). He is often likened to Moses. Both spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness before encountering God. They both parted the waters and crossed on dry land. Both Elijah and Moses appeared at the transfiguration. Both are known as great prophets and are referred to repeatedly in the New Testament. They also both had protgs who served them before succeeding them in carrying on their ministry. Moses trained Joshua to take his place, and Elijah groomed Elisha to replace him. Joshua was confirmed as Moses' replacement by parting the Jordan. Elisha likewise parted the Jordan, mirroring his predecessor and paralleling Joshua. All four heard directly from the Lord and were used to lead and direct God's people. Moses was given the law, which points to Christ. Elijah foreshadowed John the Baptist, who preached of the imminent coming of Christ. These parallels serve to illustrate God's character and his plan. He is immutable, and his plan remains the same. What he does in the Old Testament points to the coming of Christ.

Another point of interest found in the accounts of Elijah and Elisha is the difficult chronology. Because there are four books providing details during this time, two different kingdoms to keep track of, and duplicate uses of the same

name, there sometimes seems to be discrepancies in the chronology of the divided kingdom. It is important to keep in mind that the reigns of the kings were not calculated by calendar date, but by the length of time since the beginning of the reign. This means that often the final year of one king and the first year of the next king would seem to overlap. Also, there may have been times of coregency, where a son reigned with his father before taking over completely, as in the case of Jehoshaphat and Jehoram in Judah. We also should be careful not to assume a rigid chronology as we read through the Bible. Even the books that are loosely organized by chronology emphasize some time frames and skip over others. It can be a bit of a puzzle to figure out the timing of some of these reigns, but it is beneficial to obtain a chronological understanding of the two kingdoms because it illustrates the pattern of Israel's disobedience and data-highlights Judah's failures even when ruled by good kings. It also serves to emphasize the fact that our misunderstanding, or lack of comprehension, does not negate the authenticity of Scripture. The Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Although there may seem to be historical inaccuracies, there are reasonable explanations for any apparent inconsistencies. If we begin with the assumption that the Bible is inerrant, we can find answers and correct our understanding. To start with anything else is to undermine the foundation of Scripture and the sovereignty of God.

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