



ELIJAH AND ELISHA: TWO SIDES OF ONE COIN

WEEK 3
12.18.16



FOCUS VERSE

II Kings 2:9

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

LESSON TEXT

II Kings 2:1–14

1 And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

2 And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el.

3 And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

4 And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

5 And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

6 And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.

7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.

8 And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

9 And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

10 And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

12 And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;

14 And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God uses different abilities and personalities to turn our hearts to Him and to establish us in Christ.



CULTURE CONNECTION

The Rejoicing Mentor

A local church recently elected a new pastor. After serving as one of the assistants for seven years, he was elected almost unanimously. He is energetic, innovative, and extremely well-liked by the youth as well as senior saints.

The former senior pastor now serves in an advisory position. He is wise, well-seasoned, and highly esteemed by the congregation.

As the people have responded with renewed vision and dedication, the spirit of revival is rising. Worship is intensifying. The congregation is growing. And the former senior pastor is the first to rejoice in the progress of the church and to honor the new pastor.

His response reminds me of John 14:12. Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.” Jesus invested three years mentoring the twelve disciples, teaching them by precept and example. Then, rejoicing, He prophesied they would excel and perform more miracles than He had.

The former senior pastor can rejoice in the success of the new pastor, for his investment is paying dividends. His mentoring has helped to mold the new pastor’s ministry, and consequently his own ministry will continue on. The continuation is worth the effort—and the rejoicing.

OUTLINE

I. THE PROPHET ELIJAH

- A. A Fiery Prophet
- B. A Wilderness Loner
- C. Elijah’s Lone Disciple

II. THE PROPHET ELISHA

- A. Leader at Home
- B. Prophet of Peace
- C. Educator

III. SUCCESS AND SUCCESSORS

- A. Successful Leadership
- B. Successors in Pattern

IV. THE NEXT GENERATION

- A. Responsible Disciples
- B. The Double Portion

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Following the reign of Solomon, Rehoboam ascended to the throne. The elders appealed to Rehoboam to lighten the harsh labor Solomon had demanded. Instead, “the king answered the people roughly, and

forsook the old men’s counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions” (1 Kings 12:13–14). As a result, the ten northern tribes rebelled against Rehoboam.

Because of this rebellion, the Promised Land had two Hebrew kingdoms: Israel in the north with its capital in Samaria, and Judah in the south with its capital in Jerusalem. These kingdoms remained separated for more than two hundred years.

The northern kingdom continued a downward spiral of idolatry and immorality until the Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 BC. God’s spokesmen during this time were the prophets. Two of the most notable are Elijah and Elisha, who prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel.

In today’s lesson, Ahab is the king of evil. Elijah, his counterpart, is the prophet of fire. Some would say it was the worst of times and the best of prophets.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE PROPHET ELIJAH

Elijah epitomizes the Old Testament prophets. Dressed in a hairy coat and wearing a leather belt, he was bold, direct, and confrontational. The Old Testament gives no background for the prophet other than he was from the village of Tishbe in Gilead. His Hebrew name means “My God is Jehovah.”

A. A Fiery Prophet

Elijah arrived on the scene during the reign of Ahab, king over the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab married Jezebel, a priestess of Baal and the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon in Phoenicia. Under the joint reign of Ahab and Jezebel, the worship of Baal escalated.

“And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (I Kings 16:30–33).

As a flaming oracle of God, Elijah confronted Ahab and boldly declared that God would send a catastrophic drought, so severe even dew would not fall. (See I Kings 17:1.) This was a direct challenge to Baal, the Canaanite god supposedly responsible for rain, thunder, lightning, and dew. The drought would prove Jehovah alone controlled the weather. The drought destroyed the crops and resulted in severe famine.

Elijah’s ministry was marked by his fiery encounters with Ahab. In addition to the one mentioned above, others include Elijah’s contest on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal (I Kings 18), Elijah’s charging Ahab with the death of Naboth, and the prophet

pronouncing divine judgment on Ahab, his family, and his kingdom (I Kings 21). These encounters reveal Elijah’s passion for the worship of Jehovah and the harsh, destructive nature of his ministry.

In I Kings 18, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest. The god who answered by fire would be God. Two altars were built. One was for Baal and the other was for Jehovah. The prophets of Baal prayed to Baal, jumped up on the altar, and cut themselves with knives and lancets, but there was no answer.

Then Elijah repaired the altar he had built and dug a trench around it. Then he prepared the sacrifice to God. He called for a total of twelve barrels of water to be poured on the sacrifice and the altar of Jehovah. The water saturated the sacrifice and the wood and filled the trench around the altar. At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed a simple prayer, and fire fell from Heaven, consuming not only the sacrifice and the wood but also the stones, the dust, and the water in the trench. At this moment of triumph, Elijah ordered the death of the 450 prophets of Baal.

In I Kings 21, Ahab whined because Naboth refused to sell a vineyard, which was his inheritance, to Ahab. Jezebel arranged for a feast to be held in Naboth’s honor (I Kings 21:9) and for evil men to accuse him of blasphemy. As a result, those assembled at the feast stoned Naboth to death. When Ahab heard Naboth was dead, he arose to possess the vineyard.

Elijah met Ahab at the vineyard and pronounced divine judgment against him. “Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine” (I Kings 21:19). The judgment included the destruction of Ahab’s lineage and “the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel” (I Kings 21:23).

B. A Wilderness Loner

Elijah’s ministry was bold and brash, and he confronted kings and addressed the masses. However, he was also a loner who frequently moved around. It is not uncommon for a prophet to be an outsider. The Bible gives no record of his parents or family. Like his New Testament counterpart, John the Baptist, Elijah dwelt in caves and wore rough clothing, living primarily in solitude. Following his first

confrontation with Ahab, Elijah lived by the brook Cherith, which is before Jordan. There the ravens brought him food in the morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. After the contest on Mount Carmel, Elijah ran from Jezebel and spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Horeb, the mountain on which Moses had received the Law.

An exception to Elijah's solitary life is found in I Kings 17. After the brook dried up because of the drought, the Lord told Elijah to go to Zarephath in Zidon, for He had commanded a widow to sustain him. Because of the widow's obedience, she had a continual divine supply of meal and oil until the rains came again.

Another of Elijah's miracles was restoring the widow's son. (See I Kings 17:17–24 for the full story.) It is worthy of note that the Gentile widow proclaimed, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth" (I Kings 17:24). She was willing to confess what the idolatrous Hebrews were not.

C. Elijah's Lone Disciple

"And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay" (I Kings 19:15–17).

Elijah found Elisha plowing in a field with one yoke of oxen while overseeing eleven others. As Elijah walked past Elisha, he "cast his mantle upon him" (I Kings 19:19). Immediately, Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah. When he caught up to him, Elisha requested time to say good-bye to his family, and then he would return and follow the prophet.

The Bible describes Elisha as Elijah's servant (I Kings 19:21). He was Elijah's traveling companion and took care of personal needs

much as a valet would do for a wealthy man or a personal assistant might do for a busy executive. The relationship allowed Elisha to observe Elijah closely, much as a mentee would scrutinize his mentor.

Elijah was constantly on the go and Elisha was his tagalong. Consequently, Elijah taught by example. The Bible gives no indication that Elisha had any formal classroom-style training to be a prophet—even though "schools of prophets" existed in Gibeah (I Samuel 10:5, 10), Ramah (I Samuel 19:19–20), Bethel (II Kings 2:3), Jericho (II Kings 2:15), and Gilgal (II Kings 4:38). Elijah's method of mentoring apparently was successful, for Elisha had a powerful ministry that included miracles and prophecies.

II. THE PROPHET ELISHA

Elijah mentored Elisha, but the two prophets were opposites in many respects. Some might say they were different sides of one coin.

A. Leader at Home

Before leaving to follow Elijah, Elisha lived a domestic life. The fact that Elisha was overseeing the plowing of twelve yoke of oxen attested that his father, Shaphat of Abel-meholah, was a wealthy landowner. It also showed that Shaphat placed confidence and trust in his son to oversee the work. Elisha's desire to tell his parents good-bye when Elijah called him indicated Elisha had a strong relationship with his parents and a stable homelife. Feeding the people before he left to follow Elijah revealed he was compassionate and generous.

B. Prophet of Peace

Whereas Elijah was assertive and often prophesied of God's judgments, Elisha was a prophet of peace. Consider the personal touch in the miracle of the vessels of oil (II Kings 4:4), the prophecy that the Shunammite woman would have a son (II Kings 4:16), the son's resurrection (II Kings 4:34), Naaman's healing (II Kings 5:14), the floating axe head (II Kings 6:6), and the healing of the waters (II Kings 2:21).

C. Educator

Part of Elisha's ministry included teaching in the schools of the prophets, which can be

likened to twentieth-century Bible institutes. The schools were communities of men—some married with families (II Kings 4:1)—who shared a communal style of living and studied the Law under the tutelage of a prophet. The students were called “sons of the prophets.” (See II Kings 2:3, 5, 15.) Through teaching and mentoring, Elisha prepared many followers in the schools of the prophets.

III. SUCCESS AND SUCCESSORS

A. Successful Leadership

As their ministries were diverse, Elijah and Elisha had different styles of leadership. Elijah was confrontational. Elisha took a kinder, gentler approach. God used them both. Although different, they were successful. They both turned the hearts of the people back to God.

B. Successors in Pattern

At whatever stage we are in life, we should be mindful of those who are coming after us. Paul wrote to Timothy: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). In other words, Paul instructed Timothy to set up leaders after Paul’s model to carry on the gospel. The style of ministry may vary, but the gospel should be the same.

A brief overview of the one hundred years of Apostolic Pentecostalism shows a wide range of leadership styles and personalities. The early pioneers faced opposition and hardships that are almost unknown today. They had to be bold and assertive to survive the persecution. As the message spread and became more accepted, overt opposition waned. A less combative leadership style could be used. Now in some areas, the Pentecostal church is the largest one in town, and the ministry extends far beyond the pulpit into the community, calling for another style of leadership.

IV. THE NEXT GENERATION

While we must be ever thankful for the leaders who have gone before us and for the heritage we have, we must be mindful of the generations that follow. We must give clear direction to our children and grandchildren and

to new converts who grace our pews. While our approach and style may change, we must remain firm on the doctrines of the Bible and, as the prophets of old, call the people to follow wholeheartedly after God. This is not an option.

A. Responsible Disciples

It is our responsibility to transmit to the next generation, and to new converts, the necessity of having a pure love for God and true holiness. A Christian’s lifestyle should be as evident in the home as it is in the church. Our relationship with Christ should affect our day-to-day existence. Our actions and attitudes should demonstrate what we preach and teach.

As our children and grandchildren observe our daily lives, they should see authentic examples of true Christianity that would impact them and make them want to live genuine Christian lives as well. May we so live and walk in the Spirit that our lives point those who follow us to Jesus Christ.

Every generation needs its own Pentecost. Tales of brush arbors, all-night prayer meetings, and dynamic conversions are wonderful. But individuals in the current generation need to experience their own outpouring of God’s Spirit. They need their own testimonies of addicts being instantly delivered and of crusades where thousands receive the Holy Ghost. Pentecost must be born in them.

For that to happen, they must see something in us that quickens a desire in their souls. We must provide an atmosphere where the Spirit can move freely and do a work in their lives.

B. The Double Portion

Apparently Elijah and Elisha were aware of the day the Lord would come for Elijah. (See II Kings 2:3, 5.) Elisha was determined not to leave Elijah’s side; he wanted to be present when God came for Elijah.

When God called Elijah to go to Bethel, Elijah asked Elisha to stay behind. But not even his master’s request was enough to deter Elisha from his commitment to stay by Elijah’s side, and Elisha accompanied Elijah to Bethel. This scenario was repeated twice more when the Lord called Elijah to Jericho and to Jordan.

After Elijah smote the waters of the Jordan River with his mantle and he and Elijah

crossed on dry ground, Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he was taken away. Elisha had a simple request. He did not ask for wealth or position. He simply asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Why? What was his motivation? Was Elisha asking for a double portion—the normal right of the firstborn inheritance—to show he was Elijah's successor? Or did Elijah possess some trait, some characteristic, or some intangible spirit that quickened a desire in Elisha for a closer relationship with God?

Elijah agreed that if Elisha saw him when he was taken away, his request would be granted. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (II Kings 2:11). Elisha took Elijah's mantle, which fell from him as he was taken up, walked back to the Jordan River, smote the waters, and the waters parted just as they had for Elijah.

God has promised to give us the desires of our hearts if we delight ourselves in Him. (See Psalm 37:4.) May our lives inspire the next generation to claim a double portion of our spirit. May they reach farther, touch more lives, pioneer new fields, and establish more churches than our generation has.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In *All the Men of the Bible*, Herbert Lockyer listed several contrasts between Elijah and Elisha. For example, Elijah's work was mainly prophetic while Elisha's was miraculous. Elijah was fierce, fiery, and energetic while Elisha was gentle, sympathetic, and simple.

REFLECTIONS

- List five areas in which Elijah and Elisha were different.
- How do you think Elijah would have reacted if he had been Elisha's servant instead of his master?
 - List five qualities, talents, or traits that set you apart from someone else in the church. What appears to be a weakness to one may be a strength to someone else.
 - Why did Elisha ask for a double portion of Elijah's spirit? What was his motivation?
 - Describe Elijah's departure from earth.
 - What do you consider to be the three most outstanding miracles in Elijah's ministry? Why?
- In your opinion, what are the three most outstanding miracles in Elisha's ministry? Why?

Elijah had an extraordinary disappearance from earth while Elisha experienced a normal death.

We should note several things from this study of Elijah and Elisha.

- Perhaps foremost would be the example of Elisha's hunger for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Because of his tenacity, he continued to follow Elijah regardless of how often he was discouraged from doing so. His desire caused him to overcome all obstacles in reaching his goal. May our desire for the things of God be as intense as Elisha's, and may we continuously seek a deeper relationship with God.

- Although Elijah and Elisha were different in personality and leadership style, God used each of them and both were successful in ministry. Regardless of our many talents or our numerous liabilities, God can use anyone who is willing to forsake all and follow His call. We do not all have to be from the same mold.

- Because we do not have to be like anyone else for God to use us, we should strive to be the best we can be. God has uniquely designed us to fit a specific niche in His kingdom. We should develop our talents to their fullest extent and allow God to use us as He wills.

- Finally, we should be willing to take a bold stand for Christ. Although Elijah and Elisha had different styles and mannerisms, they both stood for God against the idolatry of a backslidden nation. We should be strong in our experience and stand firm in our faith. We should seek opportunity to tell others about Jesus Christ and the difference He has made in our lives. ■