

ELISHA

This month's character study on Elisha picks up a little earlier than where our last one on Elijah ended. It turns out that Elisha was to carry on the prophetic ministry started by Elijah. Key passages on Elisha can be found in 1-Kings 19, 2-Kings 2, 4-6 and a single reference to him in the New Testament... Luke 4:27.

Key Passages: 1 Kings 19:16-19; 2 Kings 2, 3:11-14, 4:1-6:33, 8:1-14, 13:14-21; Luke 4:27

We start out in 1 Kings 19:16... the Lord is speaking to Elijah...

(1 Kings 19:16), "Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."

We can see a very clear appointing of Elisha.

(1 Kings 19:18), "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

The Lord is going to spare His remnant. 7000 faithful Jews. Throughout the history of Israel there was always a group within that remained faithful to God.

(1 Kings 19:19-21), "So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. [20] And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

Basically, Elijah told him go ahead, nobody's stopping you. If you leave and never return or return and join me it will be by your free will".

[21] So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant."

This was no "bye Mom, bye Dad, I'm going to serve the Lord... see ya" type of goodbye. It took time to break the news to his parents, cook the oxen, have a feast, say his goodbyes... probably 2-3 days, maybe longer.

(2 Kings 2:1-2), "And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. [2] Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel."

verses 3-6 describe the other 2 times. As I read this, I immediately thought of the contrast with Peter's 3 denials of Jesus. Peter had a similar relationship with Jesus as Elisha had with Elijah. And just before Elijah was taken he said....

(2 Kings 2:9), "And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." "

When most people read this, they think that Elisha was looking to be twice the prophet or have twice the power of the Holy Spirit as Elijah. An understandable mistake given the English text. However, Scripture interprets Scripture best and we can find the true meaning of the verse by looking at Deuteronomy chapter 21 verse 17....

(Deu 21:17), "But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."

So we see that a "double portion" was given to a person's heir... either because they were firstborn or were treated like one. Elisha was simply saying that he wanted to be Elijah's successor. Elijah is then taken away in a fiery chariot.

Elisha is directed to go to Bethel and along the way he encountered some teenagers.

(2 Kings 2:23-24), "Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you

baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" <<feign a scowl...look up at eyebrows>> [24] So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths."

<<pause, big smile>> **Now THAT's what I'm talkin' about! If I didn't know better, I'd say that Elisha was originally from Brooklyn. Elisha is proof that you don't need hair as long as you have the power of God's Holy Spirit. So I got THAT going for me.** Youths in this verse refer to young adults... mid-to-late teens. Their taunts of "go up", are an indication that they had witnessed Elijah's departure. Beware of mocking God's miracles!

The Bible records twice as many miracles for Elisha than Elijah and yet Elisha is only mentioned once...a single time, in the New Testament. This led me to believe that while the miracles themselves were important, they weren't the focus. But consider this:

2 Kings 4:42-44, Elisha performs the miracle of multiplying the bread. This is strikingly similar to Mat 13:33-37 where Jesus feeds the 4000... multiplying bread (and fish). Let's fastforward to the end of his life.

(2 Kings 13:20-21), "Then Elisha died, and they buried him. And the raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year. [21] So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet."

With his a ministry full of miracles, the Holy Spirit wanted to underscore that point by having Elisha perform a miracle after his death.

As I mentioned earlier, there is only one New Testament reference to Elisha and it was made by Jesus Himself. Jesus was addressing the congregation in the synagogue and anticipating their reaction to His reading he recalls some of the OT prophets...

(Luk 4:27), "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army but was a leper.

(2 Kings 5:9-11), "Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. [10] And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean. [11] But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'"

Naaman became angry because he had his own expectations of how he was going to be healed. Naaman eventually does as he is told, and is healed. He's so grateful that he wants to give Elisha gifts for the healing... but Elisha refuses. However, Elisha's assistant, Gehazi secretly catches up with Naaman and demands some gifts.

(2 Kings 5:22), " And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.'"

Gehazi had compounded 4 lies in that one statement. Naaman gives those items to Gehazi, but Elisha knows what Gehazi has done and really lets him have it...

(2 Kings 5:27), "Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever. And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow."

whoa... I think we can see why Jesus chose to use this particular miracle of Elisha's as an illustration. Those who heard Jesus would be very familiar with the story of Naaman.

Key Character Traits:

- **Faithful**
Elisha remained faithful in his service to the Lord.
- **Obedient**
He followed God’s commands

MEANING OF HIS NAME

His name means, “My God is Salvation”

EXPERIENCE

- **He was appointed into service by the Lord Himself**
1Kings 19:16
- **He was chosen as Elijah's successor**
2 Kings 2:9-12
- **He was referred to as, “The man of God” 27 times**

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Elisha was a faithful and obedient servant of the Lord. Wherever he went, he was known as a “man of God”. This is a good indication that he was always doing the work of the Lord.

SHORTCOMINGS

No shortcomings are recorded in the Bible.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Elisha was used by Jesus as an example of a prophet's acceptance in his own homeland. Elisha's ministry left a mark in history that was remembered for thousands of years and worthy enough to be mentioned by Jesus. Elisha performed nearly twice as many miracles as Elijah in service to the Lord. These two facts Samuel was a faithful servant and is mentioned as a champion of faith in the New Testament (Heb 11:32)

- **Parting of the Jordan river**
2 Kings 2:14
- **Healing of the water in Jericho**
2 Kings 2:18-22
- **Teens cursed on the way to Bethel**
2 Kings 2:23-24
- **The Widow and the oil**
2 Kings 4:1-17
- **Shunammite woman and her son**
2 Kings 4:8-37
- **Purifying of the stew**
2 Kings 4:38-41
- **Multiplying of the bread**
2 Kings 4:42-44
- **Naaman the leper**
2 Kings 5:1-27
- **Miracle of the axehead**
2 Kings 6:1-7

- **Foretelling of Hazael's reign**
2 Kings 8:7-15
- **Resurrection by Elisha's bones**
2 Kings 13:21

GLORY TO GOD

God's omnipotence was illustrated in the life of Elisha. Through those miracles, the power of the Lord was made manifest. These miracles were a foreshadowing of the miracles that Jesus would later perform during His earthly ministry.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH (and LIFE APPLICATION)

Sometimes there is preparation prior to serving. Elisha was called into service alongside Elijah. Elisha was obedient to the calling, but he had a duty as a son to first say goodbye to his parents in a loving and respectful manner. Elisha took the time necessary for a proper farewell, and then joined Elijah as soon as possible. It is important to note that Elisha was free to simply take off immediately with Elijah, or to say goodbye to his parents first. Choosing to honor his parents was the correct thing to do.

practical application → Be aware that sometimes when we're called into service, into a particular ministry, that there may be some "loose ends" to tie up first. Should that be the case, ensure that you take care of those things as quickly as possible, taking only the necessary time to do it right. Don't delay. The enemy will use that time to dissuade you from your calling.

I have had to deal with this issue myself... I'm absolutely positive of my calling, but I know that I have some loose ends to take care of first. There's a very strong desire to immediately jump in when we're called. Sometimes that's the right thing... other times it

isn't. If there are no loose ends, then jump right in and serve. But if there are (genuine things... not just convenient excuses) then take care of them without wasting time. Don't be the type of person that Pastor Al spoke about last Wednesday... "As soon as I retire... in 20 years, I'll be serving!"

It's all about, "Doing the RIGHT thing, for the RIGHT reason, at the RIGHT time."

Our role in prayer is in obedience to and giving glory to the Lord. The miraculous healing of Naaman, shows us that we should be obedient to the Lord, and that we should give thanks, glory, and honor to the Lord when prayers are answered. Naaman had a preconceived notion of how he would be healed and was upset when the Lord chose a different method. Likewise, Gehazi claimed gifts for the healing even though Elisha had rightfully acknowledged that it was the Lord who had actually performed the miracle.

How many times have we heard people word a prayer in such a way that it includes what they think the solution should be?! "Lord I pray for Joe. He's having a difficult time making ends meet. I pray that you provide him with a job that pays enough to continue in his current lifestyle". Maybe the Lord wants him to be a better steward over his finances... rather than buy a new Hummer every 2 years. How many times has the Lord answered a prayer and someone takes the credit themselves?

practical application → Have you brought an issue to the Lord in prayer? Make sure to push **your** ideas of how the prayer should be answered into the background and allow the Lord to reveal **HIS** plan to you. When prayer is answered, take the time to thank the Lord and to acknowledge to others what He has done...regardless of what you thought the answer should be!

All too often Christians will PRAISE THE LORD publicly only when His answer matches THEIR expectation. If we do that... if we **only** praise Him when he answers the way we want, we're really being prideful... taking credit. We're basically saying that we knew the will of God, or worse, we made God do what we wanted. Answered prayer always brings Glory to God, but I think that glory is magnified when the answer is something totally unexpected.

Back in Feb 2000, when I prayed to be drawn closer to the Lord, nowhere on my list of possible answers did I envision being let go and dropped to the ground in brokenness, picked up, whisked out of the Catholic Church, and sent 2400 miles to a Calvary Chapel in Arizona. I'm closer to the Lord than I thought was possible...and look to get closer still. That's an answer to prayer. Our closing prayer will be taken directly from Eph 3:20-21, "Now **to Him** who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask **or think**, according to the power that works in us, [21] **to Him** be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen."

LEADING LESSON - *What do you think is the leading lesson of this man's life?*

IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE - *How does the leading lesson impact your life? What specific changes do you need to make to become a person of like character?*

FUTURE PLANS - *What specific action do you plan to take to grow in the proper character traits?*

EXPRESS OBEDIENCE - *Pray to God your desire to be obedient in this area of your life*