

This lesson takes a brief look into the life of the prophet Elisha, beginning with the miraculous way in which the prophet's role passed from Elijah to Elisha. Our lesson then skips to two other passages, focusing on two miracles that God performed through Elisha: producing enough oil so that a poverty-stricken widow could pay off her debts and making an iron ax head float.

Elisha was the servant and disciple of Elijah and he knew that the LORD would take Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind sometime later that day. Knowing this, he refused to leave Elijah's side despite multiple suggestions that he do so by Elijah. The two men journey to the Jordan river and miraculously cross over on dry ground after Elijah struck the water with his mantle (vs. 1-8).

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## 2 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.

Knowing that the LORD could take him away at any moment, Elijah allows Elisha to make a last request before his departure. Elisha has been serving Elijah for a while because it was already known that he would take Elijah's place (1 Kings 19:16-17). In Israel, the first-born son received a double-portion of his father's inheritance. Elisha has seen what God had done through Elijah and he knows that God has chosen him to take Elijah's place. Elisha requests that he, like an eldest son, could inherit the larger share of the same Spirit that he saw operating through Elijah. Elisha was not asking to be twice the prophet that Elijah was but that he could be used by God in the same power and manner as Elijah.

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.

**“And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing”** – It was not within Elijah's power to grant the spiritual gift that Elisha requested. It would be up to the LORD to grant this request if it was His will, so Elijah could not guarantee it. The LORD had already revealed that Elisha would replace Elijah, but whether he would be filled with the Spirit to the same degree as Elijah had not been revealed.

**“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”** – If the LORD allowed Elisha to witness the event when Elijah was taken away then that would be the sign that the LORD would grant Elisha's request.

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.

**“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked”** – The two men talk as they continue their journey beyond the Jordan river. We can only guess what they talked about. Perhaps they spoke of the things of God or what would be expected of Elisha as a prophet.

**“that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder”** – A chariot was known as a fast and powerful implement of war, a fact that was amplified by the fact that it and the horses pulling it were aflame. After hearing that he must see Elijah leave in order to receive his request, it was quite likely that Elisha was standing close to Elijah. The chariot and horses passed between Elijah and Elisha, separating them, perhaps so that Elisha was not also caught in what was happening to Elijah.

**“and Elijah went up by a whirlwind [tempest; storm] into heaven”** – Notice that Elijah was not taken to heaven by the chariot of fire. Perhaps this whirlwind was the “mighty rushing wind” of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2) whisking Elijah into heaven.

**“And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof”** – Elisha looked to Elijah as a father, having been discipled by him. He likely was speaking of the angelic armies of heaven which protected Israel and which would later protect him (2 Kings 6:17 “*And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha*”). The LORD apparently dispatched a single chariot from this angelic army in order to separate Elisha from Elijah.

**“And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces”** – Elisha loved Elijah like a father and was grieved over the fact that he would no longer see him. Tearing one's clothes was a common expression of grief.

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.

**“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan”** – Elijah's mantle (cloak) had been left behind after his departure, either blown off by the whirlwind or perhaps purposely dropped for Elisha. Elisha picks the mantle up and returns to the Jordan river where he and Elijah had previously crossed over (v. 8).

**“And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters”** – Elisha emulates what Elijah did with the mantle when the two had crossed the river earlier. The waters had miraculously parted when Elijah struck them with the mantle and Elisha now wanted to test whether or not he had received the “double-portion” that he had requested.

**“and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah?”** – Was the LORD now with Elisha or had He left with Elijah? Elisha calls on the LORD to test if the Spirit that had rested on Elijah was now present with him.

**“and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over”** – Elisha “also” had smitten the waters, just as Elijah had. And just as when Elijah did it, the waters miraculously parted for Elisha as well so that he could cross. The “sons of the prophets” had been watching and they see this as evidence that Elisha had taken Elijah's place (vs. 7, 15).

**2 Kings 4**

1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

**“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha”** – The “sons of the prophets” was a school for studying the things of God and educating future prophets. The wife of one of the students in this school approached Elisha with a problem.

**“saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD”** – She was a widow and her dead husband was apparently someone who had been familiar to Elisha. Elisha knew the man to be one that feared and obeyed the LORD.

**“and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen”** – Women had a hard time supporting themselves in those days, so this widow lost her means of support when her husband died. Without a means to pay her debts, her two sons were being taken as slaves until they worked off the debts.

2 And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. 3 Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. 4 And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

This woman was poor but Elisha asks her what she might have in the house that might be worth anything. When she reports that the only thing she has is a pot of oil, Elisha instructs her to borrow as many empty containers as she can from her neighbors. She is then to return home with the containers and start pouring oil from the pot into each of the borrowed containers until they are all full.

5 So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured out. 6 And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, *There is not a vessel more.* And the oil stayed.

Miraculously, no matter how many containers she filled from the original pot of oil, there was always more in the pot. This oil was likely anointing oil used to anoint the body and may have been leftover oil that her husband had used.

7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

The widow advised Elisha that she had obeyed his instructions. The oil had value as a commodity so Elisha then instructs her to sell the oil and use the proceeds to pay off her creditors. Then she was to use the leftover money to support herself and her children.

**2 Kings 6**

1 And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. 2 Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.

The sons of the prophets regarded Elisha as the leader of their school (possibly a position inherited from Elijah), so they ask him for permission to build a new dwelling place near the Jordan River. Apparently the single men of their number lived at the school, while the ones that were married lived in their own house with their wives. The place where the single men were living had become too “straight” (small, tight, confining), likely due to an increase in their numbers, so they wanted to build a new, larger place in a location near the river where they had room to grow. Elisha gave them permission to do so.

3 And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. 4 So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood.

The men asked Elisha to accompany them to the work site. They apparently hoped that he would go with them for the encouragement and moral support of seeing him there as well as for guidance during their work. Elisha agrees to go and the men begin their work by cutting down trees for lumber.

5 But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. 6 And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim. 7 Therefore said he, Take *it* up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

**“But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water”** – The ax head flew off the handle as the man swung it and it landed in the water of the Jordan river. Being made of iron, the ax head obviously sank to the bottom of the river where it was beyond retrieval.

**“and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed”** – In those days iron was expensive and iron that had been worked into a tool such as an ax head was even more expensive. The loss of the ax head was more than a personal loss for the man since he was poor and had no means for reimbursing the ax head’s owner.

**“And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim”** – Obviously there was nothing special about the stick that Elisha cast into the water. The stick floated on the water and the LORD caused the iron ax head to float to the surface to meet the stick.

**“Therefore said he, Take *it* up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it”** – Floating on the water, the ax was now easily retrievable. Presumably the man continued to use the ax to fell trees and was later able to return it to its owner.