

2 Kings Chapter 2

Verses 1-3

“Gilgal, Beth-el,” and Jericho were like modern-day Bible colleges or seminaries for prophets in training (2:5, 15).

The younger men received instruction in Scripture under more experienced prophets.

2 Kings 2:1 “And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.”

“By a whirlwind”:

Literally “in the whirlwind.”

This was a reference to the specific storm with lightning and thunder in which Elijah was taken to heaven (verse 11).

The LORD’s presence was connected with a whirlwind (in Job 38:1; 40:6; Jer. 23:19; 25:32; 30:23; Zech. 9:14).

“Elisha”:

The record of this prophet, who was the successor to Elijah, begins (in 1 Kings 19:16 see note), and extends to his death (in 2 Kings 13:20).

“Gilgal”:

Although some take this to be the Gilgal located west of the Jordan River near Jericho (Joshua 4:19; 5:9), the close affinity to Beth-el (verse 2), and its distance from Jericho (verse 4), seem to indicate that the Gilgal mentioned here was located in the hill country of Ephraim about 7 miles north of Beth-el.

Elijah was in this world, but he had never been of this world.

His life had been full of dramatic happenings.

More than once, Elijah had called down fire from heaven.

He was the prophet, who had miraculous happenings, more than the others.

He will go to heaven as he had lived on the earth, in a miraculous happening.

It is stated in the verse above, the ascension of Elijah in a whirlwind, as if it had already happened.

Elijah, like Enoch, is still alive.

They did not go the way of the grave.

Elisha had abandoned home and family to follow Elijah.

It seems, they had now gone to Gilgal.

Verses 2-3

For the “sons of the prophets” (see the note on 1 Kings 18:4).

Apparently, the prophetic schools at “Beth-el” and Jericho (verses 4-5), recognized the leadership of “Elijah.”

Faithfulness and loyalty to “Elijah” were essential traits for Elijah’s successor.

Some suggest Elisha was disobedient in not staying, but Elijah was testing Elisha (He passed).

When Elijah tested him a third time, Elisha still refused to put his own comfort first.

2 Kings 2:2 "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."

“Beth-el”:

A town in Benjamin about 8 miles north of Jerusalem, where one of Israel’s false worship centers was located (see note on 1 Kings 12:29).

Elisha had stayed with Elijah for years.

He was not about to leave him now.

Elijah knows that his life on earth is coming to an end.

He possibly does not want Elisha to see his last hours.

He could want to be alone.

It is probably and evident to Elisha too, and he wants to be there and witness the home-going of Elijah.

2 Kings 2:3 "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."

“The sons of the prophets” (see note on 1 Kings 20:35).

“Take away”:

The same term was used of Enoch’s translation to heaven (in Gen. 5:24).

The question from the sons of the prophets implied that the LORD had revealed Elijah’s imminent departure to them.

Elisha’s response that he didn’t need to hear about it (“hold ye your peace”), explicitly stated that Elijah’s departure had been revealed by the LORD to him also (verse 5).

“From thy head”:

I.e., from supervising you, an allusion to the habit of students sitting beneath the feet of their master, elevated on a platform.

Elisha would soon change from being Elijah’s assistant to serving as the leader among the prophets.

It seemed that many of the prophets and their sons knew, it would be that very day that Elijah would go home to be with the LORD.

Elisha tells them, he knows it too.

2 Kings 2:4 "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."

“Jericho”:

A city about 14 miles southeast of Beth-el in the Jordan River Valley (Joshua 2:1; 6:1), to which Elisha accompanied Elijah (verse 6).

This is the second time that Elijah had tried to get away from Elisha.

Elisha will not be left though.

If Elijah goes to Jericho, so will Elisha.

2 Kings 2:5 "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."

"Take away" uses the same Hebrew verb that describes Enoch's entrance into heaven (See Genesis 5:24).

It appears, that even at Jericho the prophets and their sons know, Elijah is about to leave this earth.

This is the very reason Elisha will not let Elijah out of his sight.

2 Kings 2:6 "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."

At Jericho, seemingly very desirous to get rid of him, that he might not see his assumption.

"For the LORD hath sent me to Jordan":

Where passing that he was to be taken up.

"And he said, Elisha swore as before, he would not leave him.

"And they two went on; to Jordan, which was six miles from Jericho.

This is the third time that Elijah had tried to get away from Elisha, but Elisha will follow Elijah wherever he goes, because he wants to witness his home-going.

2 Kings 2:7 "And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan."

To have a view, if they could, of the assumption of Elijah to heaven, and be witnesses of it.

"And they two stood by Jordan":

On the banks of it, even Elijah and Elisha.

These sons of the prophets wanted to view from afar Elijah going up to heaven in the whirlwind.

The older prophets were not that curious, thinking that the LORD might not approve of them looking on, even from a distance.

By the Jordan River, just Elijah and Elisha stand together.

2 Kings 2:8 "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."

“Waters ... were divided”:

Elijah rolled up his cloak into a kind of rod and struck the water of the Jordan River.

Immediately, the water parted, leaving a dry path through the river bed for the two prophets to cross.

Elijah’s act recalled Moses’ parting of the Red sea with his rod (Exodus 14:21-22), and the parting of the Jordan when Israel crossed over into the Land (Joshua 3:14-17).

The crossing put Elijah on the Jordan’s east bank, the area where Moses’ life came to an end (Deut. 34:1-6).

This man of miracles had done it again.

He had struck the water of the river with his folded up garment, and it parted for Elijah and Elisha to walk over.

Verses 9-10

As Elijah’s spiritual heir, “Elisha” asks for “a double portion” of Elijah’s “spirit” (Deut. 21:17 with 1 Kings 19:16-21), so that Elijah’s God-empowered spiritual activity might continue after his departure, through his successor.

Obviously only God could grant such a request.

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."

“A double portion”:

In Israel, the firstborn son inherited a double share of his father’s possessions and with it the right of succession (Deut. 21:17).

“A double portion of thy spirit” was not merely Elisha’s request to succeed Elijah in his prophetic ministry, since the LORD had already revealed this succession (in 1 Kings 19:16-21).

Nor was it Elisha’s desire for ministry superior to Elijah’s, though Elisha did, in fact, do twice as many recorded miracles as Elijah.

Apparently, Elisha was asking to succeed Elijah in the prophetic office as God had promised, with spiritual power beyond his own capabilities to meet the responsibilities of his position as Elijah's successor.

He desired that Elijah's mighty power might continue to live through him.

Elisha requested a "double portion of "Elijah's "sprit," the energizing power characterizing Elijah's ministry.

Elisha wanted God's empowerment far more than wealth.

Elisha had seen so many of the miracles done through Elijah, that his only wish was for the Spirit within Elijah would be twice as strong within him.

We see that Elijah loved Elisha, and had asked what he wished.

2 Kings 2:10 "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]."

"A hard thing":

Since only God can give spiritual power, Elijah did not have the ability to grant Elisha's request.

Elijah told Elisha that if Elisha saw his departure, it would be the sign that God Himself would grant Elisha's request.

This is a very hard thing, because the miracles of Elijah had been so fantastic themselves.

Elijah places this directly in the LORD's hands.

It is the LORD's decision, whether to grant this wish or not.

Elisha will know the answer, when Elijah is carried up.

If he sees the ascension of Elijah, God had granted his wish.

Verses 11-12

The "chariot" and "horses of fire" were likely an angel squadron on special assignment.

Elisha's exclamation speaks to the reason God commanded Israel's kings not to stockpile horses (Deut. 17:16), or fear armies with chariots (Deut. 20:1); every powerful resource is found in God, who fights for His people (6:17; Deut. 20:3-4; Psalm 104:4).

2 Kings 2:11 "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."

"Elijah" followed Enoch in being taken "into heaven" without dying (Gen. 5:24).

"Chariot of fire, and horses of fire":

The horse-drawn chariot was the fastest means of transport and the mightiest means of warfare in that day.

Thus, the chariot and horse symbolized God's powerful protection, which was the true safety of Israel (verse 12).

As earthly kingdoms are dependent for their defense on such military force as represented by horses and chariots, one single prophet had done more by God's power to preserve his nation than all their military preparations.

They had to be separated, so Elijah would go up, and not both of them.

God divided them with His fire.

Psalms 104:4 "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:"

The chariot of fire and the horses of fire accompanied Elijah up, but he went up in the whirlwind.

2 Kings 2:12 "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."

"My father":

The sons of the prophet recognized the leader of their company as their spiritual father.

This title of respect for a person of authority (Gen. 45:8; Judges 17:10), was later used for Elisha (6:21; 13:14).

Elisha's tribute to his spiritual father as the foremost prophet of all would be echoed at his own death (13:14).

Elisha's tearing of his "clothes" was a sign of mourning at his personal loss.

Elisha saw it, so he indeed received the double portion of a son.

Elisha is calling Elijah father, here.

He received the favorite son portion.

He was so humbled by it all, that he rent his clothes.

This tearing of the clothes in this manner was showing complete horror at the magnitude of God.

It was also, a way of mourning for the loss of Elijah.

This close encounter with God would put horror in anyone's heart.

2 Kings 2:13 "He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;"

Elijah had placed his prophetic “mantle” (likely some sort of shawl or cloak), on Elisha as Israel’s next prophet (1 Kings 19:19).

Now Elisha demonstrated his acceptance of the call.

The mantle of Elijah had come to Elisha.

He went back to the River Jordan that had parted for them to come over.

2 Kings 2:14 "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."

Performing the same miracle as Elijah (2:8), demonstrated that Elisha had received a double portion of his mentor’s spirit (2:9).

This put him in the tradition of Moses and Joshua, who respectively parted the Red sea (Exodus 14:21-22), and the Jordan River (Joshua 3:9-17).

Like Joshua (“Yahweh Saves”), Elisha would live up to the meaning of his name (“God Saves”).

“Waters ... parted”:

Elisha repeated the action of Elijah (verse 8), in using the cloak to immediately part the waters of the Jordan River, allowing Elisha to again cross over on dry land.

This confirmed that Elisha had received from God the same great power as his master, Elijah.

He did exactly as he had seen Elijah do and had the very same results.

The Jordan opened, and he walked over on dry land.

2 Kings 2:15 "And when the sons of the prophets which [were] to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

When “the sons of the prophets” saw Elisha, they sensed “the spirit of Elijah” on him.

God always provided a prophetic voice to guide His people, sending John the Baptist (Luke 1:17), Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, who empowered the apostles and all who followed them.

“Bowed ... to the ground”:

This action symbolized the submission of the prophets to the preeminence of Elisha as the prophet in Israel.

Prophets have an insight from God that not everyone has.

They were suddenly aware of what had happened, as they saw Elisha.

He was probably, greatly changed in appearance.

2 Kings 2:16 "And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send."

They knew that when souls went into God’s presence at death, bodies remained on earth.

Out of sensitivity to the body of Elijah, they wanted to retrieve it for appropriate care.

Elisha knew Elijah’s body would not be left behind, because he had seen his bodily ascension (verse 11), which the others had not, so he said, “No.”

The fifty sons of the prophets are not sure that Elijah had ascended into heaven.

They know something had happened, but they are not aware of what.

It was too far for them to see Elijah, as he ascended.

It was several miles in fact.

They thought, perhaps, the whirlwind had taken him up and dropped him, causing him to die.

They wanted to go and seek his body for burial.

Elisha, tells them they need not go.

He is in heaven.

2 Kings 2:17 "And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not."

“Ashamed”: (In 8:11 and Judges 3:25), this term was used for the feeling of embarrassment under the unrelenting pressure of their request.

But with shame for his own failure to believe what he had seen, Elisha was also embarrassed for the prophets, knowing the futile outcome of their search (verse 18; compare 1 Kings 18:12).

They did not believe Elisha, and kept asking him over and over until he finally let them go to look.

He knew Elijah was not there, but he could not convince them.

They did not understand a person going to heaven without benefit of the grave.

They looked three days, but of course they did not find him.

2 Kings 2:18 "And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?"

Waiting their return to hear the report they made: which when they had.

"He said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not":

Assuring them would be fruitless and to no purpose; though this search of theirs served both to confirm the assumption of Elijah, and the truth of Elisha being a prophet of the LORD.

Elisha waited at Jericho, until they finished their three days of hunting for the body of Elijah.

He reminds them, he had said it would be futile to look.

Verses 19-24

These two public miracles clearly established that “Elisha” had succeeded Elijah.

They also set the tone for the spiritual power of his ministry.

That Elisha “healed” (“purified”), “this” Salty “Water” manifested God’s unique power operating through him (4:41; Exodus 15:25-26).

2 Kings 2:19 "And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city [is] pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water [is] nought, and the ground barren."

The inhabitants of Jericho, perceiving him to be a prophet, and endowed with a power of working miracles.

"Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth":

In a plain, surrounded with gardens and orchards, with vineyards, oliveyards, and groves of palm trees, and other odoriferous ones.

"But the water is naught, and the ground barren":

That is, that part of it where this water was, or ran, for from thence it became barren; or "caused to miscarry", as the word signifies.

Not only trees cast their fruit, which it watered, but women became abortive that drank of it, as Josephus says, and so did the cattle.

Abarbanel thinks it was so from the times of Joshua, being cursed by him; but, if so, it would not have been inhabited again.

Rather this was owing to a new curse, upon its being rebuilt; though this might affect only a small part of the ground, not the whole, as before observed.

In this verse, the miracles for others to witness of Elisha began.

They liked their city, but the water was bad.

Verses 20-21

Cruse ... salt": Salt purifies water, but the small amount used there could not clean the whole water supply.

Rather, the use of salt from a new jar symbolized the cleansing of the waters that God would miraculously do.

The healing of Jericho's water through Elisha, freed the city from Joshua's curse, making it habitable for humans once again (Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34).

2 Kings 2:20 "And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought [it] to him."

The "new cruse" and the "salt" are evidently chosen from a regard to symbolism.

The foul stream represents sin, and to cleanse it emblems of purity must be taken.

Hence, the clean "new" dish previously unused, and thus untainted; and the salt, a common Scriptural symbol of incorruption (see Lev. 2:13; Ezek. 43:24; Matt. 5:13).

Salt, generally, would make bad water worse.

Salt water is not what they needed, but fresh.

The new cruse was used, so that no uncleanness had ever been in the cruse.

2 Kings 2:21 "And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren [land]."

The "waters" of Jericho may still have felt the effect of Joshua's curse (Joshua 6:26).

For purification by "salt" (see Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; Ezek. 43:24).

Elisha cast the water into the spring of waters and they became fresh and clear.

They took on a new name, Ain-es-sultan.

This spring, now, had become a beautiful fountain of sweet water.

Notice, Elisha tells them that the LORD healed the waters.

2 Kings 2:22 "So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake."

The spring intended is probably that now called Ain-es-Sultan, which is not much more than a mile from the site of the ancient town.

It is described as a large and beautiful fountain of sweet and pleasant water.

The springs issuing from the eastern base of the highlands of Judah and Benjamin are to this day generally brackish.

The waters obeyed the Word of the LORD spoken by the prophet Elisha.

Verses 23-24

These "youths" were young men, not children, and possibly false prophets of Baal.

“Go up” implies Elisha should go into heaven as Elijah had.

“Baldhead” might allude to the outcast lepers of that day or to Elisha’s actual head (whether bald by heredity or shaven by choice), but more likely it was a derisive comment (Isa. 3:17, 24).

Their contempt reflected disrespect for the LORD (Deut. 27:13-16).

2 Kings 2:23 "And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head."

“Bald head” was a taunt of scorn (Isa. 3:17, 24).

These “children” were older youths of responsible age who were actually blaspheming God by casting doubt upon Elisha’s report of the “going up” of Elijah.

The baldness was regarded as a disgrace.

The baldness of Elisha referred to here may be:

- (1) Natural loss of hair;
- (2) A shaved head denoting his separation to the prophetic office; or more likely,
- (3) An epithet of scorn and contempt, Elisha not being literally bald.

These youths were sarcastically taunting and insulting the lord’s prophet by telling him to repeat Elijah’s translation (“go up”).

Therefore, both God and His newly designated prophet were to be vindicated so proper respect might be shown.

Many of the prophets were at Beth-el.

He possibly could have been going to relate to them what had happened to him.

We will find in this, that it is a dangerous thing to speak ill of a true prophet.

These children laughed at the prophet, because he was bald.

2 Kings 2:24 "And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them."

“Cursed”:

Because these young people of about 20 years of age or older (the same term is used of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:7), so despised the prophet of the LORD, Elisha called upon the LORD to deal with the rebels as He saw fit.

The LORD's punishment was the mauling of 42 youths by two female bears.

The penalty was clearly justified, for to ridicule Elisha was to ridicule the LORD Himself.

The gravity of the penalty mirrored the gravity of the crime.

The appalling judgment was God's warning to any and all who attempted to interfere with the newly invested prophet's ministry.

The boys were probably following Elisha and jeering at him.

This is a terrible time for anyone to come against him.

It would be important for all to show great respect for the one the LORD had chosen to follow in Elijah's footsteps.

This cursing them was in the name of the LORD, which meant they had tried to defame his position with the LORD.

They were suddenly punished by being torn by she (female), bears.

This is not something for Christians to do.

This was under the law, and Christians live under grace.

It is however, a very dangerous thing to say bad things about God's anointed.

2 Kings 2:25 "And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria."

"Mount Carmel":

For the location (see note on 1 Kings 18:19).

Elisha associated his prophetic ministry with Elijah's stand against Baalism.

"Samaria":

The capital city of the northern kingdom, located in central Palestine (1 Kings 16:24).

Elisha was probably telling the other prophets what had happened to Elijah.

Carmel was a spot, where Elijah had been well-known.

This is where he called down fire from God to lap up the offering by fire.

Elisha went on to Samaria, because much of his ministry would be near there.

2 Kings Chapter 2 Questions

1. How did Elijah go to heaven?
2. Why was Elisha following Elijah?
3. How had Elijah lived on the earth?
4. Who, besides Elijah, went to heaven without going the way of the grave?
5. What did Elijah try to get Elisha to do?
6. Why would Elisha not do what Elijah asked him to do this time?
7. Why did Elijah not want Elisha to follow him?
8. What did the sons of the prophets at Beth-el ask Elisha?
9. How did Elisha answer them?
10. Where did Elijah go after Beth-el?
11. What did the sons of the prophets at Jericho say to Elisha?
12. Where was the third place that Elijah went?
13. Who followed Elijah and Elisha from a distance?
14. Why had the older prophets not followed them?
15. What miracle did the LORD do, at the Jordan River, for Elijah?
16. Who went over Jordan with Elijah?
17. What did Elijah ask Elisha?
18. What did Elisha want?
19. How did Elijah answer Elisha's request?
20. Who will decide, whether Elisha's request will be answered, or not?

21. How were Elijah and Elisha separated?
22. How did Elijah go up into heaven?
23. When Elisha saw Elijah go up accompanied by the chariots of fire and the horses of fire, what did he do?
24. What did Elisha pick up and carry back with him?
25. What did Elisha do at the River Jordan?
26. What was the first thing the fifty asked Elisha to let them do?
27. How long did they look?
28. Where did Elisha wait for the fifty?
29. How does Elisha make the water sweet?
30. Who laughed at Elisha for being bald?
31. What happened to them?
32. Why did he go back to Carmel?