



Elisha

*“Taking up the mantle :
A transition of power”*

WEEK TWO – TAKING UP THE MANTLE

Reading: 2 Kings 2

We read last week of how Elijah went to seek out Elisha who was ploughing in his father’s fields. Elijah threw his mantle, his cloak, over the shoulders of Elisha indicating that he too was to be a prophet of God. Elisha willingly left everything to follow the call of God on his life, but the time span is interesting. In this chapter it gives no indication of the fact that it was some seven or eight years between 1 Kings 19 and 2 Kings 2.

In those years, Elisha served Elijah, learning what it meant to be a prophet of God. 2 Kings 3:11 tell us how King Jehoram of Israel, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah and the King (probably a Vice-Regent) of Edom wanted to go to battle against Moab. It was the custom to send for a prophet to ask them to inquire as to God’s direction in such matters, but they didn’t know whom they should ask. *‘But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?” An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.”’*

- Have we understood the necessity of waiting on God and allowing him to prepare us for the role to which he has called us?
- What does this verse tell us about Elisha?

Some background information that is needed to understand 2 Kings 2: In the books of 1 and 2 Kings, eleven times we read about THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS. The term is a technical one referring to the members of a prophetic order or guild and has no reference to physical descent from a prophet.

There were several different guilds or branches located at various places BUT they were all “ruled” by the same prophet whom they called master (2:3, 5). When the master died or was taken, as Elijah was, one of the guild members took his place as the new master. The promotion had to be recognized by the guild members, and the test was whether the new master had the powers of the old master (2:8, 14) and whether the spirit of the old master rested on the new master (2:15). The guild may

have lived in a monastic community. They erected community buildings and shared a common table (4:38-44). Yet some were married. Some of their work was done at the command of the master (4:38; 9:1), and often they sought his approval before doing something (2:16-18). Yet they could act on their own (1 Kings 20:35).

In this chapter we read that Elijah, knowing this was to be his last day, went with Elisha to Gilgal. He tried to persuade Elisha to stay there and let him go on alone to Bethel, but Elisha refused, much in the same way as Ruth refused to leave Naomi on her journey. (Ruth 1:16-17)

Read verses 3-8

- What do you think might have been going through Elisha's mind at this time?
- Here in verse 8, we read of yet another occasion, when God parted the waters for his people to cross. God always makes a way.

Read verses 9-12

Elisha must have been very conscious of the responsibility he was about to take on because when they had crossed over the Jordan, Elijah said to Elisha, *"Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"* Elisha's response was: *"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,"*.

It is important to understand that Elisha was not asking for twice as much as Elijah had. The 'double portion' was that which denotes the proportion of a father's property which was the right of an eldest son, the rest being distributed amongst the other sons (Deuteronomy 21:17.) Probably he was asking to be acknowledged as Elijah's *'firstborn spiritual son'* (Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible).

And Elijah's response? *"Yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."*

As they walked further, we read that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire and separated the two of them: and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. At which point, Elisha tears his clothes in two demonstrating his grief.

THEN HE TOOK UP THE MANTLE OF ELIJAH THAT HAD FALLEN FROM HIM AND WENT BACK AND STOOD BY THE BANK OF THE JORDAN AND THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS WAITED TO SEE IF THERE HAD INDEED, BEEN A TRANSITION OF POWER.

- What happened, according to verse 14 and 15?
- Did Elisha pass all the tests to become the new master prophet? Why was that important?

Read verses 15-18

- Why do you think the sons of the prophets were so insistent that they be allowed to search for Elijah? How did Elisha respond?

Read verses 19-22

God loses no time in 'throwing Elisha into the ring'.

- Why was it important that Elisha was able, through the spirit of God, to perform the miracle of restoring the bad water?
- The remaining verses of this chapter seem horrendous to us, but we must understand them in relation to the period in history. To be bald evidently, was quite unusual and the taunts were cruel. We must remember that the law, given to the Children of Israel through Moses, was very rigid as to what was acceptable and what was not, and this was clearly laid down. It is important not to try and put it into the context of our present day.

Immediately after the taking up of Elijah, Elisha was thrust into his new role. We see that like for ourselves, there must be time to develop as Elisha did in those seven or eight years.

- How do we prepare ourselves for that to which God has called us?

Prayer

Father God help us to be patient and wait for your timing to step into our ministry. May we prepare our ourselves for what you have called us to be.

