

Elisha Asks For a Double Portion of Elijah's Spirit

2 Kings 1:1-2:25

Key Verse: 2:9

“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied.”

2 Kings continues the story of the kings and great prophets of Israel. Through the prophets, God warned the people to repent of their idolatry, otherwise they would be punished. The main figure in 1 Kings is the prophet Elijah. In 2 Kings, it is the prophet Elisha. They are different in character and nature of ministry. Elijah fought idol worship in kings and people. Elisha was a shepherd who served with God's truth and power. Though they were different, God is the same. As God used Elijah in his time, God wanted to use Elisha in his own time. God is the God of history. In today's passage the author presents the transition from Elijah's ministry to Elisha's ministry. We can learn what is essential to inherit God's ministry from the previous generation, and what we need most to do the work of God in our times.

I. Elijah, the man of God (1:1-18)

Chapter 1 reveals the spiritual condition of Northern Israel. Ahab's son Ahaziah became king. 1 Kings 22:52-53 say, "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he walked in the ways of his father and mother and in the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He served and worshiped Baal and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger, just as his father had done." Ahaziah became an evil man due to his parents' influence, especially that of his mother, Jezebel. What happened to him? Look at verses 1-2a. When Ahaziah abandoned the Lord, Moab rebelled against him and his kingdom. He also had personal trouble. One night, as he strolled about on the roof, he fell through the lattice and injured himself critically. It seemed to be an accident, but actually it was God's warning.

In this crisis moment, Ahaziah should have examined himself from God's point of view to learn why this happened. He should have recognized God's warning and repented. Instead, he sent messengers to consult the god of Ekron, "Baal-Zebub," that is, "the lord of the flies." This provoked the Lord God to anger. But God did not punish him right away. The Lord was patient with him. He sent his servant Elijah to intercept the messengers. Elijah told them, "Is it because there is no god in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'" The messengers returned quickly, surprising Ahaziah, and delivered Elijah's message to him. This warning actually revealed the Lord's merciful intervention. The Lord wanted to save Ahaziah, though he was evil, by

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helping him to repent his sins. But Ahaziah did not repent. Instead, he investigated the identity of the Lord's messenger. When he heard that the man wore a garment of hair, with a leather belt around his waist, he realized it was Elijah.

King Ahaziah had experienced Elijah's challenging spirit toward his father, Ahab. He should have realized that this warning came from God and listened to it. Instead, he ordered his soldiers to arrest Elijah. Knowing that Elijah was powerful, he did not send just one or two men; he sent fifty men to arrest him. Elijah was sitting on the top of a hill. The captain and fifty men went up to him and said, "Man of God, the king says 'Come down!'" Elijah answered, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." Fire fell from heaven and consumed them (10). The king should have trembled and repented. However, he hardened his heart and sent another captain with fifty men. This captain should have been humble. But he repeated the same mistake as the first captain, and his stubbornness led to destruction. The king hardened his heart again and sent a third captain and fifty more men to arrest Elijah. The third captain fell on his knees before Elijah and begged, "Man of God, please have respect for my life and the lives these fifty men, your servants!" He and his men were saved.

Why were the first two groups killed, and the third group spared? Those in the first two groups called Elijah a man of God. Out of reverence for God, they should have been humble. However, they arrogantly demanded Elijah to submit, flaunting the king's authority. They feared the king more than God. Though they were soldiers, they should have feared God most (Ac 5:29). The third captain respected the man of God from his heart, though he did his duty as a soldier. He feared God. So he pleaded for his life and those of his men. The Lord had mercy on them and spared them. Through this we learn that there are two kinds of people: those who fear God most, and those who fear evil rulers most. At this moment, let's humbly kneel before God. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Ja 4:6).

Look at verse 15. "The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.'" Although Elijah was sitting on the mountain--calling fire down from heaven and consuming the arrogant--he was also afraid. He was just like us. But when he heard the angel's message, he got up and obeyed. He went to the king and proclaimed God's message directly. Again, King Ahaziah had a chance to repent. But he hardened his heart and did not listen to God's message. Finally, he died. Proverbs 29:1 says, "A man who remains stiff necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy." God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish. So God gives sinners many chances to repent. But anyone who ignores God's message and remains stiff necked, will not avoid God's judgment.

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Ahaziah had no son. Jehoram succeeded him as king. This is the end of Ahaziah's tragic story. It shows how dark Israel was due to the evil influence of Ahab and Jezebel. However, though Israel abandoned the Lord, the Lord did not abandon Israel. God was working through his servants. God used Elijah, who had a clear identity as a man of God to challenge the terrible idolatry of his times. God is working in America today. Let's pray to have a clear identity as men and women of God, so that he can use us.

II. Elisha inherits the spirit of Elijah (2:1-25)

Chapter two tells us how Elijah was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind, and how the prophet Elisha succeeded him. Elisha knew what was most important to be Elijah's successor. We can learn from him.

First, Elisha received the Spirit of God (1-18). Look at verse 1. "When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal." The Bible says that all men are destined to die once because of their sins (Heb 9:27). There have been only two exceptions in history: Enoch and Elijah. Why did God take Elijah up to heaven without experiencing death? One reason was to reward Elijah for his service. Elijah's mission was not in vain. God rewarded him. Hebrews 11:6 says that God rewards those who earnestly seek him. Through Elijah, God shows all mankind that he rewards his servants. This reward is not housing or money. It is more than that. It is eternal life in the kingdom of God where there are no tears, sorrows, sufferings, or death (Rev 21:4). God rewards his servants. Another reason God took Elijah up to heaven was to foreshadow Christ's ascension, and the eventual ascension of all believers (1 Th 4:13-18). Suffering for Christ has great meaning and brings forth great reward: eternal life in the kingdom of God. Let's not hesitate to suffer for Christ.

Before he was taken up to heaven, Elijah wanted to visit the schools of the prophets in Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho. Most likely he wanted to encourage them, who were suffering much under the influence of an evil king in Northern Israel. Historically, after Jeroboam had set up two golden calves in Bethel and Dan, all of the Levites went to the southern kingdom, Judah. It seemed that all of the Bible teachers had gone. However, there were at least 50 prophets in each of the schools in Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho, who were receiving spiritual training. It is amazing to see that there were so many prophets who were willing to serve God in that dark generation. Especially, Bethel, which had been a center of idol worship, now contained a school of prophets. One time, Elijah had complained to the Lord,

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saying, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenants, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." (1 Ki 19:10,14) To be a prophet one must risk his life. The Lord told Elijah, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Ki 19:18). Upon hearing this, Elijah realized that God's remnant people were living in Israel. Since then, he must have devoted himself to establish the schools of the prophets, which he now visited before his ascension.

Elijah took Elisha with him. 2 Kings 3:11b says that Elisha "used to pour water on the hands of Elijah." This means that Elisha was Elijah's servant. They must have lived together. Elisha served by doing all kinds of chores, such as pouring water, cooking, cleaning, laundry, errands, and recording. Through this training, Elijah grew to be a great man of God who could embrace all kinds of people and serve God successfully. No one can be used greatly by God without humiliating training. Elijah wanted to train Elisha as much as possible, even to the last moment, when he was ready to ascend to heaven. In verses 2-10 we see how Elijah trained Elisha.

Look at verse 2. "Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel." Elijah repeats virtually the same thing in verses 4 and 6, and Elisha responds the same way both times. Why did Elijah tell Elisha repeatedly not to follow him? Usually shepherds say, "Follow me." But here Elijah was saying, "Don't follow me." Why? It must have been to test Elisha's faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord. In doing God's work, faithfulness, or loyalty, is most important (1 Cor 4:2). Elijah wanted to escape from Elisha. However, Elisha did not allow it. Elisha was determined to follow Elijah to the end. Elisha had received God's calling as Elijah's successor (19:16,19). He loved his teacher from his heart and wanted to be with him to the end. He called Elijah, "My father! My father!" (2:12) They were like a father and son. Elisha wanted to obtain God's blessing from Elijah. The two of them walked along together, not saying much.

Elijah and Elisha stopped at the Jordan. Fifty men of the company of the prophets stood at a distance watching them. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground (8). When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken up from you?" Elijah wanted to bless Elisha one final time before being taken up, granting his true heart's desire. Elisha had the privilege of asking what he wanted. If the Lord Jesus asked us, "What do

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you want me to do for you?" what would we answer? We might say, "Help me to pass through college with straight A's and get a good job." Or, "Please give me the best person as my spouse." Or, "Please give me a child, either a son or a daughter." Or, "Please heal my father's sickness." Or, "Please give me a better car and house." There are many things to ask. It is not easy for us to answer such a question. Sometimes we don't know what we need. Yet, what we seek reveals who we truly are, and the inner condition of our hearts.

What did Elisha request? Look at verse 9b. "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." Elisha could have asked for material goods, fame, authority to govern the schools of prophets, power to call fire down on his enemies, or something else. But Elisha asked for the spirit of Elijah, which was the Holy Spirit. Elisha knew that he needed the Holy Spirit more than anything else to do the work of God. He had learned that this was Elijah's secret. The Holy Spirit compelled Elijah to love God and fight against God's enemies. The Holy Spirit what moved him to love God's people. The Holy Spirit enabled him to challenge impossible situations. In doing God's work, receiving the Holy Spirit is most important. When we have the Holy Spirit we can overcome all hardships and create a new history. However, if we do not have the Holy Spirit--although we have everything else: money, knowledge, fame, authority, position--we can do nothing. Jesus said, "...the Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing" (Jn 6:63).

When Dr. Samuel Lee was full of the Holy Spirit he could do many things that seemed impossible, even leading nations to obey the world mission command. Mother Barry, who is full of the Holy Spirit, works harder than anyone. She teaches the Bible and labors in prayer for those who need help, even though she is the eldest among us. Dr. John Jun, who is full of the Holy Spirit, has delivered God's message around the world, traveling tirelessly. Dr. Joseph Chung has passed retirement age. But he is full of the Holy Spirit, so he could make a new beginning as a silver missionary to Uganda. When we have the Holy Spirit, we can overcome all obstacles to carry out God's mission. Elisha knew that God used Elijah greatly, not because of his ability, vast knowledge, or rich experience, but because he was full of the Holy Spirit. So he asked for the spirit of Elijah.

Elisha sought a double portion of Elijah's spirit. This shows that he had a clear sense of God's history. He could have tried to start his own work, thinking, "Elijah is Elijah, and I am I." He could wish that Elijah would depart as soon as possible. But then, history would have been disconnected. The work of God is the work of succession. God is the God of history. God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is the God of Elijah and Elisha, the God of John

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the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Elisha knew that he was following Elijah's footsteps according to God's sovereign call. He wanted to learn the God of Elijah. Elijah had been very zealous for the Lord. Elisha wanted to love and serve God as Elijah had. He knew that he could not do this in his own strength. He needed the Holy Spirit. So he asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

This does not mean that he wanted to do twice as great a work as Elijah. This request did not come from his human ambition. Rather, in the language of those times, he was asking for the eldest son's inheritance, which was called a double portion. This was his humble request. Elisha knew his weaknesses. Without a double portion of spirit he could not carry out the demanding work of God as a prophet. We also need the Holy Spirit in order to do God's work in this dark generation. Jesus promised to give us the Holy Spirit when we ask him (Lk 11:13). Let's ask for the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 10. "'You have asked a difficult thing,' Elijah said, 'yet if you see me when I am taken from you it will be yours--otherwise not.'" If Elisha did not give up and kept seeking it, then he would receive what he asked for. The condition was to witness Elijah's ascension.

As Elijah and Elisha were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Whirlwinds and fire were associated with the power and presence of God (Isa 29:6). Elijah was a man of fire. It was a glorious scene. Elijah went up to heaven as more than a conqueror. In the same way, we will go to heaven as more than conquerors in God's time. When Elisha witnessed Elijah's ascension, he cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" Elijah was not only the spiritual father for Elisha, but also the chariots and horsemen of Israel (2 Ki 13:14). Elijah's departure was a great loss, not only to Elisha but to the nation Israel. Out of great sorrow, Elisha tore his clothes. Then he took Elijah's cloak, which had fallen. Elisha struck the water with it, saying, "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" He wanted the God of Elijah to become his God. Then, the water was divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. The company of prophets who were watching said, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." When they met him, they bowed to the ground before him. The God of Elijah became the God of Elisha.

The company of prophets thought that the Spirit of the Lord had picked up Elijah and set him down in some mountain or valley. They wanted to search for him. Elisha replied, "No." But they persisted. They searched for three days and did not

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find him. In this way Elisha's words were proved right as a man of God. When Elijah's spirit was on Elisha, he could carry out the great work of God in the midst of the darkness of his times.

Second, the nature of Elisha's ministry (19-25). In verses 19-25 we see that the nature of Elisha's ministry reflected God's own character: God is the God of blessing and the God curse.

The people of the city, probably Jericho, told Elisha, "Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive." Perhaps the water was bad as a result of the curse by God's servant (Jos 6:26; 1 Ki 16:34). Water is essential for life. When the water is good, people are healthy and land is very productive. Chicago is a good place to live, for God has blessed us with good water. On the other hand, people in many countries die too young because they drink bad water. To the people of Jericho it was an impossible problem to solve. Yet Elisha challenged the problem and solved it. He threw salt from a new bowl into the water, saying, "This is what the Lord says, 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'" God blessed Elisha's words and healed the water. This first miracle reveals the character of Elisha's ministry. It was to remove the poison of sin and save life. It was in contrast to Elijah's ministry of purging sin by fire. These days, spiritually speaking, many people are drinking poisonous water and dying gradually. We should remove the poison by sharing the word of God with faith. The word of God can bring healing and life to sinsick souls. God is the God of blessing for those who ask him humbly.

A second event is recorded about Elisha going up to Bethel. Some youths came out of the town and jeered at him, saying, "Go on up, you baldhead." Here "youths" refer to people in their late teens, not little children. They reflected the irreverence of that generation, which grew up with increasing contempt for God and his servant. They insulted not just Elisha's baldness, but God whom he represented. They rejected Elisha's prophetic authority. They were saying, "If you are really a prophet like Elijah, go on up to heaven as he did." Elisha turned and looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. It was not for personal revenge, but to punish blasphemers of God. Suddenly two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. This event revealed that God is the God of curse to the irreverent. God cannot be mocked. Then Elisha went on to Mount Carmel. And from there he returned to Samaria.

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We live in a spiritually dark age like the time of Elijah and Elisha. People mock God's servants. People are irreverent. It is very hard for us to do the work of God in this generation. Evil waves of materialism, hedonism, and relativism try to engulf us. We need the Spirit of God to do the work of God in our time. Our problem is not the difficulties, but the lack of Spirit. When we have the Spirit of God we can do God's work in this dark generation. So let's earnestly ask for the Spirit of God.