

Elisha's Double Portion (For us too!)

Lesson #2 Elisha's Request

(II Kings 2:1-14)

Background

The ministry of Elijah is coming to a close. After about 20 years of amazing ministry in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Elijah prepares to be taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. He and his successor, Elisha are at Gilgal visiting one of the schools of prophets.

Schools of Prophets

In a season of great discouragement, Elijah had wrongly assumed that he was the only prophet left (I Kings 19:14). So, God reminded him that there were actually 7000 prophets in Israel (I Kings 19:18). These prophets lived and worked in communities known as "schools of prophets." See I Sam. 10: 5-6, 19:19-24 and Ezra 5:2.

The term "prophet" has a broad meaning in the OT. In a general sense, it means someone who was a spokesman for God. Moses, Abraham, Miriam, Deborah, Asaph the musician, Elijah and Elisha are all referred to as prophets. In our Bible, we have the words of 16 prophets recorded (Isaiah through Malachi).

The terms used for prophet convey the nuances of their job. One term means to "bubble forth" or announce. So, a prophet would be a mouth piece for the Lord, someone who "forth told" God's announcements.

Two other terms are also translated "prophet" and they come from roots that mean "to see." In that sense, a prophet was to explain a vision given him from God. He was "fore telling" or predicting the future on behalf of the Lord. And he had to be correct 100% of the time (Deut. 18:22).

OT prophets were preachers, pastors, poets, historians and covenant mediators. In a general sense, prophets represented God to the people and priests represented the people to God.

And these schools dotted the landscape of Israel. There was one in Gilgal (where the Israelites crossed the Jordan river). The one at Bethel (Samuel's hometown) was likely the first school and it was located just 12 miles east of Jericho. Jericho (the site of Joshua's first major victory- Josh. 6) was just 6 miles east of the river Jordan.

Apparently, Elijah walked a circuit around these schools as he ministered to the young prophets.

Elijah's Instructions to Elisha (II Kings 2: 1-6)

It seems that it was common knowledge among the prophets that God was going to take Elijah up in a whirlwind (vs. 3). Special note: A whirlwind was a symbol of God's incredible power-see Isa. 29:5-6.

- A. Elijah to Elisha: "Stay here, the Lord has sent me to..." See vs. 2, 4, 6
Perhaps Elijah just wanted some time alone with God
More likely, he was testing the resolve of Elisha

- B. Elisha to Elijah: "As surely as the Lord lives, I will not leave you." See vs. 2,4, 6
*Consider the commitment of Ruth to Naomi in Ruth 1: 16 and Ittai the Gittite's commitment to David in II Sam. 15:21.
*Remember too the promise of Jesus in Matthew 28:20 "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." We are God's people and He does not leave us. (Rev. 21:3, Hosea 2:23, Eze. 37:23)

- C. The company of prophets to Elisha: "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" See vs. 3, 5, 7
*Consider how the apostles reacted to Jesus' departure announcement in John 13. He had to reassure them, and promise "another comforter." See John 14:16

- D. Elijah leads them to the other side of the river. (They moved away from the settled land towards the wilderness. This is similar to Elijah's time at the Kerith Ravine in I Kings 17 and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness of Matt. 4:1) .
*He struck the water with his mantle and the river parted.
*Remember how Moses parted the Red Sea in and how He used Joshua to divide the river Jordan in Josh. 3:17.
*The mantle was a symbol of authority (like the staff or the ark)
*And he asked Elisha what he could do for him.

Elisha's Request (vs. 9-10)

Elisha to Elijah: "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit."

Three possible explanations:

1. He had seen the miracles Elijah was responsible for and he longed for more miracles.
2. He understood the Jewish principle of inheritance and hoped for the elder son's portion. See Deut. 21:17
3. He understood the immense scope of the ministry ahead and desperately needed God's help.

*Consider the request Solomon made in I Kings 3:7-9

Elijah to Elisha: "You have asked for a hard thing." (That request can only be granted by God.) "If you see me when I am taken up from you...it will be yours."

Elijah is Taken (vs. 11-13)

He is taken up in a whirlwind (not a chariot of fire). The chariot and fire separate Elijah from Elisha. They symbolize the manifestation and protection of God. Fire is sign of God's presence (Ex. 3:2, 13:21 and 19:18). Remember that Enoch is the only other person to escape normal death (Gen. 5:24).

Elisha's reaction:

1. "Elisha saw..." His eyes were on his master (remember where the eyes of Peter went in Matthew 14)
2. "My father, my father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel"- (That same comment is made near the time of Elisha's death-II Kings 13:14). It is a statement expressing the extreme value of the prophet (as compare to horses and chariots).
3. He tore his clothes-a sign of deep mourning in Israel
4. He picks up the mantle that fell from Elijah (He is embracing his role and responsibilities). He then uses that symbol of his authority to part the water in the river Jordan. He walked over on dry land.
5. The company of prophets saw that display of power and acknowledged "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." (vs. 15) They gave him the proper respect.
*Since Elijah was known to go off by himself, they searched to make sure he was really gone to glory.

Two Miracles to Authenticate Elisha's Position

1. He healed the spring in Jericho. He used salt (a preservative and a substance used to bring out flavor) (vs. 19-22)
2. He dealt with a group of undisciplined young men. (vs. 23-25) Baldness was often the mark of a leper. These young men were showing great disrespect for an elder. Such disrespect was a huge issue for the Israelites and there were prescribed consequences for those who ignored the teaching. (See Deut. 27:14-26).
*Elisha asserted his leadership. He called down a curse, but God had the bears come out and deal with the youths.

Elisha began his solo ministry traveling from the Jordan River to Mount Carmel in the northeast and then down to Samaria.

So What?

In our own lives, we dare not depend on our own strength, abilities or gifts in order to accomplish the work of God. We desperately need His Spirit to get the job done. Jesus promised "another comforter" in John 14:16 and the Spirit came in Acts 2. A violent wind came from heaven and the apostles were then equipped to do the job assigned to them (Acts 1:8).

That same Spirit has been given to each child of God. And by His Spirit we are also equipped to do the job He has called us to do. We have been strengthened, rooted, established and given power...so we can be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-21).

Elisha's double portion is ours!

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you crave a "double portion" of God's Spirit? What do you need Him for?
2. Do you feel empowered in your Christian walk? Do you serve Him with confidence?
3. Why do you think Jesus called the Spirit "another Comforter?" How does He guide you?
4. How does the prayer for the Ephesians, outlined in Eph. 3:14-21 apply in your life?

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