

Preview of 2 Kings

The Book of 2 Kings is sometimes called the book of the dispersion. It opens with the translation of Elijah into heaven, records the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), and closes with the Southern Kingdom (Judah) going into the Babylonian captivity.

The first ten chapters deal primarily with the Kingdom of Israel. Reference to Judah is rather incidental, including the story of how two of Judah's kings joined Israel in two different military campaigns. In these chapters, the ministry of Elisha to Israel is the predominant subject. Chapters 9-17 show some activities of both kingdoms and conclude with the passing of Israel into the Assyrian captivity. Since this study focuses on the Northern Kingdom, it will not include the remaining chapters.

On a national level, the activities of 2 Kings demonstrate that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Israel resisted correction, but it could not evade retribution. "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man [or nation] soweth, that shall he also reap." Someone has summarized it this way: "As we see the battered, broken tribes of Israel dragged behind the chariots of their heathen conquerors, we surely cannot fail to see that the central

Elijah's Translation

Lesson Scope: [2 Kings 2](#)

Lesson Focus

The ministry of Elijah, which had been announced suddenly and boldly some years earlier, had filled a vital role in the life of Israel. Elijah had demonstrated great faith, zeal, and utter commitment. He could rightly proclaim, "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts" (1 Kings 19:10).

Malachi named Elijah as a forerunner of Christ (Malachi 4:5). Jesus applied this prophecy to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14). Elijah's appearance with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration identified him as a fit representative of the prophetic office (Matthew 17:1-13).

First Kings 19:16-21 records Elisha's call to serve Elijah. No further mention is made of Elisha until the account of this lesson. Second Kings 3:11 gives an interesting flashback, referring to Elisha as he who had "poured water on the hands of Elijah." This indicates Elisha's service to Elijah.

Chapter 1 indicates the gross apostasy in Israel at this time. In this critical era, God carefully superintended the transfer of the prophetic mantle from Elijah to Elisha.

The passing of time necessitates the transfer of responsibility of the aging generation to those who are assuming many responsibilities.

Those of us who are older must to continue to be faithful and to pass along a worthwhile spiritual legacy.

Those who are younger need to be challenged to make those spiritual values their own and to take up the mantle of responsibility in their day.

All need the challenge of giving their best for the cause of Christ. This cause which is far above ourselves will ultimately triumph over every other cause. It is our reasonable service to present our bodies a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) while we are here.

All men should live in constant readiness for their departure from this life. Those who are serving God faithfully both anticipate this change and contemplate the welfare of those who remain.

Lesson Aim: To see principles associated with the departure of the faithful from this life.

Theme Verse: Revelation 14:13. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Lesson Text

Traveling Together

2 Kings 2:1-8¹ and it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.² And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said *unto him*, As the LORD liveth, and *as thy soul liveth*, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.³ And the sons of the prophets that *were* at Bethel 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.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.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.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.⁷ And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.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.

Parting Asunder

2 Kings 2:9-12⁹ 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.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*.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.

Taking the Mantle

2 Kings 2:13-15 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. 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 the selves to the ground before him.

Questions for Study

Traveling Together

1. Why did Elijah repeatedly ask Elisha to "tarry here" while he went on?
2. Explain why the sons of the prophets were concerned about Elijah's leaving.
3. What can younger servants of the Lord learn from those who are aging?

Parting Asunder

4. What do you suppose prompted Elijah's directive in verse 9?
5. What does Elisha's request indicate about his character?
6. Why are feelings of both sorrow and joy appropriate at the passing of the godly?

Taking the Mantle

7. What is symbolized by Elisha's taking up Elijah's mantle?
8. How can the living choose to identify with the legacy of the faithful who have departed?

Important Teachings

1. God controls the appointments of life and death (2:1).
2. Saints face the reality of death with calm confidence in the Lord (2:2-6).
3. Faithful saints remain committed to the Lord's work unto the end of life (2:2-8).
4. Every faithful saint yearns to leave a spiritual legacy (2:9).
5. Those who remain should most highly value the spiritual qualities of the godly (2:9-10).
6. God arranges the circumstances surrounding one's departure from this life (2:11).

7. For the saint, leaving this life means entering the eternal, heavenly home (2:11).

8. Feelings of both triumph in the Lord and grief are appropriate at the passing of godly saints (2:12).

9. As men of God pass off the scenes of time and duty, their responsibility must be transferred to others, so that the work of God can go on (2:13-14).

89

10. Those who remain must choose to identify with the legacy of the departed faithful (2:13-15).

Analyzing the Passage

Whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1) does not necessarily indicate a tornado as we know it. At least it was a very strong wind. The same Hebrew word is translated tempest in Jonah 1.

It is interesting to note that, after Elijah's translation, something significant occurred at each of the places Elijah and Elisha visited just before Elijah was taken up. As Elisha returned to the Jordan River, he smote the waters as Elijah had done, and the waters parted (2 Kings 2:14). When he came again to Jericho, God healed the bitter waters after Elisha directed that salt be cast into them (2 Kings 2:19-22). Then he went to Bethel, where two bears tore forty-two children who had mocked him. Sometime later, he went to Gilgal, where God made the pottage harmless after Elisha directed that meal be cast into it (2 Kings 4:38-41). These incidents illustrate God's mighty work through Elisha.

"Sons of the prophets" apparently refer to students of the prophets. The accounts of 2 Kings 4:38-41 and 2 Kings 6:1-7 seem to picture such schools. There must have been many sons of the prophets. The account in 2 Kings 2:7 implies that fifty were only part of the group at one of these schools.

Verses 3 and 5 mention "from thy head." This probably refers to the fact that the master sat on an elevated platform with his students at his feet (see Acts 22:3).

Elisha's reference to the chariot and horsemen reflected on what he had just seen. The terms, however, seem to refer to Elijah. Chariots and horsemen symbolized the military strength of a nation. Elijah represented the true spiritual strength of Israel.

Elisha did not hesitate to pick up the mantle that had become a symbol of Elijah's authority (2 Kings 2:13-15). Elisha's question (2 Kings 2:14) was not one of doubt but of calling upon God in faith.

Principles and Applications

Traveling Together

1. God controls the appointments of life and death (2 Kings 2:1). He sovereignly gives and also terminates life. For man to take this power to himself, as in murder, suicide, abortion, or euthanasia, is to usurp God's rightful place. Severe judgment will follow.

2. Saints face the reality of death with calm confidence in the Lord (2 Kings 2:2-6). Both Elijah and Elisha exhibited this confidence and resignation to the will of God. Those who have yielded themselves to God in life, having experienced divine peace and direction, have confidence in the same God as they approach death.

3. Faithful saints remain committed to the Lord's work unto the end of life (2 Kings 2:2-8). As the end of life approached, Elijah continued to minister to "the sons of the prophets" and especially to Elisha. Thus Elisha was prepared to continue the ministry that Elijah had begun.

Parting Asunder

4. Every faithful saint yearns to leave a spiritual legacy (2 Kings 2:9). As saints age, they increasingly realize the brevity of life, as well as what things matter most in light of eternity. The things of earth "grow strangely dim" as one considers their relatively small importance. Older brethren and sisters need to continue to live sacrificially so as to be good examples and influences upon those who follow.

5. Those who remain should most highly value the spiritual qualities of the godly (2 Kings 2:9-10). To do this, one must faithfully practice what he has been taught. Appreciation of spiritual values will help to produce spiritual stability, which is essential in today's world of eroding values.

6. God arranges the circumstances surrounding one's departure from this life (2 Kings 2:11). Both for the one who is departing and for those who remain, submission to God's will is imperative. Both the shock of a sudden departure and the protracted pain of watching a loved one suffer bring very real challenges. Persistently trusting "the God of all grace" will surely make that grace real in the lives of all who need it.

7. For the saint, leaving this life means entering the eternal, heavenly home (2 Kings 2:11). When a believer is "absent from the body," he is "present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

8. Feelings of both triumph in the Lord and grief are appropriate at the passing of godly saints (2 Kings 2:12). The Christian views death as an enemy that will finally be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). But the death of a godly relative, friend, or acquaintance naturally brings sorrow. The modern

idea that a funeral should be a celebration of the person's life suppresses normal grief in an unhealthy way. We do not, however, sorrow as those who have no hope. The funeral of a saint reminds us of the living hope claimed by all who die in the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Taking the Mantle

9. As men of God pass off the scenes of time and duty, their responsibility must be transferred to others, so that the work of God can go on (2 Kings 2:13-14).

Sometimes that can be done before the older one dies, facilitating a smooth, overlapping transition.

10. Those who remain must choose to identify with the legacy of the departed faithful (2 Kings 2:13-15). The work of God will continue. We show appreciation for those who have lived and died by identifying with the cause they served. We remain committed to the body of believers they identified with.

Answers to Questions

1. Why did Elijah repeatedly ask Elisha to "tarry here" while he went on? Elijah seems to have been testing Elisha's commitment and helping to strengthen his commitment.

2. Explain why the sons of the prophets were concerned about Elijah's leaving.

The sons of the prophets were familiar with Elijah's powerful ministry as a prophet, and they were concerned that the work would not cease when he passed off the scene.

3. What can younger servants of the Lord learn from those who are aging? They learn to keep the Lord's work their first priority. They learn to keep themselves in the background and to always be ready to serve. They learn to rely upon the Lord even when circumstances look impossible.

4. What do you suppose prompted Elijah's directive in verse 9? Elijah was concerned about Elisha's welfare as a prophet after he would be gone. He knew from experience what difficulties Elisha would face. He was not trying to lessen the difficulties for Elisha; he desired to help prepare him for the future.

5. What does Elisha's request indicate about his character? Elisha was not afraid of hard work. He knew of some of Elijah's difficulties in his work as prophet. He was self-sacrificing and therefore wanted to portray a spirit such as Elijah had in his ministry. The fact that he saw Elijah go to heaven indicates he was an alert servant.

6. Why are feelings of both sorrow and joy appropriate at the passing of the godly?

The separation that takes place brings feelings of sorrow. Death is an enemy that has not yet been fully conquered. Joy is appropriate for the godly who remain because they anticipate final victory and eternal rest with those who have gone before.

7. What is symbolized by Elisha's taking up Elijah's mantle?

Elijah's mantle symbolized the authority of his office as a prophet (see 1 Kings 19:19; 2 Kings 2:8). By taking this mantle, Elisha indicated that he was willing to take up Elijah's work with an authoritative yet humble spirit as the servant of God. He was moving ahead by faith into the responsibility God had called him to (2 Kings 2:14).

8. How can the living choose to identify with the legacy of the faithful who have departed?

They humbly take up the responsibility that is laid upon them. They willingly accept the difficulty or suffering that accompanies their responsibility. They submissively embrace the doctrines and practices that the faithful have taught them.

Summarizing the Lesson

He's gone; the spotless soul is gone,
Triumphant to his place above;
The prison walls are broken down,
The angels speed his swift remove;
And shouting on their wings he flies,
And gains his rest in Paradise.
Father, to us vouchsafe the grace,
Which brought our friend victorious through;
Let us his shining footsteps trace;
Let us his steadfast faith pursue;
Follow this follower of the Lamb,
And conquer all through Jesus' name.
—*Harmonic Sacra, 1847*

Research Guide

1. Read the chapter titled "Death" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8 to see Paul's charge to Timothy in light of his impending death