

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-28 Elijah Is Taken to Heaven

What do you want to be known for? Elijah's public career as a 'man of God' was centered on conflict with King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. They had brought Baal worship into the Northern Kingdom. In the last lesson you learned that God commanded Elijah to anoint a foreign king to bring judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. God intended to punish Israel for worshiping the Baals. Elijah also appointed an Israelite named Jehu to succeed Ahab as king of Israel.

Elijah was a rebel for God. He rebelled against what was happening in Israel. He wanted to restore the worship of Yahweh. We have learned that being a rebel for God resulted in great successes, including miracles, and great danger and discouragement for Elijah himself.

One of the ways God encouraged Elijah was to direct him to appoint an Israelite to take his place as a rebel for God. This young man was Elisha, whose name means 'God is salvation.' Elisha became a great prophet and spokesman for God for nearly 50 years.

As God predicted, the king of Syria made war against Israel for the next several years. Ahab and his army were able to fight him back for a while. Later, Ahab joined with the king of the Southern Kingdom, Jehoshaphat, to fight the Syrians east of the Jordan River. Through a prophet, God warned them that they were foolish to fight over there. But they went into battle anyway. Ahab was killed and the army disbanded. The Syrian king then controlled the land east of the Jordan.

Ahab's son Ahaziah became king upon the death of Ahab. But he was no more godly than his parents. When he was injured in a fall, he sent messengers to a Philistine city to ask the priests of Baal, "Will I recover from this injury?"

The angel of the LORD told Elijah to ask Ahaziah, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of the city of Ekron? The God of Israel says that you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" Elijah told the king's messengers what God told him.

When the king heard what the messengers said, he sent 50 soldiers to order Elijah to come to the palace. The captain shouted the order to Elijah up on a hill, but Elijah didn't move. He said, "If I truly am a man of God, may God kill you and your men with fire from heaven!" Fire came down, and they all perished.

The same thing happened with a second group of 50 soldiers. A third group approached Elijah more carefully and humbly. The captain fell on his knees before Elijah and begged for mercy for himself and his men. The angel of the LORD told Elijah to go back to the palace with the third group of soldiers. To the king, Elijah repeated the death sentence from God, and Ahaziah died within days. He had reigned for less than two years (2Kings 1:2-17).

This story of Ahaziah's death was Elijah's last confrontation. The time was near when Elijah would leave, and Elisha would continue his work. Elijah and Elisha seem to have spent time together in the Jordan valley near Gilgal. They gathered godly young men and taught them the ways of the LORD. Elijah invited Elisha to stay at Gilgal, but he wanted to go with Elijah. The two prophets journeyed up the hills to Bethel. Again, Elijah said, "Stay here, while I go back down the hills to Jericho."

“No,” said Elisha, “I want to go with you.” The LORD had told Elisha that his friend would soon be leaving this life. Elisha wanted to stay with him as long as he could. East of Jericho they came to the river Jordan. Many young prophets were watching them. Elijah rolled up his cloak and touched the surface of the river. The river divided to the right and the left, and Elijah and Elisha crossed the dry riverbed to the other shore.

Elijah said, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?”

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

Elijah said, “You have asked a difficult thing. If you see me when I am taken away, God will grant your request.” They continued walking and talking. Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Elisha saw all this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” He then tore his coat to show his grief. After some time, he picked up Elijah’s cloak and walked back to the river. He took Elijah’s cloak and touched the water, as Elijah had done. “Where now is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?” he asked. The water divided for him as before, and he walked across back to Jericho. This was God’s first miracle through Elisha (2Kings 2:1-14).

Elijah was a great leader like Moses in several ways. He was joined and succeeded by Elisha, as Moses was by Joshua. Moses’s death was mysterious, as was Elijah’s. God answered Elijah by fire twice, which echoes the fiery bush of Moses’s experience. Malachi predicted that Elijah’s ministry would be revived before the coming day of the LORD (Mal 4:5-6). People thought Jesus was another Elijah, but Jesus said that John the Baptist was his Elijah-like forerunner (Matt 11:14). Finally, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus.

This story is **important** because in it we see the triumph of God’s call on Elijah. He was taken to heaven, apparently without dying. He was one of only two Old Testament persons to talk with the promised Messiah.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that Elijah’s effectiveness was based on obedience. He opposed the growth of pagan worship in Israel, and succeeded in bringing the persecution of godly prophets to an end. In addition, he anointed Elisha to continue his ministry in the Northern Kingdom.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. How do we know that God wanted Elijah’s prophetic ministry to continue? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “God instructed Elijah to appoint Elisha as his companion and successor,” you are right.
2. What happened to the ungodly Ahab and his son Ahaziah? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “They both died as Elijah predicted,” you answered correctly.
3. How did Elijah leave this world? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “God took him to heaven in a fiery chariot and whirlwind,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. Then tell the story in your own words, as you remember it.

Ask someone to check that you are repeating it correctly. Then share the story with your friends. Some may feel that losing hope disqualifies them as a Christian. Pray with them after telling them the story of Elijah. Ask God to restore their hope and trust in him.

Elijah had powerful faith, but he also had times of great despair. Jesus said that Malachi's prophecy about a return of Elijah referred to the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus also said that John the Baptist was the greatest man prior to his coming, yet we know that John had moments of despair, just like Elijah.

Memorize these encouraging words of Jesus, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).