

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-29 Elisha's Ministry

Sometimes great spiritual leaders are followed by not-so-great successors. This was not the case with Elijah's successor, Elisha. His request for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah was granted. The Bible records twice the number of miracles in Elisha's ministry.

Elisha was active in the north for about 50 years, and his ministry extended through the reigns of five Israelite kings. While Elijah was alive, he served as Elijah's servant. The Book of Second Kings tells the story of Elisha's ministry as Elijah's successor.

Elisha seems to have come from a noble family, for we soon see him as an advisor to Jehoram, son of Ahab and brother of Ahaziah who died. Israel controlled lands east of the Jordan, but the king of Moab rebelled against Israel when Ahab died. King Jehoram asked the king of Judah to join armies with him against Moab. He agreed, and the armies marched south and east through Edom. The king of Edom joined the march. After a week the armies were out of water for themselves and their animals.

"What!" exclaimed the king of Israel. "Has the LORD called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?" Fortunately, the prophet Elisha joined the armies on the march. This tells us that he was a public figure of importance. Someone mentioned that Elisha was marching with them, so the kings went to talk with him.

Elisha said, "Why involve me? Why don't you ask the Baal-prophets of Ahab and Jezebel?"

The king of Israel replied, "We have come to you because it seems the LORD plans to deliver us into the hands of Moab."

Elisha agreed to help out of respect for the godly king of Judah. As someone played music on a harp, the hand of the LORD came on Elisha. "This is what Yahweh says," said Elisha, "I will fill this valley with pools of water. You won't see any rain, but there will be pools of water for the soldiers and their animals. This is easy for Yahweh to do. He will also deliver Moab into your hands." The next morning, there it was! Water was flowing in the valley, just as the LORD had promised (2Kings 3:10-18).

All of the Moabite men had been mobilized for battle. In the morning, they waited at the border for the attack. As the sun rose they saw red reflecting off the water in the valley. "It's blood," they said, "the kings must have slaughtered each other. Let's run over there and plunder their camp." The armies of Israel and Judah attacked them as they came near. There was a great slaughter of Moabite soldiers. The Israelites also ran through the countryside and wrecked wells and fields and towns.

Prior to the Moabite campaign, Elisha performed two miracles. Soon after he returned to Jericho, he learned that the water there had turned bad. He walked to the spring, threw in salt, and said, "The LORD says, 'I have healed this water.'" The water remained pure ever after. Later, as he walked toward Bethel and the school of young prophets there, he was ridiculed by the local scoffers. In the name of the LORD he condemned them, and many were killed by bears (2Kings 2:19-25).

Two more miracles were similar to those of Elijah. The widow of a young prophet was destitute, and in danger of losing her boys as slaves to her husband's creditor. Elisha told her to gather jars, and begin filling them with the little olive oil she had. She poured and poured and didn't run out until all the jars were full. Then the oil stopped flowing. Elisha said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left" (2Kings 4:1-7).

Another miracle similar to Elijah involved a well-to-do, but barren, woman and her husband. They prepared a room for Elisha to stay in whenever he came by on his travels. He was thankful and wanted to do something for them. He asked her, and she replied, "My husband and I are alone; we have no children."

"About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."

"Please, Elisha," she said, "don't get my hopes up." In fact, they did have a son a year later. He grew and was helping his father in the field some years later. Suddenly he cried out to his father, "My head! My head!" The servants carried him to his mother. He sat in her lap until noon that day, and then he died. She took him upstairs and laid him in Elisha's bed.

With a servant leading her on a donkey, she set out to find Elisha. She found him on Mount Carmel. Elisha saw her at a distance. He told his servant to run to her and ask, "Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?"

When she arrived she fell at Elisha's feet. Elisha told his servant, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, and I don't know why."

"Did I ask you for a son," she replied. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"

Elisha then realized the child was dead. He quickly told his servant, "Take my staff and run. Run without stopping or talking to anyone. Run to her house and lay my staff on the child's face." He did as he was told, but the boy didn't move or breathe. Meanwhile, Elisha and the Shunammite mother arrived at the house. There was the boy lying on the bed. Elisha went into the room, shut the door, and prayed to the LORD. Twice he lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. The boy's body grew warm. Then he sneezed several times and opened his eyes. He was alive!

"Call his mother," said Elisha to his servant. When she came in, he said, "Here's your son, alive." She bowed to the ground before him in gratitude, took the boy, and went out (2Kings 4:8-37).

Two additional miracles foreshadow Jesus' feeding of the thousands. During a famine in the region of Gilgal, Elisha and the young prophets ate some miraculous stew. Another time a man gave a gift of 20 loaves of bread to Elisha. "Give it to the people to eat," said Elisha.

"But how can 20 loaves feed 100 men?" asked the benefactor.

"Go ahead," said Elisha, "for the LORD says, 'They will eat and have some left over.'" So they all ate, and had some left over, as the LORD had said (2Kings 4:38-44).

The Spirit of God was present in Elisha throughout his ministry. His miracles look forward to the miraculous ministry of Jesus. In Elisha's miracles God was demonstrating his loving

character to Israel. This was also true of Jesus' miracles. Jesus said, "Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37-39).

This story is **important** because it shows how God was meeting the needs of his people through the ministry of Elisha and the young prophets. At times young ministers fear that God will not use them as he has used those who preceded them. This fear can even keep them from trusting God to work through them. Today's story teaches that God is faithful and does not change, "yesterday, today, and forever." He will use you as you listen to his voice and obey.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God continued to bless the people of Israel and those who trusted him. He did this for his name's sake, and not because the nation as a whole was serving him.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. How do we know that Elisha was a public figure of some importance? [Pause]
A. If you said, "He was an advisor to the king and joined the campaign against Moab," you are correct.
2. Which two miracles Elisha performed were similar to Elijah's miracles? [Pause]
A. If you said, "The widow's oil that didn't run out and the healing of the Shunammite woman's son," you are right.
3. Which of Elisha's miracles foreshadow the miracles of Jesus? [Pause]
A. If you said, "The miraculous stew, feeding 100 men with a few loaves of bread, and raising a dead child," 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. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it, to your family and friends. Join hands together to believe for God to do miracles among you. What he did in times past, he will do today.

Memorize this passage: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:7-8).