

The Rapture of Elijah; Elisha's Ministry Begins

2 Kings 2:1-14

2 Kings 2:1-14 - *"When the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they came to Jericho. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over."*

Background Notes

The time had come for Elijah to "pass on his mantle" to Elisha. Elijah's ministry was ending, and the Lord was about take him Home. Elijah knew it, Elisha knew it, and so did the sons of the prophets (v3-5).

Who were the "sons of the prophets"? They were the seminary students or the Bible college students of the day. Three "schools of the prophets" are mentioned in 2 Kings 2. One was in Gilgal (v1), one in Bethel (v3), and one in Jericho (v5).

The Lord sent Elijah to visit these schools before he departed for Heaven. At each place - Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho - Elijah gave his servant Elisha the opportunity to stay behind in the comfort of the school, but each time Elisha said, "No

way! I'm going with you. I will not leave you." It seems that a kind of "test" was going on here - a test to see whether or not Elisha was really committed to the ministry. Was he really ready to accompany the prophet all the way to the end, and take on Elijah's mantle? Elisha passed the test!

After Elijah and Elisha left the school at Jericho, they went on to the Jordan River. When they came to the river, "*Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground*" (v8). Here's a nice little Bible trivia quiz question for you: What was Elijah's last miracle (v8) and Elisha's first miracle (v14)? Answer: parting the Jordan River with Elijah's mantle!

A chariot and horses of fire appeared (v11). The chariot and horses of fire were symbols of military might and victory. It would be like seeing a tank today rolling down the street today. The fiery chariot and horses indicated to Elisha that the power of God had been behind Elijah's ministry - and would be behind his ministry as well.

Doctrinal Points

1. God arranges the departure schedule of His servants.

God knew the time, the place, and the means of Elijah's departure to Heaven - and He knows that about us as well. If you are a Christian, God knows the time, the place, and the means of your departure to Heaven. If you're not a Christian, God knows the day of your departure as well. If you want your final destination to be Heaven, it's vitally important to make sure that you are a Christian! Make sure that you've trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. That's the only way of salvation.

God knows the day of our death, and He knows whether we'll be "raptured" alive to Heaven, as Elijah was. God arranges the departure schedule of His servants.

In John 21 the Lord revealed to Peter the way he would die. He seemed to indicate that Peter would die by crucifixion, and tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down. So the Lord revealed to Peter the means by which he would depart. God hasn't revealed my departure schedule to me, and I'm glad He hasn't - but I'm very glad that my departure is in God's hands. Psalms 116:15 says, "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*" God arranges the departure schedule of His servants.

2. Elijah's departure is a picture of the Rapture.

Like Enoch, Elijah did not die. Enoch and Elijah were taken alive into Heaven! 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 teaches that when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back for His Church on earth, Christians who are alive at that time will not die. They

will be translated into Heaven without dying. *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”* This is one of the great “Rapture” passages in the New Testament. The root word for the term “rapture” comes from the Latin word for “caught up” (as used in v17).

The Rapture could take place today. The Lord could return for His Church today, and Christians who are alive when He comes will never die. Because Elijah was taken up to Heaven while he was still alive (as was Enoch), Elijah’s departure is a picture of the Rapture.

Practical Applications

1. Why think of retirement when you could be like Elijah?

Elijah was still busy serving the Lord on the day he went to Heaven. The day of boldly confronting the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel was in the past. The day of boldly confronting Ahab about stealing Naboth’s vineyard was past. Boldly confronting wicked King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1) – that day was past, too. But Elijah was still serving the Lord, right up to the end of his life. On the very day of his departure, he visited the schools of the prophets to encourage them, and the Lord led him to do this.

Elijah was concerned about Elisha. He was involved in testing Elisha’s commitment as well as teaching him along the way. Furthermore, he asked Elisha, “What may I do for you?” (v9). He was a caring spiritual father all the way to the end. What a model to follow!

My dad died last February. My dad didn’t go into “retirement.” He retired from his job, but he was busy serving and working for the Lord right up to the end. He continued to teach and encourage younger believers in his retirement years. Elijah didn’t retire to Florida! He continued to teach and equip younger believers in his senior years.

Many of you can do that. You may not have the strength or the energy you had in your youth, but you can still serve the Lord and help to equip others to serve. Even though Elijah had a lapse of faith when he ran from evil Queen Jezebel, the great encouraging lesson here is that after he was restored and re-commissioned, he was involved in serving the Lord right up to the day of his departure. Let’s follow his good example!

Some of you talk about your “golden years.” Well, our senior years can truly be “golden” when we continue to serve the Lord! We can open our homes for hospitality and fellowship. We can pray for fellow-believers, especially those who are serving the Lord in foreign lands, or who are suffering illness or persecution. We can write encouraging letters to younger

believers. We may not have the strength and energy to do all that we could do before, but we can do a lot in equipping others. ***Why think of “retirement” when you could be like Elijah?***

2. Why not think like Elisha when it comes to vacancies?

By “vacancies,” we mean ***ministry vacancies***. When Elijah asked Elisha, “*What can I do for you?*” Elisha said without hesitation, “*Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me*” (v9). What did he mean?

In Deuteronomy 21:17, the firstborn son received a “double portion” of the inheritance upon the death of his father. In addition, the firstborn son inherited the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the family. So when Elisha asked for a “double portion of the spirit of Elijah,” he wasn’t asking for double the power, or double the prestige. He was indicating that he wanted to be considered as Elijah’s firstborn son. He was willing to take on all the responsibilities of the prophetic office, and he fully realized that he would need much greater spiritual capacity and power to do the job.

Picking up Elijah’s mantle emphasized the point that Elisha was willing to take the responsibilities of the prophetic office that would be left vacant by Elijah’s departure. That was the meaning behind the symbolism of “picking up the mantle.”

Are we willing to think like Elisha when it comes to vacancies? There are always vacancies. The older generation departs, and vacancies are waiting to be filled. Are we willing to think like Elisha when it comes to vacancies? Or do we shrink away from the responsibilities of filling those vacancies? Look around you. Do you see any vacancies? They need to be filled! Be willing to pick up the mantle.

It’s not wrong to desire spiritual responsibility - as long as it’s desired for the right motive. Be willing, like Elisha, to go “back across the Jordan River” – back to where the vacancies need to be filled – to the work that needs to be done.

Elisha was willing to pick up the mantle and carry Elijah’s ministry forward. Why not think like Elisha when it comes to vacancies?