

Elisha ~ Part 1

In my last post, we completed our series on **Eliyahu** from the **Tanakh** and **Brit Hadasah**. In this post, we will begin a new series on **Elisha**. We were briefly introduced to **Elisha** as we studied **Eliyahu**, but he was left holding **Eliyahu's** mantle (cloak) as he saw him taken up to heaven in the fiery chariot. We begin our study of **Elisha** by returning to **2 Kings 2:13-18** where **Elisha** picks up the mantle of **Eliyahu** and **Parts the Yarden River**.

¹³ Then he picked up Eliyahu's cloak, which had fallen off him. Standing on the bank of the Yarden, ¹⁴ he took the cloak that had fallen off Eliyahu, struck the water and said, 'Where is Adonai, the God of Eliyahu?' But when he actually did strike the water, it divided itself to the left and to the right; then Elisha crossed over. ¹⁵ When the guild prophets of Yericho saw him in the distance, they said, 'The spirit of Eliyahu does rest on Elisha.' Advancing to meet him, they prostrated themselves on the ground before him ¹⁶ and said to him, 'Here now, your servants include fifty strong men. Please let them go and look for your master, in the event that the Spirit of Adonai has taken him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley.' He answered, 'Don't send them.' ¹⁷ But they kept pressing him until finally, embarrassed, he said to send them. So they sent fifty men. For three days they searched, but they didn't find him. ¹⁸ On returning to him where he was waiting in Yericho, he said to them, 'I told you not to go, didn't I?'" ~ 2 Kings 2:13-18 (CJB)

Background ¹

The work of **Eliyahu** and **Elisha** formed two parts of one whole, the one supplementing the other, and though there are obvious parallels between them, there are also marked contrasts. Both of them were prophets; both dwelt in Samaria, both were confronted with much the same situation. The falling of **Eliyahu's** mantle upon **Elisha** intimated that the latter was the successor of the former and that he was called upon to continue his mission. The first miracle performed by **Elisha** was identical with the last one wrought by his master: the parting of the waters of the **Yarden** with the mantle.

Striking as the points of agreement are between the two prophets, the contrasts in their careers and work are just as vivid. The one appeared suddenly and dramatically on the stage of public action, without a word being told us concerning his origin or how he had been previously engaged; but of the other, the name of his father is recorded, and an account is given of his occupation at the time he received his call into God's service. The first miracle of **Eliyahu** was the shutting up of the heavens, so that for the space of three and a half years there was no rain according to his word; whereas the first public act of **Elisha** was to heal the springs of water (2 Kings 2:21, 22) and to provide abundance of water for the people (3:20).

The principal difference between them is seen in the character of the miracles wrought by and connected with them: the majority of those performed by the former were associated with death and destruction, but the vast majority of those attributed to **Elisha** were works of healing and restoration: the one was more the prophet of judgment, the other of grace. The former was marked by loneliness, dwelling apart from the apostate masses; the latter seems to have spent most of his time in the company of the prophets, presiding over their schools. The one was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, the other fell sick in old age and died a natural death (2 Kings 13:20).

Eliyahu was gone, and **Elisha** couldn't turn to him for help, but the God of Israel was still on the throne. From now on, **Elisha's** faith would put him in touch with the power of God and enable him to accomplish

¹ Material in this section has been gleaned from "Interpretation of Scripture" by A.W. Pink and "Biblical Exposition Commentary -Old Testament" by Warren Weirsbe.

God's work in Israel. Three miracles are recorded in the remainder of 2 Kings 2, each with spiritual messages that we need to understand today. We will examine the first in this post.

Crossing the River

Why did **Eliyahu** leave the Promised Land and go to the other side of the **Yarden**? Was he abandoning his own country and people? Indeed, God's whirlwind could have lifted him just as easily from **Beit-el** or **Yericho**. Technically, **Eliyahu** was still in Israelite territory when he crossed the river since **Reuven** and **Gad** and the half tribe of **Manasseh** had their inheritance east of the **Yarden**. But there was more involved. By taking **Elisha** west of the **Yarden**, **Eliyahu** forced him to trust God to get him across the river and back into the land! **Eliyahu's** successor was now like **Y'hoshua** ~ he had to believe that God could and would open the river for him.

In taking up **Eliyahu's** mantle, **Elisha** was making it clear that he accepted the responsibilities involved as he succeeded the great prophet and continued his work. By using the mantle to open the waters of the **Yarden**, he was declaring that his faith was not in the departed prophet but the ever-present living God. Indeed, we ought to honor the memories and accomplishments of departed leaders. *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke God's message to you. Reflect on the results of their way of life and imitate their trust."* ~ Hebrews 13:7 (CJB) **Elisha** called on the God of **Eliyahu** to assist him, and the Lord honored his faith. **Elisha** wasn't a clone of **Eliyahu**, but the two men had this in common: they both had faith in the true and living God.

Elisha's miraculous crossing of the **Yarden** River not only demonstrated the power of God and the faith of His servant, but it also announced to the **guild prophets** that **Elisha** was their new leader. When God opened the **Yarden**, so the tribes Israel could cross into the **Promised Land**, He used that miracle to magnify **Y'hoshua's** name and declare that His hand was upon the new leader. No matter how they were trained or chosen, true spiritual leaders assure their followers of their divine calling by demonstrating the power of God in their lives. *"So you will recognize them by their fruit."* ~ Matthew 7:20 (CJB) The fifty **guild prophets** who saw **Elisha** cross the river on the dry ground had no problem submitting to him and accepting his leadership because God's power was evident in his ministry.

But the fifty servants didn't believe that their former leader had gone to heaven; they asked for on-site verification. God had openly demonstrated that **Elisha** was their new leader, so why search for **Eliyahu**? And why would the Lord catch His servant up in the whirlwind only to abandon him in some forsaken part of the country? Is that the kind of God they served? The entire enterprise was ridiculous, and **Elisha** permitted the search only because he was annoyed by their repeated requests. When the search parties returned to **Elisha** at Jericho, he at least had the privilege of telling them, *'I told you not to go, didn't I?'*

In my next post, we continue to explore the life of **Elisha**. We will examine **Elisha's** second miracle in **2 Kings 2:19-22 ~ Healing of Bad Water**.