

# (2 Kings) a Prophet and His Protégé

by David Guzik

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*David Guzik's sermon explores the reign of Ahaziah in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, highlighting themes of faith, judgment, and the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha.*

**Duration:** 50:00

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 2:21

**Topics:** "Faith And Trust", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Elijah and the three captains who were sent by King Ahaziah to bring him back. The preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing the strength and power of God, especially in times of doubt and uncertainty. The first two captains approached Elijah with arrogance and disrespect, but the third captain humbly acknowledged him as a man of God. The preacher highlights the message that there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word, and that it is crucial to have faith and trust in God's guidance.

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## Transcript

Tonight we intend to make it through the first two chapters of Second Kings. You've been with us, perhaps, as we've been going through First Kings and saw that it alternated between telling us about some of the kings of the Northern Kingdom, which was called Israel, and some of the kings of the Southern Kingdom, which was called Judah, and it would sort of ping-pong back and forth between these two kingdoms. Well, tonight we're going to be only looking at the Northern Kingdom.

That's all we're interested in in these two chapters tonight, the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And actually we're interested in looking at the reign of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. So let's take a look here, starting at verse 1. Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.

Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and was injured. So he sent messengers and said to them, Go inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury. The reign of Ahaziah's father, Ahab, was a spiritual disaster for the Northern Kingdom.

But it was a time of political security and economic prosperity. After his death, it changed. After his death, not only did the kingdom continue on its downward spiritual journey, but it also declined politically and economically.

And the kingdom of Moab tried to take advantage of the death of King Ahab to break away from the authority of the kingdom of Israel. You see, in those days, when a kingdom was strong, not only did it rule itself, but it also exercised authority over its neighboring kingdoms, perhaps not to take them over or to put their own king on it, but just usually to gain revenue, to gain money from that other kingdom. Well, here Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.

And so Moab had been under Israelite domination since the days of David, but the rebellion of Moab in the days of Ahaziah is a significant decline of the power of Israel, and it's evidence also, we could say, of the judgment of God. Well, in this time of the declining power and the increasing strength of the neighboring nations of Israel, what should happen to King Ahaziah? One day he's walking or sitting or doing some such thing, and he falls through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria. It's just an unexpected accident, right? I suppose he's walking, and he slips, or there's a weakness in the construction, and he breaks through, and he injures himself.

You know, these kind of accidents, they happen to kings and to peasants both. I mean, he's a king, but he's not immune to such sort of accidents of life. And so, apparently, he fell through a second-story balcony to the ground floor, and he was injured severely.

Now, in the midst of his injury, he sends forth somebody to go inquire of this pagan god, Beelzebub, who was the god of Ekron. He goes, I want to know whether or not I'm going to recover from this injury. Now, Ahaziah showed here that he was a true worshipper of this pagan god, Beelzebub, because that's the god he turned to in his time of trouble.

That is really pretty revealing, right? Who do we turn to in our time of trouble? And Ahaziah turned to Beelzebub. And he could suggest that Beelzebub was the god who maybe would heal him or ward off plagues. He was a local deity among the Canaanites and in the city of Ekron.

And so he says, OK, let's see what can happen here. Let's see if this god can tell me something. Now, verse 3. But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them, Is it because there's no god in Israel that you're going to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord, You shall not come down from the bed which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.

So Elijah departed. This is sort of Elijah in his superhero mode, right? You know, flying into a situation, delivering a word from God, and then flying out, so to speak. I mean, he didn't actually fly, he does that later, but that's not the issue right here.

Elijah is instructed by God, and he meets the messenger along the way, and he gives him a really stern rebuke. You have to admit there's a lot of wisdom in this rebuke, where he says, Is it because there's no god in Israel that you've done this? I don't have any doubt that King Ahaziah believed that Yahweh lived, but Ahaziah lived as if there was no god in Israel. Do you understand the distinction? A person can have an intellectual awareness that there is a god, but they can live their life as if there were no god.

I think you have to make a distinction. There are theoretical atheists, and there are practical atheists. And sure, there's a fair number of theoretical atheists in the world, people who honestly believe that there is no god, but there's a much larger number of practical atheists.

People who believe in their life that there is no god. He maybe believed that Yahweh was out there, but he would be no help to Ahaziah on this occasion. And so this was an occasion for the real god to send a message of judgment to Ahaziah.

You know, accordingly, it seems that when Elijah gave this word to him, where he said, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die. It seems like he's almost speaking in medical terminology, according to the ancient records of that day. It's as if he's saying, Here's your diagnosis, Ahaziah.

Your condition is fatal and irreversible. Now, we might stop right here and go, Oh, poor Ahaziah. Poor, poor man.

I want you to see right now. This is the mercy of God to Ahaziah. God told him something that very few people know, that their death is imminent, and they have time to repent and to prepare to meet God.

This was the mercy of God to Ahaziah. It wasn't judgment. I want you to understand one more thing before I move on to verse 8, that this prophetic announcement also probably explains why Ahaziah did not want to seek the answer from the Lord.

Why? Because he had a sense of what the answer would be. When he sought Baals above for an answer, he was probably looking for a God to tell him what he wanted to hear. And there's a lot of that in the world today, of course.

Now, going on now to verse 5. When the messengers returned to him, he said to them, Why have you come back? So they said to him, A man came up to meet us and said to us, Go, return to the king who sent you and say to him, Thus says the Lord. Is it because there's no God in Israel that you're sending to inquire of Baals above, the God of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die. And he said to them, What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words? So they answered him, A hairy man, wearing a leather belt around his waist.

And he said, It's Elijah the Tishbite. Well, though they went to seek a word from the pagan priests of Baals above, the word from Elijah persuaded them to go right back. From all we read in the story here, it seems like these messengers never went to the priests of Baals above, did they? They heard the word from Elijah and they said, Well, that's answer enough.

We may as well go back to the king and tell them this. And then Ahaziah was outraged at this, and he wanted to know what kind of man was it that came up to meet you. And when they described him as a hairy man with a leather belt around his waist, he instantly knew it was Elijah.

Okay, when it says hairy man there, literally in the Hebrew, it probably means possessor of hair. In other words, he had hair. And it could just as well refer to hairy animal skins that he wore, instead of a big thing.

You know, he kind of wears the big fur, you know, I don't know, whatever it was, outfit that he wore. And it could very well be that. Now, this identification of Elijah also gives us a New Testament link with John the Baptist.

Because John the Baptist also dressed in hairy skins from animals, and they thought, well, this might be Elijah that we're speaking to. And so, this seems to be the meaning here. It was Elijah, and this is what he

told us.

So now, Ahaziah, he hears this news, he's not very happy about it. What's he going to do? Well, the only logical thing to do, he's going to try to arrest the prophet of God. Look at here, verse 9. We read, Then the king sent him to a captain of fifty, the king sent him to a captain of fifty with his fifty men.

So he went up to him, and there he was, sitting on top of a hill. And he spoke to him, Man of God, the king has said, come down. So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.

And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. Now, fifty men, that seems like a lot of men to capture one prophet, right? Clearly, Ahaziah knew he was up against somebody formidable, and so he sent a lot of men, more than would be normally required. And when the captain comes, he says, Man of God, the king has said, come down.

Now, the captain here admitted the righteousness of Elijah when he called him man of God. I mean, he's confessing that he's wrong in doing this, that he should lay no hand on him when he calls him a man of God. Even though they were orders from the king, the captain should have disobeyed them.

Let me remind you that the Bible clearly teaches us that we owe submission to the government and to the governing authorities. Yet in the human sphere, the biblical command to submit is never absolute. Therefore, if the government tells us to sin, if the government tells us to deny Jesus Christ, then we disobey the government.

This man was being told to do something sinful by the king. And even though he was duty-bound to obey the king, on this occasion, he should have disobeyed the king, and he should have obeyed God instead. Elijah's response was priceless.

If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven. Now, Elijah put the issue in really strong contrast there. If he really were a man of God, then the captain and his men were on an ungodly mission and they deserve to be punished.

Since Elijah did not have it in his own power to bring down the fire from heaven without God's approval, he asked God to evaluate the situation and God to evaluate the rightness of their actions against the prophet. I want you to know something. Elijah could not just say, I therefore call down fire from heaven upon you.

He didn't say that. He said, let's leave it up to God. If I'm righteous, and you're wrong, then let fire come down from heaven.

Now, did Elijah have the power within himself to bring the fire down from heaven? You can't blame Elijah for this. I'll admit it was a severe judgment. As a matter of fact, I give a lot of compliments to Elijah here.

Elijah did not say, you bet I'm a man of God and look at what God's going to do to you. He said, if I am a man of God. He said, you say that I'm a man of God even though you're not acting like it.

Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. Let's let God decide by fire. Well, the fire came down from heaven and it consumed him.

It consumed the captain's 50 men. God brought judgment upon these men who acted as if Yahweh was not a real God and as if Elijah was not his real servant. You know, it's funny.

The captain commanded Elijah to come down. The man of God didn't come down, but the fire of God certainly came down. And so, I don't think anything here that Elijah did was wrong, even though we admit it was a sad and a severe judgment upon these men.

Now going on here to verse 11. Then he sent him another captain of 50 with his 50 men. And he answered and said to him, Man of God, thus as the king said, come down quickly.

So Elijah answered and said to him, If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men. And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50. The second captain repeated the error of the first one, but with even more guilt.

Now let me show you why he was more guilty. First of all, he knew what had happened to the first captain. Shouldn't have that.

Made him more cautious right there. Secondly, he was even more rude to Elijah than before. What did he say? Come down quickly.

I'm going to be even more bold. I'm going to be even more demanding of you. You know what I think the situation was in Israel? OK, we talk all the time about the Israelites going after pagan gods, right? But there's something we know.

We don't talk about it much, but we know this. There were no other gods in Israel, right? Was there really a Baal up in heaven? Was there really an Asherah? Was there really all these other? No, they don't exist. Now, these pagan Israelites had been so accustomed to dealing with non-existent gods who can't do anything that they had begun to think that the living God, that Yahweh, was that kind of God too.

They forgot Yahweh is not like one of your little make-believe, can-do-nothing, powerless gods. The little idol statues that you make. No, he's the living God and he's for real.

And it's at your own danger that you treat him as if he was not real. So, he said, if I'm a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men. And as we said before, Elijah didn't come down, but the fire of God did.

Well, can it happen a third time? Well, kind of. Look here, starting at verse 13. Again, he sent a third captain of 50 with his 50 men.

Could you imagine being the guy getting that assignment for the third one in a row? And the third captain of 50 went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and pleaded with him and said to him, Man of God, please let my life and the life of these 50 servants of yours be precious in your sight. Look, fire has come down from heaven and has burned up the first two captains of 50s with their 50s, but let my life now be precious in your sight. And the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, Go down with him.

Do not be afraid of him. So he arose and went down with him to the king. Now, unless anybody thinks that God was being unnecessarily cruel to Israel and to these captains and to their 50 men, the two sets of 50 that were consumed by the fire before this.

Let me just remind you that I think it was time to teach Israel some of these lessons all over again about the strength and the power of God because now a new king sat on the throne. God had revealed himself to Ahab over and over again. And now he has to reveal himself to the sun.

And that's exactly what he's doing. So the third captain, when he approached his mission to Elijah, he did it on a completely different manner. He came to Elijah humbly.

He recognized that he really was a man of God. You know, in the movie, In My Mind, the third captain comes up and he sees two big spots of blackened earth around him. And he, I better change my approach here.

It's time to try something different here. Now, you know, please, Elijah. No, please, please.

And then God speaks to him and he says, go down with him. Do not be afraid with him. Now, I want you to notice that it wasn't that God did not want Elijah to go to King Ahaziah.

It was that Ahaziah, his captains and all their soldiers acted as if there were no God in Israel. When the request was made wisely and humbly, then Elijah went. You know, you have to ask yourself, why did Ahaziah even want to arrest Elijah? I mean, he had heard the prophecy from Elijah.

Maybe he wanted Elijah to come and to reverse his word of doom. And maybe he was planning on using force against Elijah to make him to do it. Perhaps he just wanted to show his anger against the prophet who had troubled him and his father Ahab for so long.

Perhaps he wanted to dramatically silence Elijah to discourage future prophets from speaking boldly against the king of Israel. God assured Elijah, don't worry, I'll protect you. You have nothing to fear from the king.

So what does he say here? Verse 16. Now he's not speaking to a messenger. He's not speaking to a captain.

He's not speaking to soldiers. What does he say in verse 16? Then he said to him, Thus says the Lord, because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal's above, the God of Ekron, is it because there's no God in Israel to inquire of his word? Therefore, you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die. You know what impresses me about this? It's exactly what he said before.

Elijah's message did not change whether he was delivering it to messengers of the king or to the king himself. You know, there's always a temptation for anybody who presents the word of God to sort of soften the message if you're in front of important people that you don't want to offend. Elijah wasn't of that kind of character.

He said, no, I'm going to deliver the message exactly as I did before. And the main point of the message is, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? You know, that's exactly what the captains acted like. That's exactly what the soldiers acted like.

As if there was no God in Israel. This is the same message. Time didn't change the message.

Ahaziah didn't want to hear it the first time, but he was going to hear it a second time now. Now, verse 17. So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.

Because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah, which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? Well, I guess Elijah's prophecy or the word that God delivered

through Elijah, it turned out to be completely true, right? He did not recover from the fall that he made through the lattice. And so there was everything gone.

They lost Moab, he lost his life, he was losing authority in his kingdom, and he even had no son, right? No son. Therefore Jehoram became king. Now Jehoram was Ahaziah's brother.

So this is another son of Ahab who becomes king. Ahaziah had no descendant to pass the kingdom to, so the throne went to his brother after the very brief reign of Ahaziah. Now I have to tell you something that's going to be confounding to us, not so much this time, but when we get into future chapters of the book of 2 Kings.

It says that Jehoram became king in his place. Alright, this is what's tough. It's at the same time now the king of Judah is also named Jehoram.

So you have Jehoram, king of the northern kingdom, and Jehoram, king of the southern kingdom. It's confusing, but we'll work through it later on at the time. Now, that's the end of Ahaziah, right? He's gone, and from what we see him in this chapter, there's really not much impressive about that man, and we see him pass from the scene.

But not every man is as unimpressive as Ahaziah. Let's look at chapter 2, a wonderful chapter, where we see the passing of Elijah from the scene. Verse 1, And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that 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. Now, apparently it was somewhat common knowledge that God was going to take Elisha up into heaven by a whirlwind.

I don't know how it was common knowledge. Maybe Elisha had revealed it by a prophecy. Maybe another person.

But for some reason, Elisha knew it. Elisha knew it. And the sons of the prophets knew it.

There was some kind of announcement of this. And here, Elisha tries to tell his young protegee, Elisha. I'm sorry for the confusion about the names.

It's just bad. There's no other way around it. In English, the two names Elisha and Elisha are just too close.

But we'll just get through it anyway. The older prophet said to the younger prophet, You know, go, stay. I don't need you around here.

Go ahead. Stay here. For the Lord has sent me on to Bethel.

Apparently, this was some kind of a test for the younger prophet. Elisha was being tested. It was a test of his devotion.

Since it was known that soon Elisha would leave to heaven in some unusual way, the younger prophet wanted to stay with him as close as possible until the very end. So now, verse 4. Then Elisha 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 Elisha 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. So here we have a continuation. There's a test going on.

And I have to say, we probably don't understand everything about this test, do we? We don't understand exactly the personal dynamic between the older prophet and the younger prophet. But for some reason, this was an important test. You see, Elisha knew that God had a dramatic plan for the end of his earthly life.

And he knew that he wanted Elisha to see it. But you know what I think is interesting about it? Do you notice the geography of this? They move from city to city to city and then to the wilderness. Now look, if I knew that God was going to carry me away to heaven in a chariot of fire, I would have it done in the most public place possible.

I would look for a gathering of thousands, if not tens of thousands of people, and I would have it done in front of not Elisha. Elisha says, I'm going to go out to a private place. I don't need to have anybody else what is going on.

They don't have to know what's going on in my life. They don't have to see this. And so the two of them went on.

You see, Elisha was determined here. He was determined that he would not leave the older prophet until God took him away in the dramatic way promised. Now, verse 8. Now, Elisha took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water.

Do you know what a mantle is? It's like a shawl or a small blanket almost that you would use. Think of it like a coat without arms, so to speak. Elisha 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. You've got to admit that's some miracle right there, right? And this is amazing. And so it was when they had crossed over that Elisha 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've 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.

Now, we see part of the reason why the older prophet was testing the devotion of the younger prophet. This offer, ask whatever you want, what can I give to you? It only comes at the end of station to station to

station. The younger prophet has proved his devotion.

He's proved that he'll stick with the older prophet. And now, here, after the dramatic and strange miracle of parting the waters, it almost seems unfair. It almost seems just like a convenience.

Just walking along. Oh, well, I want to cross this river. Wham! Oh, let's walk right through it.

Anyway, he did it. There's nothing more to say about it. He makes this great offer.

Ask, what may I do for you before I'm taken away from you? Elisha had demonstrated his tenacity, his perseverance by refusing to leave his mentor. And when this offer is made to him, what do you want? He said, I want a double portion of your spirit to be upon me. Now, most people, I think, misunderstand what the younger prophet was asking for.

He asked for a big thing. He asked for a double portion of the mighty spirit of Elisha. You see, he saw how the spirit of God used Elisha, and the younger prophet wanted that for himself.

You've got to admit, that's really wonderful. He could have asked anything for himself. He could have asked for wealth.

He could have asked for status. He could have asked for worldly power. He didn't want any of those things.

He wanted the same spirit that was upon Elisha. He wasn't asking for twice as much of it. That's normally misunderstood here.

The idea of a double portion is not to ask for twice as much, but to ask for the portion that went to a firstborn son. Let me explain to you this way. Let's say there's a farmer in Israel, and he has three sons.

Well, what would they do with the inheritance? Well, they would divide the inheritance into four parts. And the eldest son would get two parts of the inheritance. He would get the double portion, because he inherited what the father had.

Elisha asked for the right to be regarded as the successor of Elisha in his ministry. Now, I want you to notice this. He's asking, I want your power and ministry.

He wasn't asking for twice as much of it. He basically said, I want to inherit your ministry. I want to receive it.

I want to take it. Now, I have to say that back in 1 Kings 19, God had already promised that Elisha would receive the ministry of Elisha. This was a request for spiritual power to fulfill the calling that he had already received.

That's what he wanted in this request. Now, before we move on to the next idea, I have to just sort of pause here and ask a question. It's worthwhile to consider if this is generally a good thing or a bad thing.

Normally, we don't think of one person inheriting the ministry of another person. Sometimes you hear that, you know, take some notable man in the Christian world today. I mean, a commonly given example is someone like Billy Graham, right? Notable man in the world today.

You say, well, who's the next Billy Graham? Who's going to inherit Billy Graham's ministry? And in some way, the answer is, well, no one. Nobody's going to have Billy Graham's ministry. Now, I'm not going to say that nobody's going to have as great a ministry as Billy Graham.

Maybe somebody will come up with a greater. But there is something unique. There's something special, something particular about Billy Graham's ministry.

And it can't be replicated in somebody else. And so it's fair for us to say, you know, is it right for there to be an Elisha after an Elijah? You know, is ministry inherited from one person to another? Do I somehow have the power to say, well, you know, you inherit my ministry. Does it work like that? I guess the answer is, apparently sometimes.

Not normally, right? But apparently sometimes it does work like that. It certainly did in the case of the older prophet Elijah and the younger prophet Elisha. So basically, he left them with this idea that if you see me when I'm taken from you, it shall be for you.

Elijah tested the devotion of his protegee by seeing if he would persistently stay with him through these last remarkable hours. If the devotion of the younger prophet stayed strong, then the request would be fulfilled. Now, verse 11.

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 his 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 he went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. You know what I like? I like the very first line there in verse 11.

As they continued on and talked. Wouldn't you love to know what they talked about? What does Elijah say to Elisha at a time like that? The last few words before he goes up to eternity. What does he tell him about? I don't know.

But it must have been a very, very interesting conversation. And then suddenly, this chariot of fire appears with horses of fire. It separates the two of them.

And Elijah is carried away up into heaven. It's an absolutely strange and unique miracle. As the two prophets walked along, some fiery object separated them and then carried Elijah up into heaven.

He was taken up into heaven in the whirlwind, which was accompanied by the fire. It was strange. And then what does Elisha cry out? He cries out, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen.

What a weird thing to say. I mean, what are you talking about, Elisha? No, actually it made perfect sense. The chariot of Israel and its horsemen referred to that which defends Israel.

Right? Military things. Horsemen, that's what defends Israel. Chariots, that's what defends Israel.

Do you understand what Elisha was saying right here? He was saying, You're the real defense of Israel. You're the one that has kept us. You're the one that has kept us from being conquered by other nations.

You are the true strength of Israel. And with that, he was taken up into heaven. You have to say that this was the end of a genuinely remarkable ministry.

One that in many ways was similar to the ministry of Moses. Have you ever thought about the similarities in the ministry of Elisha and Moses? Both of them stood alone for righteousness. Both of them were associated with fire upon mountains.

Both were associated with the desert. Both of them met God on Mount Sinai. Both were chased out of their country by pagan rulers.

Both knew God's miraculous provision of food and water. Both of them wandered in the desert for a period measured by 40. Both of them fasted for 40 days.

Both of them were powerful examples of prayer. Both of them parted waters. Both of them had close associates who succeeded them.

Both of them had successors who also parted waters. And both of them had mysterious or strange deaths. Remarkable man, Elisha.

Maybe best of all in our text here is the fact that the junior prophet, the younger prophet, he saw it. When he saw it, he knew that the promise would be fulfilled. Remember what the older prophet said? If you see me leave, you're going to get that double portion.

You're going to inherit my ministry. You're going to inherit the spiritual strength of my ministry. Now, I don't know.

I have to say, Elisha is probably a more godly man than I would ever be. If it was me, and I saw Elisha being carried up into heaven, me being the younger prophet, I'd say, Yahoo! I got it! The promise is mine. I got what I asked for.

That wasn't Elisha, was it? He tore his clothes. He was genuinely grieved. It was an expression of deep mourning.

But then, he took up the mantle of Elisha that had fallen from him. That mantle. That mantle was the special mark of a prophet.

And it was really a demonstration of the truth that Elisha had really inherited the ministry of Elisha. And so he sees that prophetic mantle. You know, if I'm filming this scene, you see Elisha carried up into heaven, and then you see the mantle float down, right? And then Elisha comes over and he picks it up.

And think of what it was like for him to pick up that mantle. The mantle didn't fall from heaven and rest on his shoulders. He had to stoop down and pick it up.

He had to stoop down and pick that thing up and decide, do I really want to put this on or not? Listen, you know this. Was Elisha's ministry just all sweetness and light and one move of glory to another? Woo! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! All day long. No.

He had profound bouts with depression, with fear, with discouragement. This is the same guy who said, Lord, take my life. I'm no better than my father's.

And I just picture Elisha bending over to grab that mantle and thinking, do I really want this? I know the power that my mentor had in ministry, but I also know the agony that he lived with. And am I willing to put that mantle on and to embrace both the difficulty and the glory? It's something serious to think about in ministry. We all want the mantle that says, woo, more spiritual power.

Oh, isn't it great? But you know, there's more to it than that. And Elisha knew about it. So now verse 14.

I love this passage. Then he took the mantle of Elisha that had fallen from him and struck the water. And he said, where is the Lord God of Elisha? And when he had also struck the water, it divided this way and that.

And Elisha crossed over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were with him from Jericho saw him, they said, the spirit of Elisha rests on Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

Oh, this is so great. So unlike me. You know, you put the mantle on.

Yeah, I got the power of Elisha. Yeah, you bet I do. Well, why don't you try it out? Oh no, let's save that for later.

You know, no need to put it to the test right away. Not with Elisha. He comes up and he says, listen man, either I got the spirit and the power of Elisha or I don't.

Now's the time to find out. Whips off that mantle. Rolls it up, you know, like you would roll up a towel that you're going to snap.

He snaps it on the water. It's either going to part or it's not going to part. I love what he said.

Where is the Lord God of Elisha? You see, Elisha knew that the power in prophetic ministry, it didn't rest in mantles and it didn't rest in fiery chariots. It rested in the presence and in the work of the living God. If the Lord God of Elisha was also with Elisha, then he would inherit the same power and the same direction of ministry.

It's a great question to ask. If God expected Elisha to carry on the ministry of Elisha, then he had to be present for the junior prophet in the way that he was for the senior prophet. It was as if Elisha could have asked the question more specifically.

He could have asked it like this. Where is the God that kept Elisha faithful when the whole nation turned from God? That's the God I need for me right now. Where is the God who mightily answered prayer for Elisha? Where is the God who provided miraculously for Elisha? Where is the God who raised the dead through Elisha? Where is the God who answered prayer by sending fire from heaven? Where is the God who encouraged the discouraged prophet? Where is the God that carried Elisha up into heaven? That's the God I need on my side if I'm going to carry on that man's ministry.

So he said, where is the God of Elisha? Well, let's find out. He struck the water and it parted. Isn't that beautiful? How exciting.

I imagine how his heart was beating. You know, not full of unbelief, but just full of apprehension. He got right down to business.

I have to read you just a wonderful quote here from Spurgeon that speaks about the succession of ministry. He says here, and when you have their mantle, don't waste precious time in lamentation about them anymore. Get to your business.

There's a river in your way. What then? Well, go to the Jordan as the prophet Elisha did and try to pass it. Say not, where is Elisha? But where is the Lord God of Elisha? Elisha is gone, but his God is not.

Elisha has gone away, but Jehovah is present still. That's the attitude to have in succeeding in ministry. And so everybody knew it.

Everybody could see it. The sons of the prophets come around. Did you see that there in verse 15? The spirit of Elisha rests on Elisha.

They could see it. Elisha didn't need to persuade them or convince them of this. He didn't have to hand out a business card that says Elisha, successor of Elisha in ministry.

He didn't have to do that. Everybody could see it. It was apparent.

Now, verse 16. Then they said to him, Look, now there are 50 strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or some valley.

And he said, You shall not send anyone. But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, Send them. Therefore they sent 50 men and they searched for three days, but they did not find him.

And when they had come back to him for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, Didn't I say to you, Do not go? You see, the sons of the prophets, the sons of the prophets wondered, Maybe that chariot of fire just took him to another place in Israel. But Elisha knew that it carried him up into heaven. And so he was hesitant to grant permission for what he would know to be a fruitless mission.

But eventually he said, Okay, go ahead and do it. You see, he knew Elijah was carried up into heaven, not to some other place on this earth. Verse 19.

Then the men of the city said to Elisha, Please notice the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord sees, but the water is bad and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it. So they brought it to him.

And he went out to the source of the water and cast the salt there and said, Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water. From it there shall be no more death or barrenness. So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha, which he spoke.

Well, at the time, apparently Jericho had a very poor water supply. It made agriculture impossible and life very difficult. And the miracle happened through the agency of putting salt in there, but it wasn't magic salt.

It was the work of the Lord. It didn't happen because Elisha wanted to impress others or because he thought it would be good to do it. It was a work of the Lord.

And it was a word of the Lord that announced the healings of the water. Now we conclude the chapter here with a look at verses 23 through 25. One of the more interesting little sections here in the book of 2 Kings.

Then he went up from there to Bethel. And as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him and said to him, Go up, you bald head! Go up, you bald head! So he turned around and looked at them and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths.

Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria. Alright. I've actually heard critics quote this passage of the Bible to say how crazy or how cruel God is.

Let's take this apart here. First of all, it says here in verse 23 that some youths came up from the city and mocked him. Something you should know about this is the ancient Hebrew word that's translated youths there, it can mean young men in a very broad sense.

That word was applied to Joseph when he was 39 years old, to Absalom when he was an adult, and to Solomon when he was 20. So I don't think anybody should think that this is a group of 5-year-old kids running around saying this. At the very least, it's probably older teenagers.

So these youths were also from Bethel. And by the way, Bethel was a chief center of pagan worship at that time. So this is another knock against these young men.

And then they yelled at Elisha, saying, Go up, you bald head! This both mocked Elisha, I guess because of his apparent baldness, which I'm sure he didn't like to hear, but also because of his connection with the prophet Elisha. You see, the idea behind the word go up was that Elisha should go up into heaven like Elisha did. It mocked Elisha, it mocked his mentor Elisha, and it also mocked the god that they served.

Go up, go up into heaven, just like Elisha did. Go up, baldy. That's the idea behind it.

And so, you have to understand that it was a unique thing that they were doing here. So what did Elisha do? He turned around, and knowing that these young men had mocked his ministry, Elisha's ministry, and the god that they both faithfully served, he put a curse upon them. And he put a curse on them in the name of the Lord.

I don't think you can blame Elisha for this. I mean, he just put a curse on them in the name of the Lord. It was up to the Lord to fulfill the curse.

And the Lord sure did. Sent out two female bears out of the woods and they mauled 42 of the youths. Now, let me say here, it says that they mauled, literally, in the Hebrew, it's cut up the young men.

This was a large group of boys. Obviously, 42 of them were injured. Apparently, some others got away uninjured.

But the idea here is that they were not killed, but mauled. But just, you know, beat up and cut up and scratched up by these bears. Which is bad enough.

You know, a friend one time gave me a book, Alaska Bear Stories. And it's all about vicious bear attacks in Alaska. Oh, my heavens.

You've never read such a book. You know, when you hear about how grizzly bears attack people, and how grizzly bears come, and what they like to do is they like to get your head, your skull, in their jaws. That's what they do.

And they basically, they come and they get your skull in their mouth, and they just start tossing you around like you're a little doll around there. And, you know, there's stories of guys who survived this and their complete scalp is ripped off by the bear attack, and all of these things. So I'm not trying to say that a bear attack is a pleasant thing.

Please. But it seems as if these young men were not killed, that they were severely frightened. And I would say, in defense of Elijah, rightfully so.

I don't know how much it hurt him about the baldness thing. But it's definitely true that they were mocking Elisha, his mentor Elijah, and they were mocking the Lord that they both served. But, as we come to the end of chapter 2 here, we have to say we have a pretty remarkable contrast, right? Look at the end of Ahaziah, king of Israel, and look at the end of Elijah.

I mean, what could be more pitiful than dying, rejecting God, smarting under the curse of God, refusing to seek God, refusing, trying to injure his prophet? That's the way King Ahaziah died. And then we think of Elijah. This has got to be one of the most glorious departures in the whole Bible, right? Carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

Which, by the way, is just plain strange, right? You have to say, why did God do this for the prophet? Why? Well, I have to say that there's a sweet completion in this, right? Do you remember? This was the same prophet that in the wilderness, I should say, in the midst of his discouragement, his prayer was, Lord, let me die. Lord, kill me, right? That's what he prayed. Not only did God not answer that prayer then, God said, you know what, Elijah, just for your sake, I'm never going to answer that prayer.

I'm taking you right up to heaven with me. I'm going to show you that you're still useful even in the midst of your discouragement. And it's a glorious answer of radically unanswered prayer that we should thank God about when he does not answer our unwise requests.

Well, let's pray and then we'll take time for any questions. Father, we do thank you. We think of how wonderful you are when you answer our prayers.

We think of the answered prayer for the junior prophet, Elijah. How wonderful it was, Lord, that you answered his prayers. But Lord, we also thank you for unanswered prayer.

We thank you for how you did not answer the prayer of Elijah to just die. As a matter of fact, Lord, you never let him die. We don't understand all your ways, Lord, but we do understand that you're a great God, that you're a loving God, and we love you in return.

So we praise you and we thank you here this evening. Thank you for your word and the opportunity to spend time in it together. Thank you for meeting us tonight in your word.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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