



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
LEWISVILLE

Session 5

The Succession of Leadership

Summary and Goal

In God's sovereign purpose and plan, it was time for Elisha to succeed Elijah. That transition took place in a miraculous way, as Elijah was supernaturally removed from the earth. The anointing of God on Elijah was transferred to Elisha, as Elisha was supernaturally empowered to carry on the prophetic ministry.

Main Passages

2 Kings 2

Session Outline

1. A Journey of Change (2 Kings 2:1-8)
2. The Departure of a Mentor (2 Kings 2:9-14)
3. The Test of Transition (2 Kings 2:15-25)

Theological Theme

God expresses His faithfulness during times of transition through His ample provision for His servants.

Christ Connection

After Jesus' supernatural ascension, His mantle was given to His church to carry (Acts 1:7-9).

Missional Application

We are the body of Christ carrying the mantle of Jesus to a lost and dying world.

Historical Context of 2 Kings

Purpose

For the Bible writers, history could not have existed without God's purposes. This makes all history theological. The books of 1 and 2 Kings interpreted Hebrew history in light of OT covenant theology. The Babylonian exile created the need for this work of historical apologetics. The exiles needed to explain the failure of the religious program established by the sovereign God. In the Deuteronomistic history—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings—this failure was consistently explained as the failures of the people to live up to their part of the covenant.

Author

Scholars cannot identify the authors of any portions of these books. Traditional guesses such as Samuel and Jeremiah lack evidence, although a prominent worshiper of the Lord like Jeremiah would have been influential in the circles that produced these books. Since the books clearly incorporated many earlier documents, the complete authorship would include all writers who contributed to the source documents of this work. At some point, the Holy Spirit worked in the human authors to authenticate the inspired, inerrant books of 1 and 2 Kings. The final stage of composition or compilation had to come after the release of Jehoiachin from Babylonian imprisonment (ca 562 BC). That edition may have added only a postscript to a work completed years earlier, or it may have involved significant additions.

Setting

The history recorded in 1 and 2 Kings covers approximately 410 years. First Kings begins around 970 BC with the death of King David, and 2 Kings ends around 560 BC with the release of King Jehoiachin from prison. During this time, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms (930 BC), and both kingdoms went into exile (Israel in 722 BC and Judah in 587 BC).

Special Features

First and Second Kings are part of the twelve Historical Books (Joshua-Esther) of the Old Testament. Originally, these two books were just one, but were divided by the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament; aka LXX).

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Condensed Leader Guide

The Succession of Leadership

Introduction

- ❓ When has “saying goodbye” been most difficult for you? Are you more likely to look for change or try to avoid it?
- ❓ How has God shown His faithfulness to you when coming through a challenging time of transition?

Saying goodbye for a significant period of time often proves difficult. Whether the goodbye comes about as a result of a change in work, school, or local church ministry, or even because of an end-of-life situation, such occasions stand as watersheds in our lives. We come across such a mixture in 2 Kings 2 with the departure of Elijah followed by Elisha’s literal taking up of his mantle. From this passage, we learn that God is more than faithful to His people, demonstrated in the way He equipped Elisha for his tenure as prophet of Israel.

1. A Journey of Change (2 Kings 2:1-8)

The narrative of 1–2 Kings prepares the reader for Elijah’s successor, Elisha, in 1 Kings 19:16, which states, “You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.”

- ❓ Since the Lord had made it clear to Elijah that Elisha would finish what he had begun, why do you think Elijah tried to deter Elisha from accompanying him further on this journey?
- ❓ How did Elisha respond to Elijah’s requests? Why do you think he refused his mentor’s requests?
- ❓ What stands out to you about Elisha’s conversations with the sons of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho?

2. The Departure of a Mentor (2 Kings 2:9-12)

By continuing to accompany Elijah, Elisha would receive Elijah’s “deathbed” blessing, as was the custom of that day. When that moment came, Elisha asked Elijah for “two shares of your spirit.” This “changing of the spirit” among leading prophets is analogous to the transition in leadership from

Moses to Joshua. Even during the time of Moses' time as prophet, we see the transferring of a prophet's spirit (or "Spirit" referring to the Spirit of Yahweh) in Numbers 11:16-17,24-25. So in our discussion of 2 Kings 2, we should keep in view the expectation of Elisha's succession of Elijah and the precedent for the sharing of a prophet's spirit.

- ❓ What did Elisha mean by asking to "inherit two shares of your spirit"? (See Num. 11:16-17,24-25.)
- ❓ Considering Elisha's initial reaction in verse 12, what are some different ways the earthly loss of his mentor might have impacted him going forward? What are some different ways we might respond to the transition before us at First Baptist Church Lewisville?

3. The Test of Transition (2 Kings 2:13-25)

Elisha grieved appropriately, but it did not keep him from taking up the mantle ("cloak", ESV) he had been given. Not only did Elisha begin wearing Elijah's mantle, which signified a transference of power, but also Elisha's initial miracle of parting the Jordan River in verses 13-14 harkened back immediately to Elijah's performing the same miracle in verse 8. God demonstrated that He would be faithful to Israel through the ministry of Elisha—just as he was through Elijah.

- ❓ What do people usually mean by the idiom, "taking up the mantle"?
- ❓ Why did the sons of the prophets desire to search for Elijah? Was their concern about Elijah's whereabouts a sign of resentment or merely a sign of their adjusting to the "new Elijah"?
- ❓ Why is it important for the reader to know that Elisha was used as much for miracles even more so than Elijah was?

Conclusion

- ❓ What can we take away from 2 Kings 2 that helps us trust God through periods of transition?
- ❓ What would it look like for us to take up the "mantle" that has been given to us? What would it look like for us to let that mantle fall to the ground instead?
- ❓ Why is it daunting to assume a role or job that someone else has been known for doing?
- ❓ What can we glean from Elisha's example that teaches us both to respect our predecessors and to act in our current roles with confidence?

❓ For Further Discussion

Read Job 38:1; Jeremiah 23:19; Zechariah 9:14. Why do you think God chose to remove Elijah from the earth in a whirlwind? How do such events confirm God's presence and approval?

❓ For Further Discussion

Elisha indeed received a double portion of the Lord's Spirit, as indicated by his power in declaring the Word of the Lord, performing miracles, or even delivering curses. How do we utilize the power of the Holy Spirit that is given to us through Jesus Christ?



Expanded Leader Guide

The Succession of Leadership

Introduction


- ❓ When has “saying goodbye” been most difficult for you?
- ❓ Are you more likely to look for change or try to avoid it?
- ❓ How has God shown His faithfulness to you when coming through a challenging time of transition?

Saying goodbye for a significant period of time often proves difficult. Whether the goodbye comes about as a result of a change in work, school, or local church ministry, or even because of an end-of-life situation, such occasions stand as watersheds in our lives. We think in terms of “before” and “after” once we’ve said our farewells. There is a reason, after all, that Shakespeare wrote the well-known line, “Parting is such sweet sorrow” in *Romeo and Juliet*. Transition of virtually any kind brings with it a mixture of good and bad, excitement and despondency.

We come across such a mixture in 2 Kings 2 with the departure of Elijah followed by Elisha’s literal taking up of his mantle. From this passage, we learn that God is more than faithful to His people, demonstrated in the way He equipped Elisha for his tenure as prophet of Israel.


1. A Journey of Change (2 Kings 2:1-8)


The narrative of 1–2 Kings prepares the reader for Elijah’s successor, Elisha, in 1 Kings 19:16, which states, “You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.”

 Since the Lord had made it clear to Elijah that Elisha would finish what he had begun, why do you think Elijah tried to deter Elisha from accompanying him further on this journey?

Elijah and Elisha began their journey at Gilgal, then proceeded to Bethel and Jericho. At each stop, Elijah told Elisha to stay there and not accompany him any further. Elijah knew the road for Elisha would not be easy or pleasant. As God's prophet, Elijah had become an enemy of many when he confronted the evil King Ahab, the prophets of Baal, and Jezebel. For a time, he had lived alone in a cave in the wilderness, as he was hunted by people who wanted him dead. By telling him to stay, Elijah was likely testing Elisha's commitment and determination to carry out his calling.

Jesus also often made statements that tested people's resolve in following Him. (See Matt. 8:18-22; Luke 6:22; 14:25-27; 18:22.) Carrying out the role of a disciple is a difficult task, and anyone who determines to follow Jesus must understand they will be tested along the way.

 How did Elisha respond to Elijah's requests? Why do you think he refused his mentor's requests?

 What stands out to you about Elisha's conversations with the sons of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho?

As painful as the imminent change before him was, Elisha was determined to continue on the journey and see it through. He didn't want to discuss or debate the matter; his mind and heart were set on the journey.

Our journey, too, is filled with necessary change and transition. God gives us people we love and admire to lead us as we walk with Him, and in His sovereignty, He doesn't allow those relationships to continue forever. In doing so, He leads us to fix our eyes only on Him—the God of the man, not the man of God. This life is a God-ordained journey of change, where the one constant is God Himself, who faithfully continues His purposes in and through us in every circumstance.

We'll see in verse 9 more clearly why Elijah tested Elisha and what Elisha's commitment to keep going would mean for him.

2. The Departure of a Mentor (2 Kings 2:9-12)

- What did Elisha mean by asking to “inherit two shares of your spirit”? (See Num. 11:16-17,24-25.)

By continuing to accompany Elijah, Elisha would receive Elijah’s “deathbed” blessing, as was the custom of that day. When that moment came, Elisha asked Elijah for “two shares of your spirit.” This “changing of the spirit” among leading prophets is analogous to the transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua. Even during the time of Moses’ time as prophet, we see the transferring of a prophet’s spirit (or “Spirit” referring to the Spirit of Yahweh) in Numbers 11:16-17,24-25. So in our discussion of 2 Kings 2, we should keep in view the expectation of Elisha’s succession of Elijah and the precedent for the sharing of a prophet’s spirit.


Elisha’s request for a double portion was not a sign of greed; this was the typical amount that an eldest son would receive as an inheritance, in terms of land from his father, according to Deuteronomy 21:15-17. We see a spiritual father-son dynamic played out between Elijah and Elisha. (See 2 Kings 2:12.) What is more, some interpreters calculate that 1–2 Kings presents Elisha as performing twice as many miracles as Elijah, thus confirming the conditional promise that he would receive two shares of Elijah’s spirit.

- Read Job 38:1; Jeremiah 23:19; Zechariah 9:14. Why do you think God chose to remove Elijah from the earth in a whirlwind? How do such events confirm God’s presence and approval?


Though the miraculous is never to be interpreted apart from God’s Word, the spectacular miracle of the chariots and whirlwind made known God’s intention to bring Elijah’s time as prophet of the Northern Kingdom to an end. This side of the cross we have the empty tomb, the sightings of the resurrected Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to confirm God’s approval of the gospel message and our duty to share its truth with all people.


- Considering Elisha’s initial reaction in verse 12, what are some different ways the earthly loss of his mentor might have impacted him going forward? What are some different ways we might respond to the transition before us at First Baptist Church Lewisville?


3. The Test of Transition (2 Kings 2:13-25)

 What do people usually mean by the idiom, “taking up the mantle”?

Elisha grieved appropriately, but it did not keep him from taking up the mantle (“cloak”, ESV) he had been given. Not only did Elisha begin wearing Elijah’s mantle, which signified a transference of power, but also Elisha’s initial miracle of parting the Jordan River in verses 13-14 harkened back immediately to Elijah’s performing the same miracle in verse 8. God demonstrated that He would be faithful to Israel through the ministry of Elisha—just as he was through Elijah.

 Why did the sons of the prophets desire to search for Elijah? Was their concern about Elijah’s whereabouts a sign of resentment or merely a sign of their adjusting to the “new Elijah”?

 Why is it important for the reader to know that Elisha was used as much for miracles even more so than Elijah was?

 Elisha indeed received a double portion of the Lord’s Spirit, as indicated by his power in declaring the Word of the Lord, performing miracles, or even delivering curses. How do we utilize the power of the Holy Spirit that is given to us through Jesus Christ?

God gives His Spirit to those He commissions to speak on His behalf. As He passed the prophetic Spirit from Moses to Joshua and then a few centuries later from Elijah to Elisha, He passed the Spirit from His anointed Son, Jesus, to the apostles. Having received the teaching of the apostles in the form of the New Testament, the church now serves as God’s prophetic voice in the world as those He has commissioned to proclaim the gospel. Prophets throughout Israel’s history called the people to repent of their sin and to trust in God’s promises. Since Jesus has already come as the Prophet (see Acts 3:19-23; Heb. 1:1-2), we call on sinners to repent and trust in Jesus, in whom all of God’s promises find fulfillment. (See 2 Cor. 1:20.)

Conclusion

- ❓ What can we take away from 2 Kings 2 that helps us trust God through periods of transition?

- ❓ What would it look like for us to take up the “mantle” that has been given to us? What would it look like for us to let that mantle fall to the ground instead?

- ❓ Why is it daunting to assume a role or job that someone else has been known for doing?

- ❓ What can we glean from Elisha’s example that teaches us both to respect our predecessors and to act in our current roles with confidence?

Prayer of Response

Thank God that He provides more than enough for you when you face substantial changes in life. Ask Him to help you trust in Him as He equips you to adjust to periods of transition.

Family Discussion

Family Discussion Questions For Children

- *Who do you look up to? Why?*
- *What do you think God wants you to learn from that person?*
- *How can you know if you’ve learned the lessons God wanted you to learn from that person?*

Family Discussion Questions For Teens

- *What is a change you look forward to? A change that makes you nervous?*
- *Who has been an Elijah (spiritual mentor) to you? What has that person taught you about dealing with change?*
- *What would it look like for you to “take up the mantle” you’ve been given to carry out your God-given purpose in this world? Is there anything that scares you about that? Explain.*

For Next Week

Session Title

- Called to Serve

Main Scripture

- Isaiah 6

Session Outline

1. A Vision of Glory (Isaiah 6:1-4)
2. Woe is Me, Great is God (Isaiah 6:5-7)
3. Ready and Willing (Isaiah 6:8-13)

Memorize

When he could see him no longer, he took hold of his own clothes, tore them in two, picked up the mantle that had fallen off Elijah, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

—2 Kings 2:12-13

Extended Commentary

2 Kings 2:1-25

The Lord had made clear to Elijah on Mount Horeb that Elisha was the man who would finish what he had begun in the battle against Baal and the followers of Ahab (1 Kgs. 19:15-18). We have no way of knowing how long Elisha accompanied Elijah as his servant and protege, but now the time had come for the transition to occur.

2:1-6. The opening words of the chapter announce the dramatic event that was about to occur: the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. With the possible exception of Enoch, no such thing had ever occurred. But a surprising number of people were aware that something dramatic was about to take place that would remove Elijah from them. The passage is organized around a journey. Beginning at Gilgal, Elijah and Elisha proceeded to Bethel and Jericho. At each stop Elijah made an effort to deter Elisha: Stay here, Elisha. But Elijah's efforts seemed rather halfhearted. He never insisted that Elisha remain where he was. He seemed to be testing the younger man's loyalty and determination, rather than trying to stop him. Elisha's response was the same each time: I will not leave you.

This was a strong oath of refusal which reflected Elisha's determination to stay with Elijah, wherever he went. Elisha was aware that this was a momentous day, and he would not be diverted or distracted. In two of the towns, the two were met by the company of the prophets, and the course of the journey was determined by Elijah's desire to meet with these men. Twice they had the same message for Elisha: the Lord is going to take your master from you today. Apparently the Lord had revealed this information to them as well as to Elisha. But he refused to discuss the matter since that would change nothing and would only intensify Elisha's grief.

The journey began at Gilgal, a name of importance when Joshua led Israel into the promised land (Josh. 5). But since Gilgal was near Jericho and would require a climb to Bethel, it was apparently another town of the same name. They went down to Bethel, a place associated with Jacob's remarkable encounter with God (Gen. 28:10-22) but also the center of the pagan Jeroboam cult. A company of the prophets was there, and Elijah and Elisha met with them. From there Elijah led them to Jericho, following the Lord's direction. This was the location of Joshua's first great victory in the conquest (Josh. 6) and also the locale of another company of the prophets. From there they journeyed to the west bank of the Jordan River, where a group of "fifty men of the company of the prophets" (v. 7) had gathered to witness what was to happen.

2:7-12. The Jordan was both the border of the nation and a place of rich biblical significance. It was the boundary Moses had not been allowed by God to cross, so that Joshua led the people into the land, finishing what Moses had started. This would be true of Elijah and Elisha as well. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The parallel to Moses at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:15-22) is obvious. Moses had raised his staff, the symbol of his shepherd leadership, over the water, while Elijah struck it with his cloak, the symbol of his prophetic office. In a reprise of the exodus, the water divided... and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. They were now outside the land, in Moab, where Moses had died.

The reason for Elisha's persistence now became evident. A dying man would traditionally pronounce a blessing over his successors. That custom led Elijah to ask, What can I do for you before I am taken from you? This was the moment for which Elisha had been waiting. He replied, Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit. "Double portion" is a Hebrew idiom. It does not mean "twice as much" but "the firstborn's share" (Deut. 21:17). Elisha knew that he had been appointed to be Elijah's successor (1 Kgs.

19:19-21). But he recognized his need of divine empowerment. He would inherit Elijah's role; he needed Elijah's God-given equipping for the task.

Elisha recognized that a position without God-given power was an impossible assignment. But God's Spirit is God's Spirit. He was not under the control even of an Elijah. Elijah could not guarantee the request, but he could give a sign that God had granted it: if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.

The departure of Elijah into heaven was filled with divine symbolism. In the course of their walking and talking, a chariot of fire... appeared and separated the two of them. Chariots and horses were military symbols; they represented God himself as the ultimate protection of his people (Deut. 20:1; see 2 Kgs. 6:15-17). But in a nation riddled with Baal worship, they were a refutation of the false claim that Baal was the "rider of the clouds." God alone "rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty" (Deut. 33:26). Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind, not in the chariot, another indication of the emptiness of the claims of Baal, the so-called storm god. It was the Lord who controlled the storm and God's prophet who rode it into his presence. Ahab and Jezebel's deaths would be associated with dogs; Elijah's departure happened through supernatural intervention.

Elisha's response was a spontaneous cry of grief which honored Elijah and captured his sorrow: My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel! Elijah had been his mentor ("my father"), and Elisha knew him to be God's true military defense of the nation ("the chariots and horsemen of Israel," a description later used of Elisha in 2 Kgs. 13:14). God's prophet had been the guarantee of Israel's divine protection. But now he was gone. Elisha took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart—a vivid expression of grief for himself and his nation. Something precious and valuable had departed with Elijah.

2:13-14. Elisha met Elijah's condition. God had enabled him to witness the departure of his mentor. The evidence of that was the cloak that had fallen from Elijah, the symbol of his prophetic office and of his divine empowerment. Elisha picked up the cloak and returned to the banks of the Jordan River. He was a "Joshua" about to demonstrate that he was his master's legitimate successor. Elisha's cry was both a plea and a petition for God to authenticate him: Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah? The answer came when Elisha took the cloak... and struck the water with it, and the water divided.

It is significant that in the Baal mythology the river and the sea were the enemy of Baal which he struggled to control. The river represented no challenge to the Lord, its maker. While Elijah may have departed, everything of God remained. Israel's need was not Elijah but the Lord. Elisha's focus was on the God of the man, not the man. He had been given not only Elijah's position but his power as well.

2:15-18. The fifty men of the company of the prophets had been watching from a distance, but how much they had seen is not clear. Almost certainly they had not seen Elijah's remarkable departure, but they had seen Elisha divide the river and return to the land. They recognized that the spirit of Elijah was resting on Elisha. Meeting him, they bowed to the ground before him. They were willing to accept his God-given empowerment and his leadership. But they were much less willing to let go of Elijah. Concerned about him, they wanted to launch a search: Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has... set him down on some mountain .

Did they expect to find Elijah's corpse and desire to bury it? Or did they expect to find him wandering, lost, and confused in some remote location? Their confusion and dedication to Elijah was understandable. No one had ever departed life in such a way!

Elisha attempted to dissuade them, knowing their search would be futile. But their persistence made him ashamed to refuse, an idiomatic way of referring to the fact that their search went on for a long time. They were submissive to Elisha's leadership, but they felt a need to get closure about Elijah. Elisha finally

relented, allowed them to search for their beloved leader, and reminded them of his warnings when they returned empty-handed. The whole story is a very human insight into how hard it is to let go of a beloved leader and to move on to the next part of God's purposes.

2:19-22. Elijah's name meant, "My God is Yahweh," a name descriptive of his ministry. Elisha means, "My God saves," a name also capturing his unique ministry. Elisha's life would be notable for the significant number of miracles, almost all saving or delivering individuals from personal problems. His first miracle (excluding the dividing of the Jordan River) showed his credentials as God's prophet and set the pattern of his ministry.

The city where the miracle transpired is not named, but both the location near the Jordan and the tradition that persists to this day about Elisha's water show that Jericho is meant. It was certainly a place of which it could be said, this town is well situated, nestled as it was in an oasis in the Jordan Valley. The city had been rebuilt under Joshua's curse (see 1 Kgs. 16:34), and this may account for the problem of the water: the water is bad and the land is unproductive. The last phrase is literally, "the land suffers miscarriages." This may refer to a predominance of miscarriages in the area, a situation far worse than poor crops.

Whatever the exact problem, Elisha's solution was remarkable. Taking a new bowl filled with salt, he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it. This was obviously not a scientific solution but a miraculous cure. It was not Elisha or the salt that "healed" the water but God. Elisha's actions had power because of the underlying power of God.

2:23-25. God's word also comes in judgment upon those who resist and reject it. Retracing their journey, Elisha went up to Bethel. This had become the center of Jeroboam's pagan cult, a place where the Lord was mocked with golden calves and where God's faithful prophets were mocked (2 Chr. 36:15-16). The story must be read against its wider context. Some youths of the city, a large group of at least forty-two young men in their early teen years, recognized Elisha and jeered at him. Their words were more than the childish taunts of young boys. They were full of deep spiritual animosity: Go on up, you baldhead!

"Go on up" is best read as a mockery of the story of Elijah's departure. "Baldhead" was a personal insult, directed at Elisha's lack of hair. But in a society where the young were expected to respect their elders, it was a hate-filled insult of God's prophet. They knew who Elisha was, and they were ridiculing him and the God he served.

In response, Elisha called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. To ridicule God's prophet was to ridicule his God. To mock God's prophet was to mock God. Elisha's curse was not intemperate language but a call for divine judgment, to which the Lord responded by the unexpected appearance of two bears that mauled forty-two of the youths. The message was clear: don't mess with God's prophet! Most of his miracles would be miracles of blessing, but this was a warning: if the nation persisted in its rebellion against the Lord, it was headed for disaster. In a rebellious age God would speak in a way that could not be ignored.

Elisha retraced Elijah's steps all the way to Mount Carmel, the scene of his great battle with the Baal prophets. But from there he returned to Samaria. This was significant. Elijah had spent most of his ministry in isolation. Elisha took up residence in Ahab's capital city and represented God there. He would complete the ministry of Elijah but not as an imitator of his great mentor. He was God's unique man, not a shadow of Elijah.

