

“God’s New Prophet”  
2 Kings 2:11-25  
(Preached at Trinity, November 28, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. God commanded Elijah back in **1 Kings 19** to anoint Elisha as his successor.  
**1 Kings 19:16 NAU** - "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."  
**1 Kings 19:19 NAU** - "So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him."
2. Elisha followed and faithfully served Elijah as his protégé.
  - A. **Verse 9** - When Elijah asked Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you” Elisha’s answer reminds us of Solomon’s answer when God asked him a similar question. He didn’t ask for wealth or honor but help in his service to God as Elijah’s successor. “Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.”
  - B. It was also testimony of Elisha’s inheritance as Elijah’s successor.  
By “double portion” Elisha’s attention was upon the Deuteronomic law that gave the eldest son a double portion of his father’s goods (Deut. 21:17).
3. As the two of them progressed away from the Jordan Elisha was suddenly separated from Elijah by blazing chariots and horses of fire. Suddenly, Elisha witnessed the amazing ascension of Elijah as he was carried away in a whirlwind.
4. As Elijah rose from the earth his mantle fell from him and Elisha took it up.  
Elijah’s mantle was his outer garment or robe. The mantle usually had slits rather than arms. In Old Testament times it was often brightly colored. It reminds us of Joseph’s coat of many colors which was probably a mantle made of brightly colored strips.  
Elijah’s mantle was distinct in that it served as a symbol of his prophetic authority.
5. Elijah and Elisha had crossed the Jordan alone. The fifty prophets remained behind.  
**2 Kings 2:7 NAU** - "Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite *them* at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan."
6. The phrase, “sons of the prophets” refers to men associated as a school or guild and living together in a communal life. They were organized under a leader that bore the title, “father.” While Elijah seems to have some connection with them, he is also separated from them—not considered one of them. They looked at him as their spiritual father.
7. The prophets did not witness the ascension of Elijah. They did not know he had been taken away into glory. They were filled with uncertainty. As they gazed towards the Jordan River they saw Elisha coming and he was alone. Where was Elijah? As Elisha neared the waters he suddenly took the mantle that they recognized as belonging to Elijah and he struck the water. The waters divided just as it did when Elijah struck it. As Elisha crossed over the prophets understood that he was successor to Elijah.

- 2 Kings 2:15 NAU** - "Now when the sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho opposite *him* saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him."
8. They saw with their eyes, but they were not certain. Faith goes beyond what is seen.  
**Hebrews 11:1 NAU** - "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."  
 They wanted to send out a search party if perhaps Elijah had not actually left.  
**2 Kings 2:16 NAU** - "Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men, please let them go and search for your master; perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him on some mountain or into some valley."
9. The fifty prophets might have been uncertain but not Elisha. He had Elijah's mantle. He had the promises of God upon him. His order to the prophets were:  
**2 Kings 2:16-18 NAU** - "You shall not send." <sup>17</sup> But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, "Send." They sent therefore fifty men; and they searched three days but did not find him. <sup>18</sup> They returned to him while he was staying at Jericho; and he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go '?"
10. The remainder of the chapter has two events that will define the ministry of Elisha. The first is the account where Elisha heals the waters feeding the city. The second is an account that's troubling for some. While Elisha was on his way to Bethel some young men came out of the city and insulted him. Elisha cursed them and two bears rushed out of the woods and tore them up. Both of these events tell us much about the ministry of Elisha.
- I. Elisha was a shepherd of God's people.
- A. Elijah was largely a private prophet
1. His arrival was mystical – little is known of his past.  
 Elijah saw himself as a lone prophet.  
**1 Kings 18:22 NAU** - "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD"  
**1 Kings 19:10 NAU** - "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
  2. His contact with others was limited and specific.
    - a. God sent him to announce judgment upon Ahab. After the drought began he retired east of Jordan alone where God provided for him supernaturally.
    - b. God then sent him to Zarephath where he cared for a lone widow.
    - c. After three years God sent him again to speak to Ahab  
**1 Kings 18:1 NAU** - "Now it happened *after* many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab"
  3. After his showdown with the prophets of Baal he again retired to solitude.

B. Elisha was a people person

1. After Elijah called him as his successor he obeyed – but his first act was preparing a feast for his friends.  
**1 Kings 19:21 NAU** - "So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave *it* to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him."
2. Now Elijah is gone, and we find Elisha interacting with the prophets. He is among them and interacts with them. Elijah most likely began this school for the prophets but we don't find him interacting with them.
3. Now in **Verse 19** we find Elisha ministering to the men of the city of Jericho. They had not approached Elijah for help but now they come to Elisha. Elisha was among them and they felt comfortable coming to him.
  - a. They came to Elisha seeking his help. The city was nice in many ways. The word **טוב** is used which has a wide range of meanings: "beautiful, charming, delightful, favorable – the NASB translates it "pleasant." In other words it was a great place to live except for one serious problem. The water supply was poor. Something had caused the water supply in the previously fair city to become foul. Without a supply of good water any and any city homestead will fail.
  - b. **Verse 21** describes the water as poisonous – that drinking it could result in death. In addition, using it to water crops would ruin render the land unfruitful. But the word doesn't only refer to failed crops. It refers to miscarriages and barrenness.
  - c. The otherwise pleasant city was facing a crisis – death, miscarriages, suffering – Jericho was basically uninhabitable.
4. We shouldn't miss that this was Jericho which had been cursed of God in the days of Joshua and rebuilt in rebellion against God. We now find God showing mercy upon Jericho. God has grace for the chief of sinners.  
 Dale Ralph Davis describes it: "God's word through God's prophet brings God's grace—even to Jericho."<sup>1</sup>
5. Elisha performs a miracle. He asked for a new jar and ordered that it be filled with salt. He went to the source of the water and threw in the salt and prophesied,  
**2 Kings 2:21 NAU** - "Thus says the LORD, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.'"
  - a. Salt has purifying properties. I still remember moving to California as a teenager. The water was so hard every home had a built in water softener. There was a large holding bin that we had to all large bags of salt which reduced the mineral levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 37.

- b. Miracles often included a physical prop. Like Jesus making mud from spittle and clay and putting upon the eyes of the blind man. Elisha adding salt was not a natural treatment but a supernatural. God intervened and changed the water.  
**2 Kings 2:22 NAU** - "So the waters have been purified to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke."

From Jericho, the location of the school of the prophets who received Elisha as Elijah's successor and who bowed before him, we now witness the young men of Bethel. This scene seems cruel and heartless. Did Elisha endorse the slaughter of these children?

II. We must understand that Elisha was called and set apart by God as Elijah's successor

A. Elijah was commanded by God to seek out Elisha

**1 Kings 19:16 NAU** - "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."

**1 Kings 19:19 NAU** - "So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him."

1. As we've seen, Elisha accepted the call and faithfully served as Elijah's protégé and servant.
2. With the ascension of Elijah this was affirmed and Elisha received the mantle, the sign of Elijah's prophetic authority.
3. This was also affirmed by the 50 prophets.  
**2 Kings 2:15 NAU** - "Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho opposite *him* saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him."
4. The men of Jericho recognized the prophetic office of Elisha as the successor to Elijah and sought his office to help them with the major need of the city.

B. Now the young men from Bethel arrive and openly rejected God's prophet  
**2 Kings 2:23 NAU** - "young lads came out from the city and mocked him"

1. This was a serious offense. This was the damning offense of Israel  
**Matthew 23:29-32 NAU** - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,<sup>30</sup> and say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.'<sup>31</sup> "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.<sup>32</sup> "Fill up, then, the measure of *the guilt* of your fathers."  
**Matthew 23:37-38 NAU** - "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.<sup>38</sup> "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!"  
 God demonstrated great forbearance and mercy until His wrath was displayed.

**2 Chronicles 36:15-16 NAU** - "The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent *word* to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; <sup>16</sup> but they *continually* mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy."

2. These young men not only rejected Elisha, they come out mocking him and denying his prophetic office.
3. "Go up, you baldhead" – Elisha may have been bald, or they may have used these words to deny that Elisha was anything like Elijah.
  - A. Don't forget the description of Elijah:  
**2 Kings 1:7-8 NAU** - "What kind of man was he who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" <sup>8</sup> They answered him, "*He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.*" And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."
  - B. If Elijah was a hairy man, Elisha was bald.
  - C. And the word for "go up" is the same word used describe Elijah's ascent, as if to say, "Elijah has departed, why don't you?"
4. What about the description of these "young lads" from Bethel?
  1. The word used for "lads" is נָעָר *naar* which can refer to children. Some presume that these were young children reflecting the hostility of their parents.<sup>2</sup> There is sufficient Biblical evidence to suggest this wasn't young children but young men.
  2. It is the same word used to describe Isaac when Abraham was about to sacrifice him.  
**Gen. 22:12** - "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad" Isaac was around 28 years old.
  3. It was used to describe the Sodomites when they attacked the home of Lot.  
**Genesis 19:4 NAU** - "Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter;"
  4. Absalom was described with this word even though he was an adult.  
**2 Samuel 14:21 NAU** - "Then the king said to Joab, "Behold now, I will surely do this thing; go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom."  
**2 Samuel 18:5 NAU** - "The king charged Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "*Deal* gently for my sake with the young man Absalom."
  5. Rehoboam is said to have rejected the counsel of the elders and instead turned to his friends referred to as "young men." They were adults.

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 38.

6. All of Jesse's sons were referred to as "children."  
**1 Samuel 16:11 NAU** - "And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?"  
 David would have been a teen, but the rest of Jesse's seven sons were adults.
5. These were likely students of the false prophets who were sent to mock and ridicule Elisha. This was the location of one of Jeroboam's golden calves. These young men were mocking God's prophet.
6. By mocking God's prophet they were mocking God. And they came under the judgment of God.
- A. Notice Elisha cursed them "in the name of the LORD."  
 B. The implication is the two bears were sent by the hand of God.  
 C. Dale Ralph Davis calls the bears, "Covenant bears."  
**Leviticus 26:21-22 NAU** - "If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins. <sup>22</sup> 'I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted."

#### Conclusion:

1. So we find the nature of Elijah's successor.  
 He was a public man with a pastoral heart. He was with the people and among the people. He cared about them and ministered to them.
2. He was also God's man. We don't give much attention to this. When David had the chance to remove Saul who was out to kill him he refused because Saul was king by the hand of God.  
**1 Samuel 26:11 NAU** - "The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed"
3. God raised up Elisha as His holy prophet. No less than 30 times he is referred to as the "man of God." Elisha seized the mantel and served.  
 We are comforted that God is active upon the earth and active among His people.