

SECOND KINGS

Chapter 2

Elijah Taken to Heaven

How when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." 11 And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

Ch 2 After briefly noting Ahaziah's death (1:17–18) and before taking up the account of his successor's reign (ch 3), the author records the end of Elijah's ministry (2:1–12a) and the first deeds of his disciple Elisha (vv 12b–25). (TLSB)

2:1 *by a whirlwind* – Literally, the text reads "in the whirlwind" (*bāsa'arah*). The definite article suggests that the incident is known to those who read it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

True tornados are rare in Israel. Term describes a strong wind. (TLSB)

Gilgal. Not the Gilgal northeast of Jericho. (TLSB)

2:2 *stay*. Throughout ch 2, Elijah looks for a way to separate from his disciple. (TLSB)

Bethel. On a final journey, perhaps to bid farewell to his friends and associates, Elijah went 7 mi S from a place called Gilgal to Bethel and from there c 12 mi SE to Jericho (v 4) and then east to the Jordan (v 7). (TLSB)

As the LORD lives. Oath formula. (TLSB)

I will not leave you. Elisha was aware that Elijah’s ministry was almost finished and that his departure was near (v. 5). He was determined to accompany him until the moment the Lord took him. His commitment to Elijah and to Elijah’s ministry was unailing (see v. 9; 1Ki 19:21). (CSB)

Apparently sensing what was to happen, Elisha insisted on accompanying Elijah, even though the latter discouraged him. (TLSB)

Elisha’s resolve is repeated in v 4 and again in v 6, each time in response to Elijah’s request that he wait behind. Elisha’s determination is heightened by the prophet’s explanation that accompanying his “father” is futile, since he will be taken. Nevertheless, by v 9 it is apparent that his stubborn adherence will be rewarded, as the request for a parting blessing is invited and subsequently granted. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

2:3 *sons of the prophets.* During the days of Elijah and Elisha, companies of prophets were located at Bethel (here), Jericho (v. 5) and Gilgal (4:38). It appears that Elijah journeyed by divine instruction to Gilgal (v. 1), Bethel (v. 2) and Jericho (v. 4) for a last meeting with each of these companies. (CSB)

“sons of the prophets.” Lessing notes that in Kings, “sons of the prophets” always refers to disciples of true prophets (R. Reed Lessing, *Amos*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009], 472). As witnesses of the prophetic succession (e.g., T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings: Word Biblical Commentary* [Waco: Word Books, 1985], 20), they are therefore dependable. Similarly, at the transfiguration, the most trusted inner circle of disciples is chosen as witnesses, and their reliability is precisely the point being made in the traditional Epistle for this day from 1 Peter. Significantly, after the transfiguration, those select disciples, trusted also as witnesses of other events such as the raising of Jairus’s daughter and Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, are charged to keep their own counsel regarding what they have witnessed (Mt 17:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

The sons of the prophets, first at Bethel and then at Jericho, have been told what must happen to Elijah and do not shrink from bearing the unwelcome news. Elisha’s response seems to be one of understandable irritation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

I know. The Lord had revealed the matter. (TLSB)

2:7 *Fifty men.* These men were to witness the miracle by which Elijah and Elisha crossed the river. (CSB)

Ironically, a respectful platoon of prophets gathered to witness a miracle the Lord would work through Elijah. Contrast with 1:9–10.. (TLSB)

stood at some distance - “stood at some distance from them.” At Bethel, the sons of the prophets had come out to Elisha; at Jericho, they had drawn near to him. But at this point, they keep their distance, perhaps sensitive to the emotion entailed in the separation or maybe in realization of the awesome encounter with the Almighty that will ensue. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

2:8 *Elijah took his cloak ... and struck the water.* Elijah used his cloak much as Moses had used his staff at the time of Israel’s passage through the “Red Sea” (see Ex 14:16, 21, 26). (CSB)

cloak and rolled. When this rectangular cloak was rolled, it would take the shape of a rod. *struck the water.* Moses had stretched out his rod to open a path through the Red Sea. (TLSB)

The parting of the water is, of course, suggestive of Moses' parting of the Red Sea in the exodus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

2:9 *Let there be a double portion.* Elisha was not expressing a desire for a ministry twice as great as Elijah's, but he was using terms derived from inheritance law to express his desire to carry on Elijah's ministry. Inheritance law assigned a double portion of a father's possessions to the firstborn son. (CSB)

Firstborn son typically received twice the inheritance of other children (see note, Gn 25:31; cf Dt 21:17) Elisha requested a share of his father's spirit double that of the other "sons of the prophets." (TLSB)

"double portion" refers to twice what other heirs might inherit, rather than twice the portion of the spirit Elijah himself possessed. This would be in line with the allocation bequeathed to the oldest son. By this formula, we may understand Elisha to be the proper heir of Elijah's prophetic ministry. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

2:10 *hard thing.* Although Elijah had previously been told to anoint Elisha as his successor (1Ki 19:16, 19–21), Elijah's response clearly showed that the issue rested solely with the Lord's sovereign good pleasure. (CSB)

Inheritance issues often bring hardship, even division, within families. (TLSB)

Elijah points out that Elisha's request is not his to grant, but it is hard for Elisha to receive rather than for God to give. As the chapter unfolds, Elisha is confronted with the difficulties of his calling and his own limitations in meeting the challenge. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

If you see me ... it shall be so for you...if you not see me...not be so. Elijah left the answer to Elisha's request in the Lord's hands. (CSB)

Elijah asked Elisha to stick close, as was proper for the master's chief disciple, thus distinguishing himself from the other sons. (TLSB)

2:11 *went on and talked.* Common method of teaching and discipleship, since training did not take place in a classroom setting. (TLSB)

chariot of fire and horses of fire. The Lord's heavenly host has accompanied and supported Elijah's ministry (as it had that of Moses; see Ex 15:1–10), and now at his departure Elisha is allowed to see it (cf. 6:17). (CSB)

Either a vision or angels. On angels appearing as animals. Elisha later saw the mountains around hard-pressed Samaria "full of horses and chariots of fire" (6:17), a visible demonstration of God's protection and power. (TLSB)

"chariots of fire and horses of fire." What is meant by this is not clear, but artists have enjoyed colorful and dramatic portrayals of it. Fire is associated with theophany at many points in the Old Testament; for example, in Ex 3, where God speaks to Moses through the burning bush. Another emblem of theophany is cloud; again, for example, when God speaks to Moses on Sinai in Ex 19. This is the one that accompanies the voice of God at the transfiguration. In Ex 13, the two symbols are combined to demonstrate the unwavering presence of God with his people in the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. Elijah, like Enoch before him (Ge 5:24), was taken up to heaven bodily without experiencing death; like Moses (Dt 34:4–6), he was taken away outside the promised land without leaving a grave. (CSB)

Where God’s saints will reside bodily hereafter in God’s presence. The ascension of Elijah was to teach Elisha; it happened because of Elijah’s special relationship with the Lord. (TLSB)

2:12 *My father, my father!* See p 555. Repetition expresses longing. (TLSB)

chariots of Israel and its horsemen. The same description was later used of Elisha (13:14). (CSB)

A prophet like Elijah, who kept the people in communion with the omnipotent Ruler of heaven and earth, deserved this title. A later Israelite king bestowed the same title on Elisha (13:14). Here, Elisha confessed that Israel’s true strength and glory were not in war horses and military prowess, as Israel’s kings believed, but in the Word and the faith of her prophets. (TLSB)

no more. Some expected Elijah to return in the flesh. (TLSB)

“Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.” The rending of garments is an expression of grief or distress. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

It would be remiss to leave this text without considering the issue of Elijah’s reappearance. The Old Testament canon closes with the parting promise that “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Mal 4:5). Clearly by the New Testament era there was an expectation that Elijah would appear before the Messiah. The Synoptic Gospels portray John the Baptist in terms resembling the description of Elijah the Tishbite in the previous chapter of 2 Kings given by the king’s messengers: “He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist” (2 Ki 1:8). Anyone could recognize John in this role, and Jesus himself affirmed, “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Mt 11:13–14). The last of the prophets corresponds to the first. In a sense, then, it is unnecessary for any further appearance of Elijah to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi. John himself, however, insists that he is not Elijah when asked explicitly about it (Jn 1:21). So there follows the very literal fulfillment on the Mount of Transfiguration. Perhaps it is a reminder that God may be super-abundant in the keeping of his promises, but never lacking. After the transfiguration, there can be no doubt at all that the stage is set for the Messiah to accomplish his work. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

2:13 *He took up the cloak.* Possession of Elijah’s cloak symbolized Elisha’s succession to Elijah’s ministry (see 1Ki 19:19). (CSB)

After tearing his own clothes, Elisha dramatically demonstrated that he had inherited the spirit of Elijah with his master’s mantle, he performed the same miracle of parting the Jordan (vv 12b–14). (TLSB)

2:14 *When he struck the water, it divided.* See v. 8. The Lord authenticated Elisha’s succession to Elijah’s ministry and demonstrated that the same divine power that had accompanied Elijah’s ministry was now operative in the ministry of Elisha. In crossing the Jordan as Joshua had before him, Elisha is shown to be Elijah’s “Joshua” (Elisha and Joshua are very similar names, Elisha meaning “God saves” and Joshua “The LORD saves”). (CSB)

Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah? Not expressing doubt, but confronting the question that would be on the hearts of the faithful, because the Lord’s chief prophet was now gone (see note, v 9). God settled the matter with a miracle. (TLSB)

2:1–14 When the Lord takes Elijah to heaven, He also bestows Elijah’s office and authority on Elisha, his chief disciple. The burning desire to serve God and His people through faithful leadership is proper (cf 1Tm 3:1). If you set your heart on such noble service, walk and talk with the Lord’s servants to learn from them His Word and wisdom, by which the Lord will prepare you for your calling. The heavenly Father will send His Spirit to embolden and uplift you, through Jesus, His Son. • Build me up by Your Word, O Lord, and bear me up by Your grace, that I may serve You honorably and rush to Your side when my service is fulfilled. Amen. (TLSB)

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

15 Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. **16** And they said to him, “Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send.” **17** But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, “Send.” They sent therefore fifty men. And for three days they sought him but did not find him. **18** And they came back to him while he was staying at Jericho, and he said to them, “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go’?” **19** Now the men of the city said to Elisha, “Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful.” **20** He said, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. **21** Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, “Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.” **22** So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke. **23** He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!” **24** And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys. **25** From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

2:15 *opposite them.* On the far bank of the Jordan. (TLSB)

The spirit of Elijah. Elisha had received the prophet’s office of service. (TLSB)

bowed to the ground before him. Indicated their recognition of Elisha’s succession to Elijah’s position. Elisha was now the Lord’s official representative in this time of royal apostasy. (CSB)

2:16 *it may be ... valley.* The Lord had hidden Elijah previously. The sons of the prophets expressed some doubts about the events they witnessed and wanted to be sure of Elisha’s succession. (TLSB)

do not send them. Elisha knew their search would be fruitless. (CSB)

Elisha had no doubt about what had taken place. (TLSB)

2:17 *ashamed.* Disappointed, Elisha bears with the weakness of their faith because they needed to confirm the succession and the miracle. (CSB)

Send them. When the company of prophets refused to be satisfied with Elisha’s answer, he permitted them to go so that the authority and truth of his words would be confirmed to them. (CSB)

2:19 *city.* Evidently Jericho (see v. 18). (CSB)

the water is bad and the land is unfruitful. The inhabitants of Jericho were experiencing the effects of the covenant curse (contrast Dt 28:15–18 with Ex 23:25–26; Lev 26:9; Dt 28:1–4). See 1Ki 16:34; Jos 6:26. (CSB)

Problem with the water is unknown. (TLSB)

2:20 *new bowl.* That which was to be used in the service of the Lord was to be undefiled by profane use (see Lev 1:3, 10; Nu 19:2; Dt 21:3; 1Sa 6:7). (CSB)

put salt in it. Elisha may have used salt because of its known preservative qualities, but it is more likely that he used it to symbolize the covenant faithfulness of the Lord (see notes on Lev 2:13; Nu 18:19; see also 2Ch 13:5). (CSB)

Symbolic of cleansing, freshness. *healed.* Purified or made healthy. Cf Ex 15:25. (TLSB)

death nor miscarriage. Could describe the water's effects on the land or its inhabitants. (TLSB)

2:21 *I have healed this water.* Any idea of a magical effect of the salt in the purification of the water is excluded by the explicit statement that the Lord himself healed the water. In this symbolic way Elisha was able, as the first act of his ministry, to proclaim to the people that in spite of their disobedience the Lord was merciful and was still reaching out to them in his grace (see 13:23). (CSB)

2:23 *small boys.* Same modifier is used of David (1Sm 17:14, 33). (TLSB)

Go up. Since Bethel was the royal cult center of the Northern kings (1Ki 12:29; Am 7:13) and Elijah and Elisha were known to frequent Samaria (perhaps even as their main residence, the youths from Bethel no doubt assumed that Elisha was going up to Samaria to continue Elijah's struggle against royal apostasy. (Some believe that the youths, in their mocking, were telling Elisha to ascend to heaven as Elijah had done.) (CSB)

Boys demanded that Elisha imitate Elijah and go up into heaven in order to prove that he was not an impostor. (TLSB)

you baldhead! Baldness was uncommon among the ancient Jews, and luxuriant hair seems to have been viewed as a sign of strength and vigor. By calling Elisha "baldhead," the youths from Bethel expressed that city's utter disdain for the Lord's representative, who, they felt, had no power. (CSB)

Jeering at baldheaded Elisha's claim to be the successor of bushy-haired Elijah. They displayed the disdainful attitude present among the people of Israel. (TLSB)

2:24 *cursed them in the name of the LORD.* Elisha pronounced a curse similar to the covenant curse of Lev 26:21–22. The result gave warning of the judgment that would come on the entire nation should it persist in disobedience and apostasy (see 2Ch 36:16). Thus Elisha's first acts were indicative of his ministry that would follow: God's covenant blessings would come to those who looked to him (vv. 19–22), but God's covenant curses would fall on those who turned away from him. (CSB)

she-bears. Female Syrian brown bears. (TLSB)

tore. Mauled. (TLSB)

forty-two. Boys were apparently gathered for some training or service. (TLSB)

2:15–25 Through three miracles, the Lord removes all doubts about Elisha as Elijah’s successor. As the Lord calls you to service, He will prepare and support you. Though miracles may not follow you (as with Elisha), you have God’s miraculous Word in the pages of Holy Scripture by which the Lord will bless you with the comfort of salvation and equip you for every good work. • O Lord, as You bore insult on the cross and brought forth life for me, let me bear all insults and burdens of my calling. I entrust my defense to Your almighty power and my life to Your surpassing mercy. Amen (TLSB)