

# **God's Superhero - Elisha**

## **Man of Miracles**

### **1 Kings 19:19**

## **Introduction**

Elisha was the servant of Elijah. His name in Hebrew means "God is Salvation." He was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elisha prophesied for nearly fifty years during the reigns of the Israelite kings Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash. He is believed to have been the son of a wealthy farmer in Galilee. He was called by Elijah while tilling in one of the family fields. His new home would become Mt. Carmel which had once been the place of idol sacrifice until Elijah claimed it for God by calling fire down from heaven.

He was one of the great Old Testament miracle workers. His ministry included healing the sick and even raising the dead. One rather strange story records that he cursed a group of children who mocked his bald head and God sent two bears that mauled some 42 kids. (I'm not sure what the lesson there is: Maybe don't make fun of bald-headed preachers - if you're the children - or be careful what you ask God to do? - if you're the prophet.)

Elisha was also involved in politics. He was known for helping the king's forces attack Moab and defend Israel against Syrian attacks. His message was that Israel should return to God and acknowledge His absolute sovereignty over the nation as well as each person's life. He healed the sick and demonstrated God's power over life and death. He advised the King in battle to demonstrate God's power over the nations and kingdoms.

We catch a glimpse of Elisha in 2 Kings Chapter 2: (Read)

It was a stunning and thrilling moment. One that would impact the rest of his life. After that experience he knew he would be the one to carry on the great work of Elijah. He knew he had been chosen by God to bring relief and blessing to the people of Israel, and teach them the kindness and greatness of God. He knew he had been chosen of God.

## **I. Chosen of God**

Elisha picks up the mantle that Elijah threw off as he ascended up to heaven. Immediately He felt the spirit of Elijah within him and as he went to cross the Jordan to return home, he waved Elijah's mantle against the

water, and suddenly they parted before him, making a way for the this new prophet to cross the Jordan on dry ground.

It's a great honor to be chosen of God. But as we have seen throughout this series, there is first of all a preparation for the call. By His Spirit and through his prophets and leaders, God develops and trains the people He has chosen to serve in ministry. Martin Luther described this inward call as "God's voice heard by faith." The call of God is a sense of leading and purpose and growing commitment. Charles Spurgeon identified it as "an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work of God."

A person who is called by God senses a growing desire to proclaim and teach God's Word, and to disciple and minister to people. Whom God calls he qualifies and equips. God always supplies the gifts necessary for ministry. And there is always a sense of urgency and commission that marks an authentic call.

In verse 16 of 1 Kings 19 we find the call of Elisha. God tells Elijah, "...you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place." Elijah had become discouraged and depressed. So God not only encourages Elijah's spirit with renewed purpose, he gives Elijah a comrade and successor. Everyone needs a friend! The core of Elijah's complaint before God was that he felt all alone. So God lets him know that not only were there many true prophets who still followed God, there was also a man who was ready to learn from the great prophet and be his disciple and companion. Elijah needed hope, and since Elisha would become his successor he knew that his work would continue even after his death. God showed Elijah that his ministry over the years had actually born more fruit than the spectacular ministry at Mount Carmel.

So 1 Kings 19 says that, Elijah departed from Mt Horeb, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him. And as Elijah passed by him, he threw his mantle on him. And Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

Elijah followed the guidance of the still small voice of God. He found Elisha and offered him the opportunity to join the prophetic ministry. Elisha was already at work. But as Elijah passed by him and threw hi mantle on him. The mantle was the symbol of Elijah's prophetic authority. Elijah was saying, "I call upon you to join in my work as a prophet." Elijah's reply indicates that God had called Elisha. Whether Elisha would follow that call

was his own decision. Elisha shows a complete commitment to following Elijah. He destroys the tools of his trade in a going away party for his family and friends. It also shows how willingly and joyfully he accepted the call of God upon his life.

Just think of it, out of the billions of people on planet earth today, you have been chosen by God to follow Christ and be his prophetic voice to your world. But whether or not you follow that call will be your own decision! If you do choose to follow God's call upon your life, you need to know there will be challenges to face. Challenges that will test your devotion and loyalty.

## **II. Challenged by Elijah**

God was about to take Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind. Apparently, this had become common knowledge among the prophets. Elijah says 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."

Elijah is testing the devotion of Elisha. However Elisha knew God was coming for Elijah and he would soon depart for heaven in an unusual way, and he wanted to stay as close as possible to his mentor. Then Elijah 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.

Then Elijah 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. As Elijah continued to test the devotion of Elisha, and Elisha continued to stay right with his mentor.

I think it's interesting that Elijah knew God had a dramatic plan for the end of his earthly life, yet he was perfectly willing to allow it all to take place privately, without anyone else knowing or seeing it. F.B. Meyer wrote, "The prophet's evident desire to die alone shames us, when we remember how eager we are to tell men, by every available medium, of what we are doing for the Lord." But Elisha was determined not leave his mentor until God took him away in the Spirit.

And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah 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 have 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."

Elijah was truly walking in the steps of Moses and Joshua when he miraculously parts the waters. And after they cross over the Jordan and disappear from the sight of all the onlookers, Elijah turns to Elisha and asks! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you? What an opportunity. The test was over. Elijah had urged him again and again to leave him. But Elisha had stood the test with unwavering resolution and had proven himself faithful. So Elijah gives him carte blanche.

Elisha's request is no small thing. He asks for asked for a double portion of the mighty spirit of Elijah. Elisha had seen how great the Spirit of God had worked through Elijah, and he wanted that kind of ministry. He could have asked for anything, but he asked for a double portion of the Spirit. The double portion was not just a request for twice as much as Elijah had, but was a request for the portion that went to the firstborn son according to Deuteronomy 21:17. Elisha was asking not only for the right to be regarded as Elijah's firstborn son with regard to his ministry, but to also be the successor of Elijah's spiritual power. So Elijah tells Elisha, "If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be done for you."

Elijah put Elisha to the test to see if he would persistently and loyally stay faithful to the very end. If Elisha stayed strong through the testing, his request would be fulfilled. I think it is quite significant, however, that Elisha did not know he was going to get to make this request - until after the test was over! Had he failed in his testing, we would very probably be reading a different version of this passage today. Following God means accepting the call and meeting the challenges and developing a strong and confident faith!

### **III. Confident in Faith**

Faith is what causes us to put our destiny in the hands of another. Unfortunately, too often we place our faith in something or someone who lets us down and we are left with doubts and mistrust. But Elijah had proven to be trustworthy. A man devoted to the cause of God. And Elisha had seen this prophet up close and personal and he trusted him.

And then it happened. As they continued on their way and talked with each other - probably about some of the great things still left to do, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire that separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And as Elisha views all of this he cries out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" And the bible says, "So he saw him no more." What a spectacular and stunning moment! He knew it was coming, but he still couldn't believe it when it happened!

Elijah is taken up to heaven as the whirlwind and horses of fire and chariot of Israel separates the two of them. And as he stands there all alone, he picks up the mantle of Elijah that has fallen from him, and heads back to the Jordan. What a conclusion to a remarkable ministry.

Since the mantle was the special mark of a prophet, this was the evidence that Elisha had truly inherited the ministry of Elijah. Think of what it was like for Elisha to pick up that mantle. By the way, the mantle didn't fall from heaven and rest on his shoulders. He had to decide to pick it up and put it on. So he takes the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and strikes the water, and says, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?"

And at that moment the water was divided and Elisha crossed over. And when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. A key point here is that Elisha knew the power in prophetic ministry did not rest in mantles or fiery chariots. It rested in the presence and work of the Living God. This was the moment of truth for Elisha. If the LORD God of Elijah was also with him, then he had inherited the same power and ministry that Elijah had. The succession of Elisha to the power and office of Elijah was apparent to others. Elisha didn't need to persuade or convince them with words. God's blessing on his actions was enough to prove it.

## **Conclusion**

When one generation of leaders moves on there is a vacancy and need for new leadership! Elijah was taken - but his mantle was not. His mantle was left which meant Elisha was to pick up where Elijah left off. The same is true today. God takes men and women who have ministered to us, but not their mantles or the need for someone else to step into their place of ministry. This is why discipleship is so important. And why each of us must not only be involved in ministry, but in building and multiplying ourselves in others.

In faith, Elisha picked up the mantle, which represented his calling and gift, moved to the Jordan, which represented the barriers he would face in ministry, and then cried out, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" He was not questioning God's actions, but demonstrating his faith and dependence on the Lord, that, regardless of his gifts, he knew he was totally insufficient in himself to be and do what lay ahead of him, unless as God had been with Elijah, so God would be with him. He knew that the power and sufficiency for ministry always belongs to God. And true success only comes as God gives it!

And God was with him! So the waters parted and he walked across on dry ground. And the sons of the prophets saw it and became convinced of Elisha's character and qualifications to lead them and they bowed in respect to demonstrate they recognized him as Elijah's successor.

Elisha was a man who was involved and his involvement provided opportunity for his growth in the Lord and for the manifestation of his gifts and his godliness. The church was intended by Jesus to be a gathering of people full of faith--strong in their confidence in Him--not a gathering of religious folks who are desperately needy and always looking for reassurance. Elijah and Elisha are good examples of what God wants in each of our lives.

The Lord wants us to be mentoring others and preparing them to take up our mantle - to become reproducing believers. Are you mentoring others? Are you available to teach, train, or disciple others in their walk with Christ? He wants us to pick up the mantle that has been dropped in front of us, to face the Jordan-like barriers that may stand in the way of ministry (our fears, ignorance, indifference, lack of training, finances, etc.) and cross over by the power of God to serve the king.