

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

The God of Elijah II Kings 2:1-25

Intro: On April 12th, 1945, while sitting for his portrait and talking with friends, Franklin D. Roosevelt had a stroke and never regained consciousness. FDR had been in office for an unprecedented 12yrs, during which he oversaw the nation's recovery from the Great Depression and headed up the coalition of Allied countries that opposed the Axis power in WWII. No matter what your political leanings were at the time or your opinion of Roosevelt and his policies, everyone at the time knew this was the end of an era in American history. This is the same mood we see in [ch2](#).

[V1](#) immediately notifies us that this is the story of Yahweh's taking Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind. All the primary characters seem to already be aware of it: Elijah, Elisha and the various "sons of the prophets" but no one speaks about it openly. There is an air of tension in this scene as everyone – at least in the remnant of believers – is on edge because they realize, with Elijah's departure and era in Israel's history is passing. We can see the esteem that Elijah was held in by Elisha's cry in [v12](#). Elisha is referring to Elijah when he cries out, "The chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" We know this because the same thing is said of Elisha at the time of his death in [13:14](#). Chariots and cavalry are military assets. Having Elijah on hand was like having the army of God at your disposal. He was the true defense system of Israel whether evil kings accepted it or not. Elijah was worth whole divisions of soldiers.

So now Israel's defense system is being removed. Or so it seemed. In the middle of a pagan, Baal-worshipping regime and a prophet-killing oppression, Elijah was the one who stood in the gap and stood up for Yahweh's word. Now Elijah is to be taken. Thus, the remnant's dread of what will come next. How are they to go on from here? An epoch is ending. Its transition time in the kingdom of God and it feels like the tectonic plates are moving. What to do?

Before we launch into our study let me speak briefly about the problem of this chapter. Since the late 19th Century, the Bible has been under assault from purveyors of what is called "higher" criticism. Over the years, rational

and scholarly study of the Word of God has shown this criticism for what it is – sour grapes. But, there are still those individuals who cut their scholarly teeth in that vein who continue to carry the water of those debunked critic and some of them write commentaries. This chapter is a problem for these people, especially those allergic to miracles.

The problem here has to do with the miracles. Many critics see them as unnecessary to the story and unbelievable to the point of referring to them as prophetic legend. The evidence against this erroneous presupposition is given right here in the text, given in the geographical structure of the chapter. Notice that Elijah and Elisha begin their journey by traveling to Bethel, they move on to Jericho, they travel to and cross over the Jordan where Elijah is taken up in a whirlwind. Now note where Elisha goes after these events: he crosses back over the Jordan, goes on to Jericho and then to Bethel. This geographical pattern isn't accidental; it shows that the water miracle and bear circus are integral parts of the story, not just random scenes looking for a literary home. It's an argument for the unity of the chapter.

1-15 – There's no question that these first few verses record some odd exchanges between Elijah and Elisha. It almost looks as if the teacher is trying to get rid of the student but the student's not taking the hint! We realize that that's not the case at all when we get to **v9**. Elijah asks what he can do for Elisha and the reply is for a double portion of his spirit. The double-portion wasn't a request for twice as much spirit but is a reference to the law concerning the first-born son as seen in **Deut 21:17**. The first-born was to receive twice as much as any other son but he was also the heir who was to take charge of the family, who assumed responsibility for the family – who took over once the patriarch was gone.

This is Elisha asking for the right to be regarded as Elijah's successor; as his first-born son in regard to his ministry, the one who will take over and finish the job. Now, if you recall, Elisha had already be designated as Elijah's successor back in **I Kings 19:19**. So, what's the deal? Was Elisha questioning his calling? Not at all, he was merely requesting the spiritual power that would be necessary, even critical, to fulfilling the calling he had already received.

Elijah's reply in v10 doesn't seem to be that difficult of a condition since he's

taken in the very next verse but this tells us that ever since v2, 4 and 6 – Elijah has been testing the devotion of his protégé by seeing if he would persistently stick with him throughout the last remarkable hours of his life. He’s giving Elisha every opportunity to turn down the job. He could stay behind if he wants to; if he wanted to decline the position as Elijah’s successor. Elisha’s response in each case is exceptionally strong: I’m not going anywhere! Elisha is committed to fulfilling the task that Yahweh has called him to and he’s willing to go through with it no matter how difficult it may prove to be.

and talked – This is one of a several conversations I wished had been recorded in the Bible. Just imagine what topics held their attention in this moment. We’ve already seen that faithful prophets were often given insight into the inner workings of God’s throne room and both Elijah and Elisha knew what was about to happen. How did they know? How detailed or limited was the information they had received concerning this miraculous event and what direction did this conversation take? There’s no way to tell this side of heaven so we must bide our time before the mystery is answered; along with the Lord’s conversation with the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus and His conversation with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Time will tell...

But, eventually their conversation was cut short by a fiery chariot and a rather hefty dust-devil. Note that Elijah was carried to heaven by the whirlwind, not by the chariot. The chariot only served to separate Elijah from his protégé. Elisha’s deep sorrow at the loss of his mentor is seen in his tearing of his garment. After Elijah was gone, his mantle – the uniform of the prophet – was found by Elisha, who then, standing at the bank of the Jordan, asks an important question: “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” He knew that the power in prophetic ministry didn’t rest in mantles or fiery chariots. It rested only in the presence and the work of the Living God, Yahweh; the covenant God of Israel. If the Lord God of Elijah was also with Elisha then he would inherit the same power and direction in his ministry.

So, in the first half of [ch2](#) there is a palpable anxiety over Elijah’s departure. A quiet dread and uncertainty seem to hover over Israel’s faithful remnant. And yet, with all that, the story teaches us that there are certain anchor points of truth that hold rock steady in the midst of the shifting

circumstances of God's people. The first thing we notice in this section is that the power of God still reaches us. To that point, v14 implies that God's power is not tied to any 1 era.

This isn't the first time the Jordan has been crossed in dry sandals. Clearly, v8 & 14 are a reenactment of Joshua 3-4, when Yahweh cut off the waters of the Jordan and Israel entered Canaan. Of course, here in our text the parting is not so public; it's only seen by a group of the faithful. But what's the text telling us when Elijah and Elisha duplicate this miracle? Simply that the God of Joshua's time is just as powerful as the God of Elijah's time. His arm hasn't atrophied nor has His strength failed. I'm sure there were some in Elisha's day who claimed to live in a different time; this is the Iron Age after all! We have different cultural problems and the political difficulties of the world we live in weren't even thought of back there in the Bronze Age!

The text is telling us that it doesn't matter: the God of the Bronze Age is the same in the Iron Age, no matter how advanced it may seem. This truth applies the same for us today. God is still saving and sanctifying His people, still keeping them from the evil one and the Holy Spirit is still leading wandering Christians to repent and renew their obedience to Christ and His calling on their life. These miracles aren't limited to Pentecost or the Reformation or 18th Century revivals. The historical God of miracles is the contemporary God of power that we serve.

V14 also teaches us that the power of God is not limited to a certain instrument. The sons of the prophets saw this for themselves; that Elisha, by Yahweh's power, can do the same works as Elijah. This should prevent us from idolizing certain servants of God. This has become an issue with the advent of TV evangelists, on line services and the mega church phenomena. I understand that most people want to be on the winning team; they like to be where all the success appears to be but the reality of the Christian life is that our help is found in the name of the Lord not in the charisma of His servants. God's leaders change but God's power persists. God's servants enter and exit the scene but the plan and purpose of God continues on unhindered and unabated. Maybe God sometimes removes His most illustrious servants just so that we won't make idols of them. Maybe He deliberately displays His might through lesser instruments so we can focus on the strength of God's arm not the flash of His servants (I Cor 1:26-29).

If the sons of the prophets were asking themselves where is Yahweh now that Elijah is gone then the answer to their questions is: He's with Elisha! We are given 3 quick series of events to drive that point home

16-18 – This shows us that wisdom matters and Elisha has it. God's wisdom is with Elisha even if the sons of the prophets fail to recognize it. They submit to Elisha and yet they don't submit. Apparently, they know Elijah is gone but seem to think that God took his soul/ spirit to heaven but cast his lifeless body off somewhere in the wilderness and they want to go find it and give it a proper burial. Elisha refuses because he knows better but they persist and pester him until he relents. Yes, it was a colossal waste of time and they catch up with him at Jericho in time to hear his "I told you so." This little episode informs the prophets that Elisha knows what he's talking about. He's not just the bearer of God's power but of God's wisdom too!

Wisdom's important but the modern church doesn't value it very highly. We're impressed with God's power but rarely look for His wisdom. Wisdom isn't one of God's flashier gifts. It's pretty mundane, ordinary, quiet. God's power often makes waves but His wisdom is more under-the-radar. Wisdom is available (**Jam 1:5**) but we ignore it. When we hear of someone cured of a debilitating disease we rightly rejoice in God's power but when we hear of someone who is drowning in debt decide to cut up their credit cards and sacrifice to get out of debt then we say, "Good for them." This is God's wisdom at work and we should rejoice in it the same way. We like to look to God's power to extract us from the difficulties of life but consider this: if we sought after and employed God's wisdom to the same degree, we might not require so many divine interventions to be displayed in our lives. God's wisdom still settles us.

19-22 – God's grace still thrills us. Elisha is at Jericho and they have a problem: bad water; something we're intimately familiar with. But, this water didn't just taste bad, it rendered the ground or the land unproductive, unfruitful. A better rendering of the original Hebrew verb would be: suffers from miscarriage. The problem is far more serious than unproductive land, there's something lethal in the water supply causing fatalities for livestock and humans. Elisha calls for a new bowl with salt in it bt the bowl and the salt are just the external signs that accompany a mighty work of God. The essential component of this miracle in found in **21**, thus says the Lord...

When Elisha announces Yahweh's healing of the waters, he assures the people that the water supply will no longer cause death or miscarriage. So, by the use of visible signs and spoken words, God's word through God's prophet brings God's grace to God's people and this scene stresses the transforming impact of that grace. How so? If you recall, after the walls of Jericho fell down and the city was captured and then destroyed, Joshua pronounced a curse on anyone who would dare to rebuild this condemned place ([Josh 6:26](#)). And, during the dark days of Ahab's reign when few cared about God's Word, a contractor believed he was up to the task. Hiel accepted the challenge and he had at least 2 graves to serve as monuments to his achievement, those of his sons. Jericho was a place where a curse was both uttered and inflicted. Jericho is a place under a curse.

That's the true significance of our text: a city under a curse receives a blessing of grace. The place where Yahweh inflicted His destructive word now enjoys His healing word. Back in Ex 15:22, at a place called the waters of Marah, God had shown that He would rather heal than destroy and He has not changed! Here in [ch2](#) Curseville has become Graceland. This scene gives us a glimpse of God's own character. See how He delights to turn the most curse-ridden, sin-laden, judgment-bearing situations into episodes of His divine grace? It seems too good to be true and too much for sinners to hope for but this is the testimony of the text: God's word through God's prophet brings God's grace – even to cursed Jericho.

[23-25](#) – Yahweh is with Elisha and that truth comes loaded with consequences. The people of Jericho approach him humbly and that brings a blessing to an area that had been cursed for a long time. But that's not the case in Bethel. Of course, this passage has all kinds of naysayers. Some are scandalized by how humorless or savage Elisha seems to be. Maybe if he drank decaffeinated coffee he wouldn't be so edgy. To hear them talk, you'd think Elisha just stomped into Bethel and went to the nearest daycare center and called down judgment on all the precocious pre-schoolers. But that's not the case at all, not by a long shot.

First off, we are talking about some young lads which could mean 10-12 on up to 20-30. Next, look where we are: Bethel. This was the center of Jeroboam's bull worship and had been for some 80 yrs so the residents

probably had a dim view of Yahweh's true prophet. The lad's mockery reflected the parents hostility. Children are taught to hate. 3rd, these boys acted with deliberate intent. Elisha was on the road going by the city and these boys came out to accost him of their own accord. This was no accidental meeting; theirs was a deliberate and malicious intent. Next; the mockery itself could have 2 possible meanings: the go up is the same as was used for Elijah's ascension so either they're taunting Elisha and telling him to pull a similar stunt and leave the earth or, more likely, their telling him to just get lost. Finally, note the number of casualties: 42 of them, meaning not all of them were injured. This tells us that Elisha is being confronted by a rather large mob of surly youngsters with malicious intentions against him.

That's the situation but what was the result? Elisha pronounces a curse in the name of the Lord and a couple of momma bears came out of the woods and taught those boys a lesson. What kind of bears were they? [Lev 26:21-22](#) will tell us. Why, these were covenant bears fulfilling a covenant curse. Covenant infidelity (hatred of God's servant and persisting in pagan worship) has brought the covenant curse. If Elisha had wrongly cursed them then Yahweh wouldn't have fulfilled the cursed. Yahweh did so that validates Elisha's curse. This is not a story about an irritable prophet; it's a story about a judging God.

The people's attitude towards God's anointed is reflective of their attitude towards God Himself and as such, they receive through that prophet either God's blessing or God's judgment. The function of the prophets was to call Israel back to her God. Israel as a whole had turned her back on God, they've rejected Him, preferring to follow other gods. The prophets job was to call Israel back to the original covenant they had with God, the covenant they agreed to at Mt Sinai where they pledged their allegiance to God and He pledged His goodness and love to them.

God's grace is available to bring blessing in the midst of your mess. It doesn't matter what kind of skeletons fill the closets of your past, God is ready with grace to remove the curse and stain of sin and to usher in the blessing of salvation and forgiveness; the blessing of His presence and direction in your life; the blessing of fellowship with Him and effective service for Him. He delights to make the broken whole, to bind up the brokenhearted and bring healing and the promise of abundant life both in this world and in the world to come.

The prophet's message was: "Turn around and go back to that! The Covenant still stands – be loyal to that, be loyal to Yahweh. If you do, you'll receive His blessing; if you don't, you'll receive His cursing." Jesus is the one who now speaks God's final Word to the world. Just like Elisha, it's a word of either healing or destruction. How will you respond to Jesus? This is the most important question you will ever answer because how you respond to Jesus is how you respond to God and the word He will speak to you will be determined by your response to Him.

Christian, we live in a society where it is easy to ask the question, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" But the text is pretty clear that He is still with us in power. So, the only real question left for us to ask is, "where are the Elijah's?" Who is willing to stand in the gap and be the instrument of God's word to the lost and dying world around us? 😊