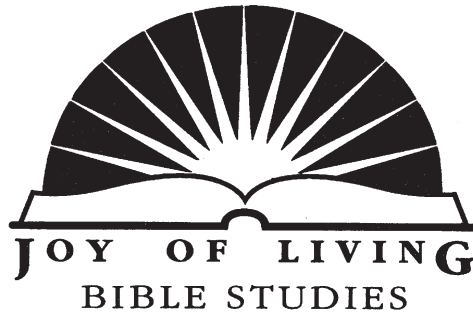


2 Kings Lesson 2



2 Kings Chapters 1-2

Setting: The Northern Kingdom of Israel

As 2 Kings opens, Elijah the Tishbite was serving as God's prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. Elijah was first introduced to us and to Israel in 1 Kings 17. God had sent Elijah to stand against the worship of Baal during the reign of Ahab. He had been given power to shut up the heavens, so there was no rain for three and a half years. At the close of that time, he called down fire from heaven before the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Ahab called him "you troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17), refusing to admit that it was his own wickedness that had caused Israel's troubles.

Ahab died at the end of 1 Kings. Continuing the long line of wicked kings in the northern kingdom of Israel, Ahaziah had succeeded his father Ahab as king. We first met Ahaziah at the end of 1 Kings: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He served and worshiped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had done" (1 Kings 22:52-53).

The Consequences of Sin

The Lord's anger against Ahaziah, as he continued in his father Ahab's wickedness, resulted in several forms of negative consequences:

- Political: "After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel" (2 Kings 1:1). Much earlier, King David had conquered Moab, an area east of the Jordan River. After the northern kingdom of Israel broke away from the southern kingdom of Judah, Israel apparently continued the domination of Moab. Now Moab saw its chance and broke free of subjugation to Israel.
- Economic: Ahaziah joined with King Jehoshaphat of Judah in building ships to go to Tarshish. A prophet of the Lord told Jehoshaphat that because of his alliance with the wicked northern king, the Lord would destroy the ships—"And the ships were wrecked" (2 Chronicles 20:37; see also 1 Kings 22:48-49).
- Personal: Ahaziah fell "through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria" (2 Kings 1:2) and severely injured himself.

This injury provided an opportunity to see where Ahaziah would turn in a crisis. Rather than call on the Lord God of Israel, Ahaziah sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of the Philistine city of Ekron, to see if he would recover from his injury.

The angel of the Lord told the prophet Elijah the Tishbite,¹ "Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?' Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'" (2 Kings 1:3-4).

Whether Ahaziah had previous experience with Elijah we aren't told. But his father Ahab's experiences with the prophet were well known. Since Ahaziah also refused to obey the Lord, he would not have considered consulting Elijah about his injury.

Where we initially turn in times of crisis reveals whom or what we are trusting in. When a little child falls down and gets hurt they usually run to their mother, or to whomever is their main caregiver—the person they rely on to take care of them. When crisis strikes, where do you turn? Is your first reaction to call on the Lord for help, even while you are taking necessary action? Our reactions tell a lot about what is in our heart.

When Ahaziah's messengers returned to him, they said "a man" had sent him a message. After hearing the message and a description of the man—he wore a garment of hair (probably sheepskin or camel hair) and a leather belt around his waist—Ahaziah knew it had to be Elijah. He sent a captain with his company of 50 men to summon Elijah. The captain said to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'" (2 Kings 1:9). To this peremptory, arrogant challenge, Elijah answered, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!"—and it did! The king and his captains didn't learn quickly. Ahaziah sent a second delegation with the same message, and with the same terrifying result.

Because God is patient and longsuffering, and His judgment isn't usually immediate, people—even His own people—tend to forget to show Him the honor and respect that is due to Him. For example, consider how often the Lord's name is taken in vain. It is not uncommon

1. The Lord usually spoke directly to the consciousness of the prophet. The means of revelation may have been changed in this instance as a contrast between the messengers of Ahaziah and the "angel" (which means "messenger") of the Lord. [NIV Study Notes on 2 Kings 1:3]

to hear even young children say, “Oh, my ____.” Matthew 12:34-36 tells us that what is in our heart is revealed by what comes out of our mouth, and that we will be held accountable for everything we say—since it is merely a reflection of who we really are. Pay attention to the words that flow from your mouth. What do they say about your heart?

Now the third captain followed orders and came to Elijah; however, he came humbly, begging for his life and the lives of his men. His attitude showed respect and fear of God’s prophet (and therefore of God). His life and the lives of his men were spared. God is merciful.

The angel of the Lord told Elijah to go with him to see the king, and promised him safety. Elijah went to Ahaziah and repeated the Lord’s message to him. And Ahaziah died, just as Elijah had prophesied. The word of the Lord was proved reliable and unconquerable.

Because Ahaziah didn’t have a son, his brother Joram¹ succeeded him as king of Israel.

Elijah Taken up to Heaven

In 1 Kings 19:16, God had instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to be the one who would eventually succeed him as prophet. Elijah obeyed, and Elisha became a follower of and a servant to Elijah.

Although Israel, as a whole, no longer worshipped and served the Lord, God had told Elijah, “I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). Among these were members of groups referred to as “the company of the prophets”² or sometimes just as “the prophets.” They generally lived together at religious training centers. Their chief study was the law and its interpretation. They were not necessarily prophets as we think of them—speaking messages from God—but they denounced national, family, and personal sin (see 1 Kings 20:35-42; 2 Kings 17:13). Years prior to this time, the first of these groups had been formed by Samuel in Ramah (see 1 Samuel 19:19-20). Now, in 2 Kings, these schools were flourishing at Bethel, Jericho, Gilgal, and elsewhere (see 2 Kings 2:3,5; 4:38; 6:1).

In 2 Kings chapter 2, Elijah and Elisha traveled together from Gilgal toward Bethel and then on to Jericho. It appears that Elijah was visiting, and possibly encouraging, the men who resided at these religious communities one final time.³ Elijah urged Elisha to remain with each group they visited, but Elisha was determined to stay with his master. In both Bethel and Jericho, members of the company of the prophets asked Elisha about Elijah’s imminent departure, but Elisha refused to speak of it. When Elijah and Elisha left for the Jordan, 50 of the company of the prophets at Jericho followed, waiting to see what the Lord would do. At the edge of the river, they witnessed a miracle—Elijah rolled up his cloak and used it to strike the river. Then, just as God had done for Moses at the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:21) and for the Israelites as they crossed the Jordan when they entered

the Promised Land (see Joshua 3:15-16), the waters divided. Elijah and Elisha then crossed over on dry ground.

Knowing that this would be his last day on earth, Elijah asked his servant what he could do for him. Elisha asked to “inherit a double portion of your spirit” (2 Kings 2:9). This request referred to Israelite inheritance laws that assigned a double portion of a father’s possessions to the firstborn son (see Deuteronomy 21:17). That son then carried the responsibility of being the head of that family. And so, Elisha wasn’t asking for a ministry twice as great as Elijah’s. Rather, he was asking for spiritual power far beyond his own capabilities, in order to carry out the responsibilities of succeeding Elijah’s ministry.⁴

Elijah’s reply, “You have asked a difficult thing,” meant that it was not in his own power to grant Elisha’s request. He left the answer to the request in the Lord’s hands, saying, “If you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not” (2 Kings 2:10).

Suddenly, as the two prophets continued on their journey, “a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.” The *NIV Study Notes* say, “The Lord’s heavenly host has accompanied and supported Elijah’s ministry...and now at his departure Elisha is allowed to see it.”⁵

When Elisha saw how Elijah was taken into heaven, he cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” (2 Kings 2:12). Elijah, rather than the wicked king of Israel, had been the Lord’s representative, the true strength of the nation of Israel.⁶ The same words were later used of Elisha, as he lay dying, in 2 Kings 13:14.

What a great reminder to us that God and His angels are always present and working on behalf of His people (see Psalm 34:7). Elijah and Elisha lived before the death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In this passage in 2 Kings, Elisha is encouraged by seeing just a bit of God’s power. We, however, live on the resurrection side of the cross and have the Holy Spirit actually living within us. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are told, “We live by faith, not by sight.” God is continually proving to us through His Word and through what He does in our lives that He is always present and working on our behalf.

Elijah did not experience death—he was taken bodily to heaven, into the presence of God.⁷ This had happened once before in Scripture. In Genesis 5:24 we read, “Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” Enoch was “com-

1. Some Bible versions call him “Jehoram.” See footnote on page 11.

2. In Hebrew they are referred to as “sons of the prophets.” (*NET Bible Notes* on 2 Kings 2:3)

3. *NIV Study Bible Notes* on 2 Kings 2:3.

4. There are various opinions among Bible commentators about what a “double portion of your spirit” means.

5. *NIV Study Notes* on 2 Kings 2:11. In 2 Kings 6:17 Elisha will encourage his frightened servant by asking God to open the servant’s eyes to see, “the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

6. *Ibid*, notes on 2 Kings 2:12.

7. Elijah had not, at this point, finished his work for God. In the New Testament, he and Moses appear with Jesus when Jesus is transfigured (see Matthew 17:3, Mark 9:4, Luke 9:30). Many believe he is one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3—for a period of 1,260 days, God’s two witnesses will testify of God before a world that has sold its allegiance to Satan and Satan’s Antichrist.

mended as one who pleased God” in Hebrews 11:5, and we see from Elijah’s ministry that he, too, pleased God.

Elijah’s life had been one of service to the Lord. Elijah stood for the Lord and spoke His Word before a nation that, as a whole, had turned from God and sold its allegiance to other gods and the wicked practices that accompanied their worship.

We, as God’s people, have been called to speak His truth to those around us. The same Spirit that empowered Elijah—the Holy Spirit—lives in us and empowers us to share His truth (see Acts 1:8). Ask Him to give you the boldness to tell others of His salvation. If you don’t, who will?

Elisha Assumes Elijah’s Ministry

Elijah’s cloak had fallen from him as he was whirled away in the chariot of fire. When Elijah had first called Elisha to succeed him as prophet, Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him (see 1 Kings 19:19), so this cloak had tremendous meaning to Elisha. He now picked up the cloak and went back to the bank of the Jordan River. Just as Elijah had done, Elisha struck the water with the cloak, and once again the river parted. This confirmed Elisha’s succession to Elijah’s ministry, both to himself and to the fifty from the company of the prophets who had witnessed the entire event.

The prophets insisted on sending men to search for Elijah, in case “the Spirit of the Lord has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley” (2 Kings 2:16). Elisha finally gave in to their desire. Of course, they did not find Elijah, as they finally reported to Elisha. He couldn’t resist saying, “Didn’t I tell you not to go?”

Elisha’s Miracles

Elisha’s ministry opened with miracles that established the character of his ministry. His would be a helping ministry to those in need, but also would allow no disrespect for God and His earthly representatives.¹

Elisha was staying in Jericho when the men from the company of the prophets were searching for Elijah. The people of the city asked for his help, because their water was bad and their land was unproductive.

Elisha asked the people to bring him a new bowl with salt in it, which he threw into the spring, saying, “This is what the Lord says: ‘I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive’” (2 Kings 2:21). The salt was not magic—the Lord Himself healed, or purified, the water.

We may pray that a person is healed, and then they are, but we did not heal that person—God did. We may pray for a need, and it may be miraculously met, but we aren’t the ones who met the need—God did. We must always remember that God does the miracles.

Next, Elisha went to Bethel. King Jeroboam of Israel had established this city as one of two religious centers for his kingdom, as he feared the people would return their allegiance to the king of Judah if they went to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. He made two golden calves and set them up in Bethel and in Dan, telling the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28).

In contrast to Elisha’s experience in Jericho, where the people came to Elisha for help and followed his instructions by faith, he ran into quite a different type of attention in Bethel: “As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. ‘Get out of here, baldy!’ they said. ‘Get out of here, baldy!’” (2 Kings 2:23). These boys not only insulted Elisha himself but also the God whom he represented. Elisha called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord, upon which two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. From the number of boys involved, we see that this was not just a couple of youths making stupid comments, but a whole gang of ruffians who viewed the Lord and His representative with contempt.

Covenant Blessings and Curses

Elisha’s first miracle illustrated God’s covenant blessings that would come to all those who looked to Him for help. His second miracle, following the pronouncement of a curse, gave a warning to all of the northern kingdom of Israel of the judgment that would fall on them if they continued in their disobedience and apostasy. Second Chronicles 36:15-16 describes God’s continual efforts to reach His people: “The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.” God’s covenant curses would fall on those who turned away from Him.

Jesus came and established a new covenant with humanity by dying on the cross and shedding His blood for our sin. Those who look to Him for salvation receive God’s covenant blessing, resulting in new and eternal life in Christ. But those who turn away from God and from His Son Jesus, will experience His covenant curse—eternal separation from Him, in “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

Have you accepted Jesus’ gift of salvation? (If you need more information, turn to page 4.) Whom do you know who may still be living under the curse of death? Pray that God will give you the opportunity and the right words at the right time to share His message with them. Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

1. Frank E. Gaebelin, editor. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), notes on 2 Kings 2:19-22.

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the "Challenge" questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the "Personal" questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Commentary on 2 Kings 2.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Commentary on 2 Kings 2 or from your teacher's lecture?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read 2 Kings 3-4, concentrating on 3:1-14.

1.
 - a. What was the spiritual evaluation of the reign of Joram son of Ahab?¹ (2 Kings 3:1-2a)

 - b. What positive action did Joram take? (2 Kings 3:2b)

 - c. How did he continue to lead Israel in apostasy? (2 Kings 3:3; review 1 Kings 12:26-33 for specific information on Jeroboam's sin)

2.
 - a. When Moab rebelled against Israel, what did Joram do? (2 Kings 3:4-7a)

 - b. When Jehoshaphat agreed to help Israel fight Moab, what route did he suggest, and what additional king joined them? (2 Kings 3:7b-9a)

3.
 - a. What problem did the three allied armies run into? (2 Kings 3:9b)

 - b. How did Joram and Jehoshaphat react very differently to this situation? (2 Kings 3:10-12)

4.
 - a. How did Elisha rebuke Joram? (2 Kings 3:13a)

1. Some Bible versions call him "Jehoram." See footnote on page 11.

5. Personal: What consequences of turning away from God have you seen in your own life (perhaps in the past), or in the lives of people around you?

Fourth Day: Review 2 Kings 3-4, concentrating on 4:1-7.

1. Who came to Elisha, and what crisis did she face? (2 Kings 4:1)
2. Challenge: Read Exodus 21:2-4; Leviticus 25:39-41; and Deuteronomy 15:1-11. Although not the ideal, but because of the hardness of people's hearts, God allowed servitude and slavery, but He gave guidelines to govern it. From these verses do you believe the creditor had the right to take the widow's sons?

3. How did God, through Elisha, meet the widow's need? (2 Kings 4:2-7)

4. No matter what our circumstances are, or what problems we face, God will meet our needs if we will only trust and obey Him. What do you learn about this in the following verses?

Matthew 6:26-33

Ephesians 3:20-21

1 Peter 5:6-7

5. Elisha, as a man of God, was just as available to help this poor widow as he had been available to help the kings in 2 Kings 3. Read James 2:1-9. How are believers today to be like Elisha in this way?

6. Personal: The woman of Shunem, in her desire to help Elisha, “a holy man of God” (2 Kings 4:9), used her gifts to promote the work of God. New Testament believers are also to do this, “so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (see 1 Peter 4:9-11). Hospitality, opening your home and life to others, is something anyone can do.¹ How is the Lord calling you to promote His work?

Sixth Day: Review 2 Kings 3-4, concentrating on 4:38-44.

1. a. Elisha could have remained comfortably in Shunem, but where did he go instead, and what was the situation there? (2 Kings 4:38a)

b. In spite of the situation in that region, what did Elisha instruct his servant to do for these prophets? (2 Kings 4:38b)
2. a. What did one of the prophets do, and what was the result? (2 Kings 4:39-40)

b. How did God work through Elisha to make the stew edible? (2 Kings 4:41)
3. Challenge: Flour, in and of itself, does not remove poison from food. Compare this to the miracle 2 Kings 2:21. Why do you believe the flour made the stew edible?
4. a. What did the man from Baal Shalishah bring to Elisha? (2 Kings 4:42a)

b. What was Elisha's servant's objection when he was commanded to give it to the prophets to eat? (2 Kings 4:42b-43a)
5. a. What did the Lord promise through Elisha? Was the promise fulfilled? (2 Kings 4:43b-44)

b. Challenge: How was this miracle similar to the work of Jesus in Matthew 14:15-21?
6. Personal: God has promised to supply all the needs of His people, both physical and spiritual (see Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:19). Our responsibility is to trust Him and obey His commands. What are some things for which you need to trust the Lord today? Perhaps you struggle with a personal weakness or failure, with physical or financial needs, or with a difficult relationship. Do you believe that God is able to meet these needs? If you aren't sure, you may want to pray as the man prayed in Mark 9:24, “...I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

1. For ideas, see *You Can Do It Too! Opening Your Heart and Home to Share God's Love*, by Doris W. Greig, available from Joy of Living.