

2 Kings 1-2

The conclusion of the Reign of Ahaziah

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab ruled for less than one year. The purpose of this opening story is to confirm that he was just like his parents in their disregard for God and his hate for his prophet, Elijah. The king had an accident in his palace and fell off a balcony, presumably, and so he sent messengers to Ekron, to inquire of Baal-Zebub. This name means The exalted god or the god of the flies – dung god. A form of this name is picked up by the Pharisees in the New Testament when they accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Ahaziah wants the god to predict the future and tell him if he will recover from his injuries. The Angel of the Lord (the messenger of the Lord) appears to Elijah to intercept the king's messengers to tell him that he will not get out of his bed but will die from his injuries.

When the king heard about this mysterious man who gave them this negative prophesy, he asked for a description and they described him as wearing a coat of hair and a leather belt – the king immediately recognized him as Elijah the Tishbite. This verse becomes an important description that will be picked up in the gospels as John the Baptist is described as being a man with a coat of hair and a leather belt. John will come in the spirit of Elijah and this similarity in appearance would have been immediately recognized by the Jewish leaders. Just as Ahaziah should have believed and repented at Elijah's words so too the religious leaders of Jesus' time should have believed and repented at John's words of judgment.

Ahaziah does not believe but sends a captain and 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah. Elijah calls down fire two times to demonstrate that he is indeed the prophet of the Lord. This reminds us of the fire that came down at Mount Carmel to prove that God is the true God. Ahaziah responds just like Ahab his father – instead of belief and repentance – he wants to kill the prophet. Finally, the third time, the Lord tells Elijah to go with the captain to the king and tell him in person that he will die. And this marks the end of the Ahab-Ahaziah reign. Joram will become the next king.

Now the text turns to Elijah who will turn his ministry over to Elisha. The Lord has made it clear that Elijah will be taken from the community of prophets and taken up into heaven. Elisha is stuck to his teacher like glue so that he can be there when he is taken. Remember in 1 Kings 19 Elijah was told to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah seems to be testing his disciple by telling him to stay behind, but he refuses to leave his master. They are traveling from Gilgal, in the Jordan Valley up to Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. Then

they travel down to Jericho back down in the Jordan Valley. It is here that they finally travel to the Jordan River and Elijah uses his cloak to strike the water and part the river so that they can cross on dry ground.

These events are intended to show that Elisha is the successor to Elijah just as Joshua was the successor to Moses. Elisha was previously anointed to succeed his master (1 Kings 19:19–21), just as Joshua had been divinely ordained through the office of the priest to succeed Moses (Num. 27:18–23). The miraculous crossing of the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8, 14; cf. Josh. 3:11–13); the presence at Gilgal (cf. 2 Kings 2:1; Josh. 4:19), Bethel (2 Kings 2:2, 23; cf. Josh. 7:2), and Jericho (2 Kings 2:4, 15; cf. Josh. 2:1); and the ascension of Elijah at the same location where Moses died (2 Kings 2:9; cf. Deut. 34:1) all show that Elijah and Elisha are the equivalent of Moses and Joshua in their own time. Josephus exploited this connection, linking the ignorance of the burial place of Moses (Deut. 34:6) with the mysterious end of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11).¹⁵ The motif of Elijah as a second Moses found in his flight to Sinai (1 Kings 19:11–13) is further developed in his departure. **(from NIV Application Commentary: pg. 383)**

Elisha asked Elijah for “a double portion of his spirit.” We tend to think of this as twice as much of the spirit. But as we know from the Bible, the Spirit is not a force but a person. You can’t have more or less of a person. The double portion refers to the traditions of inheritance. The master (father) is leaving so Elisha is asking to inherit his place as the leading prophet as if he was the oldest son who would inherit a double portion of his father’s estate. So Elijah basically said that if you are faithful and stay with me then you will receive what you have asked for.

The Chariot of Fire comes to take him away and Elijah is taken up in a Whirlwind. Notice the presence of wind and fire. These are both signs of the Spirit. Acts 2 tells us that the Holy Spirit came on the apostles with tongues of fire and the sound of a rushing mighty wind. This also reminds us of the Exodus and the cloud of fire and the wind that parted the Red Sea. Elijah being taken without dying put him in a unique position in scripture. It is prophesied that he will return before the coming of the Lord – Malachi 4. Jesus indicated that John the Baptist “was” Elijah or in the spirit of Elijah and the book of Revelation speaks of two witnesses (ch 11) one of which may be Elijah.

Elisha picked up the cloak (or mantle) of Elijah which fell from the sky. It was his symbol of authority, much like Moses’ staff. It was placed on Elisha’s shoulders when he was called in 1 Kings 19 and now he will use it to part the Jordan River just like Elijah had done. This was a confirmation to him and to the other prophets that he had taken the office of the master prophet. The other prophets insist in looking for Elijah just in case God picked him up and set him down somewhere else. Elisha is confident that he was gone, but their actions are further confirmation that he was miraculously taken into heaven.

Elisha is staying in Jericho and the water supply seems to be contaminated and is causing infertility to the ground or to the people (reproductively). They ask for his help and he puts

salt into the water to make it pure – thus healing the waters. It is noteworthy that Moses first opened the Red Sea then healed the waters. Jericho was not to be rebuilt and Ahab, the king of Israel, was judged for doing it. This miracle may be the LORD now removing his judgment from the city.

This last story of the confirmation of Elisha's authority and position is troubling. He was leaving the Jordan Valley and ascending into the Hill Country of Ephraim where Bethel is, when a mob of young men/boys came out to make fun of him. They are calling him "baldy." Why is this an issue? Well, he has inherited the coat of hair that belonged to Elijah and these people seem to be saying that he really does not have the power/spiritual authority of the old man. Even though he has the hairy coat, he is really bald or powerless. So he called down a curse and two bears came out of the woods and attacked 42 of the young men. Don't deny the power of the Lord's anointed one.

Elisha then crosses the entire country of Israel from east to west and ends up at Mt. Carmel, where Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal. He then returns to Samaria to stand as a check against the actions and authority of the Israelite kings. The Prophet has taken up his office... watch out!