

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 17, Part 2

2 Kings 1-2, Part 2

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We turn now to the second portion of our study today, Elijah and Elisha, chapter two, verses one through 11. Again, like so many of these narratives, it is a fascinating story with a number of interesting imponderables, some questions for which there are no obvious answers. So, we see when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.

Elijah said to Elisha, stay here. The Lord has sent me to Bethel. But Elisha said, as surely as the Lord lives and you live, I will not leave you.

So, they went down to Bethel. Now, before we talk about that conversation, let's look for a moment at the map. There's some question of where the Gilgal that they're talking about is located.

Historically, Gilgal was located right here. It was the place where the tribes camped during the receiving of the land. Now, I don't say conquest.

We've talked about this a bit before. They didn't conquer the land. They were given it by Yahweh.

Part of the evidence is that they would go out on military raids, breaking certain confederations of cities, and then return.

They were not occupying the land in the book of Joshua. They are receiving it and they're breaking the power structures. Gilgal, though, is down in the Jordan Valley.

Bethel is up here on the central ridge. Normally, you would say they went up from Gilgal to Bethel. But if you caught it there in the text, the text says they went down to Bethel.

So, it's possible that this is not the Gilgal of Joshua, but it's another location somewhere here on the central ridge. We don't know for certain. If it is Gilgal, the historical Gilgal of Joshua, that'll be interesting.

And we'll talk more about that in just a moment. So, they're at Gilgal. And Elijah says the Lord has told me to go up to Bethel.

I want you to stay here. Elijah says, Elisha says, no way. I'm not going to leave you.

As we discover when they arrive at Bethel, the community of prophets there says to Elisha, do you know your master is going to die today? He's going to be taken from you today. And Elisha says, I know that. Shut up.

So, I suspect there were other times in their relationship when Elijah said to Elisha, stay here. I've got to go over there for a while. And Elisha would say, okay, but not today.

Not today. Now, the first question is, why did Elijah tell Elisha to stay there? And he repeats it three times. Three times, they get to Bethel, and he says, stay here.

Elisha says, no way. They get to Jericho. Elisha says, stay here.

Elisha says, no way. What's going on? Well, the Bible doesn't explain it. Therefore, we need to be careful about our suggestions.

But here's what I think. I think this was a test. How committed was Elisha? How committed was he to this ministry that had been given to his master and was now going to be handed off to him? Was he willing not to give up, not to hang back? Did he understand, and I think he did, that what was going to happen was going to be a real welding of their two ministries into one?

So again, we've got prophetic insight going on here. This is the challenge for you and me. When the going gets tough, when the questions are unanswered, will we say, I'm going on? I'm hanging on.

I'm keeping on. If that was the case, if it was a test, then Elisha passed it with flying colors. I mentioned the community of prophets a moment ago.

They show up again at Jericho. The Hebrew says the sons of the prophets. Almost certainly, these are not Elijah and Elisha's family members.

Sons is used very broadly, and it refers to a class of people. So, almost certainly, the sons of the prophets are probably younger prophets, but they're in the class of prophets. Now, the interesting thing is we only see this group during the ministry of Elijah and Elisha.

As the introduction in your study guide says, they only show up in 1 Kings 20 verse 35 when Ahab, unfortunately, spared Ben-Hadad's life. Again, we ask why? Why only in this narrative? And again, we have to say the Bible doesn't answer the question. So, we've got to be a little careful.

But I suspect that God gave these two men this support group in this lonely battle where they are ranged against the royal power of Israel. I suspect that these sons of

the prophets, this prophetic community, were given to Elijah and Elisha to support them. You remember that Elisha when he was dealing with deadly depression, was sure he was the only one left.

And God said, no, you're not. There are 7,000 who are not left. How often in the ministry when we hear stories of burnout and dig into the story, we find the person is without a support group.

They're without friends. They're alone in the battle. And as you've heard, coal taken out of the fire very quickly burns out.

So, what this says to us is that you need a support group. You need someone with whom you can pray. You need someone to whom you can complain.

You need someone who is at your back. And I think that's what was going on here with the sons of the prophets. So, Elijah and Elisha go.

Now notice, if Gilgal is the historic Gilgal, interesting, they're beginning at the place where the tribes were congregated in a unity of faith to receive God's gift. From Gilgal, they went to Bethel. Bethel, the place where Jacob had met God and the place where now there is a golden idol of Yahweh.

From Bethel, they went to Jericho. Jericho is the place where Joshua led them in their first victory in receiving the land. From Jericho to Jordan, the first miracle of entering the land occurred.

And as the story tells us, he struck the water with his cloak, and the waters divided, and they crossed on dry land. What are we doing? We are, in fact, reiterating the story of the entry into the land, the story of the beginning of the nation of Israel. And, of course, they crossed the river.

And where did they end up then? On the plains of Moab. Elijah is, in many ways, a be careful now, the reincarnation of Moses. Now, I do not mean that in the sense in which Hinduism means it.

I mean simply that, and probably a better way of saying it, he's a reiteration of Moses. And you remember who were the two who visited with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? Moses and Elijah. As I mentioned when we were talking about Elijah's running from Jezebel, there are those who feel that God basically said to Elijah, okay, you failed, appoint your successor, get out of the way.

Well, that's not the way the story develops. And that's certainly not the implication of Elijah's meeting with Jesus. What we have here is what God did in starting this nation in a political sense.

Clearly, he started the nation with Abraham. But in the political geographic sense, this is when the nation started. And that was with Moses.

Now, with Elijah and the continuing ministry of Elisha, we're restarting. We're starting over again. So, the moment comes, and Elijah now says, not get out of here, go away.

I want to disappear alone. No, he says, what can I do for you before I'm taken from you? And this is Elisha's shining hour. He says I want to be your successor in the spirit.

As I say in the introduction, when Elisha asks for a double portion, he's not saying, as some have said, well, he wants to be twice the man Elijah was. No, not at all. In ancient times, when a man died, his estate was divided into equal portions.

His wife and each of the other children got one portion each. But the firstborn son got two portions, a double portion. That's what Jacob was asking for from Esau, your birthright.

He was asking for the double portion of the estate. So, Elisha is saying, oh, make me your firstborn son in this regard, in regard to your power. I want to be your firstborn son in regard to your power.

No, he didn't say that. Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit. Oh my, what a vital distinction.

Too often, we want the power of the spirit, or we want the gifts of the spirit, or we even want the fruit of the spirit, but we don't want the spirit. You've heard it said, you've heard me say it. This thing of salvation is about a relationship.

It's not about a position. It's not about standing. It's about a relationship.

A relationship in which we are brought into the saving arms of our Father. Because of the work of the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, Elisha says, I want your spirit.

I want to be your son in regard to the spirit that has been upon you all these years. Oh, friends, that's what we want. If the spirit doesn't give us spirit power, so what? If he doesn't give us this gift or that, so what? I think I can say he will give us his fruit.

But that's the key. That's the key. And Elisha says, you've asked a difficult thing.

Because you see, the Holy Spirit is not a commodity that can be passed off or passed on. The Holy Spirit is a person. Personal relationships are never easily managed or controlled.

So, the question is not, can I give you my spirit? The question is, are you such a person with whom the spirit can come into a living, saving relationship? He said I don't know about that. But I'll tell you this. If you see me when I'm taken from you, it'll be yours.

That'll be the evidence that your sight, your vision, is the spiritual vision that the spirit gives. Can we see the world as God sees it? Can we see persons as God sees them? Can we see issues as God sees them? Oh, oh, this is what we need. This is what you and I need.

To see with the eyes of God because we are in the grip of his spirit. These days, people wonder, well, are they going to come back to church? We've had coming up on a year of stress, closed churches, and sharply reduced meeting areas and meeting times. Are they going to come back? And the question in my mind is, are we going to use the present crisis to drive us into the arms of God? Are we going to use the present crisis to say, oh, I need your spirit, and I'll pay any price personally?

That's the challenge, folks. I think that nominal Christians are going to fall by the wayside. And those who remain will be those who are willing to pay the price.

Who says I want to be filled with the spirit of Jesus? I don't want to be just on the periphery. I don't want to be just on the rim.

I want to be at the very center of his life. So, indeed, that's exactly what happened. My father, my father, I've seen the chariots and horsemen of Israel.

That's not Elijah. But what he saw was that the real power in the universe was not the army of Israel or the army of Syria. The power in the universe is the army of God who has revealed himself through this fallible person, Elijah.

And so, the cloak is left behind. The mantle, the mantle that was thrown over Elisha's shoulders years before, that mantle. Elisha has torn his own in grief at the loss of his master.

And now there's a new cloak to pick up. Again, what a wonderful set of images here. Now, why did Elijah not die? Why is he translated? Again, I'm answering questions that the Bible doesn't specifically answer.

So, you have to take it with a grain of salt. But I think it is precisely to say, there is no end to this ministry. The ministry of Elijah and Elisha is a single ministry.

And Elisha is translated out, leaving his cloak behind. And Elijah is translated out, leaving his cloak behind. And Elisha picks up that cloak.

And he says, very interestingly, where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah? And the water's part. And the sons of the prophets see it and say, oh my, the spirit of Elijah is upon Elisha. What spirit are you looking for? Don't look for power.

Don't look for blessing. Don't even look for fruit. Look for him.

Make him your goal, your desire, and allow him to do whatever he wishes to do in you.

And let those standing by say, ah, ah, the spirit of God is on her. The Spirit of God is on him. Let that be what is said of us.