

## 2nd Kings Chapters 1-2 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "How God Judges Us Part 2". I admit that seems like a bad movie title for a sequel. I use that title as you may recall that God's judgment was the title of my last lesson. What I discovered is that same judgment theme continues here as we transition from 1st Kings to 2nd Kings. As I like to state, the only reason "Kings" is in two books is because it was too thick to keep as one scroll. There is no significant ending to 1st Kings and it continues into 2nd Kings.
2. With that said, it is best if I summarize the main events of these two chapters and hopefully that will explain why I picked the title that I did.
  - a) The final chapter of 1st Kings ends with the death of the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel named Ahab. 2nd Kings opens with a "footnote" that a country called Moab, which is near Israel rebelled against Ahab. That fact won't be discussed until Chapter 3. The son of Ahab is now the king of Israel. He accidentally gets severely injured and then he sends messengers to go consult a foreign god to see if he will recover. While the messengers are traveling to do this, Elijah is somehow told to give a message to the king's messengers to say that because he did not consult the God of Israel for help, he will die from his injury.
  - b) You may recall the queen mother put a death sentence on Elijah. Now the king (her son) sent messengers to go have Elijah arrested. Elijah responds in effect, "If I'm truly a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and kill these men." Yes, it did. Then the king sends another fifty men to go arrest Elijah. This second group gets the same fate. A third group is then sent. The leader of the third group begs Elijah for his life and the life of his men. Therefore, this 3rd group returns to the king with Elijah to effectively repeat God's command for the king to repent or else he would die from this injury. This king did not repent and died for his sin of avoiding God as the leader over His people. Bottom line is we have a lot of judgment of people so far in these chapters.
  - c) Then we have Chapter 2, which is mostly about the transfer of leadership in the "office" or duty of prophets from Elijah to Elisha. As I have stated before if you get these two similar names mixed up, just remember in the English word "Jesus", the opening "J" comes before the ending letter "S" so the older EliJah comes before EliSah. It's silly, but it works.
  - d) The point here is Elisha wants to be the next head prophet after Elijah. After some drama about them staying together, Elijah says in effect if you see God take me up into heaven in a dramatic way, then know that He has chosen you to be the next head prophet for Israel. Then of course we see Elijah taken up into heaven in a dramatic way. By the same method Elijah called down for God to send down fire to accept his offering several chapters back, so fire came down to take Elijah to heaven.
    - i) That too, is God's judgment, albeit in a positive result for Elijah.
  - e) After a few verses about the other prophets of God looking for Elijah and not finding him, the other prophets of God now accept Elisha as the new head prophet. God now allows Elisha to perform a small miracle to validate his role. It involved using a jar and some salt in order to heal a water source that those prophets depend upon to sustain themselves.
  - f) The final story in this section is about a bunch of young men who curse Elisha for his role as a prophet. The short version here is they get judged by God (who allowed two bears to attack and hurt them) for cursing out who God has called to be a prophet. I've got more to say about this incident, but I'll save that for the lesson itself. The point is the chapter ends with more judgment by God against those who would ignore what God has designated in order to help His people. In other words, we have more judgment here.
  - g) It may also help to realize in effect that 2nd Kings is a book of judgment. By Chapter 17 of 2nd Kings, this nation will no longer exist as they get judged for collectively turning from God with their lives. By the end of the book, the Southern Kingdom of Judah will also be destroyed for a lack of obedience to God. In summary, we have a lot of judgment here.

3. OK John, we get the idea that these chapters have a lot of judgment. Some eternally good (like the death of Elijah), some eternally bad like the death of Ahab's son Ahaziah, and the death of the soldiers sent to arrest Elijah. We also get "injury judgment" by the men who taunted Elisha. Yes there is a lot of judgment. The question is why should we care and how does any of this affect us as believers in Jesus? The answer is that God is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow and we should be aware as just as God can and does judge people back then, so He does it today.
  - a) Let me explain this concept another way: How long do you plan on living? Maybe eighty or over 100 years? What makes any of us think that we're guaranteed to live that long? If we've decided to completely trust in Jesus for our salvation, then whether we realize it or not, we've turned our lives over to Him. Among many things, it means the length of our life is now His problem and not ours. My point is that if God's in charge of our lives, it is His business how and when He will judge us just like the characters in this story.
  - b) What I'm trying to get across here is what is to be learned here is not how God judges a bunch of people who lived long ago. It is to understand how God judges us. In fact the judgment is far more than eternal. It is about how we live our lives. We get characters in this story who repent and have their lives spared (the third set of soldiers sent to Elijah) and we get people injured but not killed (young men attacked by a bear near the end of the second chapter).
  - c) So are you saying, trust God or a bear will get us? Not exactly. I'm saying that God has called us to be a witness for Him. While we are saved by faith alone, a natural question to ask is "What are we doing with that faith?" How are we using our faith in God in order to make a difference for Him in this world? That's the tough question we have to consider as we go through these two chapters to avoid God judging over lives.
4. With that convicting introduction completed, it's time to start the verse by verse comments:
5. Verse 1: After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel.<sup>2</sup> Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury."
  - a) My first question is what does Verse 1 have to do with Verse 2? I suspect it is just a time marker. It's like saying, when did this king die? It was around the time that Israel had to deal with a war with the nation of Moab. As to the war with Moab, we'll deal with that in Chapter 3. Here in Chapter 1 the focus now is on the latest king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the son of Ahab named Ahaziah.
  - b) You may recall from the last chapter in 2nd Kings that Ahab died in battle fighting against a nation called Edom. History records that his son Ahaziah reigned for 12 years. We now get this story about an injury he suffered as that accidental injury ends up being his death sentence. Recall that Ahaziah's mother is Jezebel, who was not an Israelite and forbid the Israelites from worshipping God. With that type of mother influencing her son, it should not surprise us that in Verse 2 the king decides to go consult some foreign god now that he's badly injured. I'm not saying for sure his mother told him to do this. My point is as he was raised to worship foreign gods, so he acts the way he was raised, that's it.
6. Verse 3: But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "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?'"<sup>4</sup> Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!' " So Elijah went.
  - a) The last we read of Elijah the prophet, was in 1st Kings, Chapter 21 when he told previous King Ahab that he was going to die soon, so Ahab better repent and he did. Now here we are two chapters later, and God is telling Elijah to tell the new king (again 12 years later) that he will die and not recover from the injury. The reason he's going to die isn't because the injury was fatal, but because he refused to trust in the true God. I'm willing to bet that this king knew how his father repented after Elijah warned his father and he refused to do likewise and that's why the death sentence was announced here.

- b) It's important to understand that this was not a face-to-face confrontation. Remember that the king was sending messengers to the priests of a foreign god to see if the king will live through his injury. Elijah intercepts these messengers and tells them to tell the king what is really going to happen to him no matter what the foreign priests say.
  - c) OK John, this is fairly interesting history. Why should I care? Consider this from Elijah's perspective: He was called to be a witness to others of the existence and ruling of the true God over this world. His job was in effect to draw people close to the true God in order to guide their lives. Turning from that God causes eternal death. How different is that from what God calls us to do as Christians? Suppose we think, I'm too shy to go talk to others about Jesus. My response is ask God for boldness. I'm not saying we need to tell everyone we meet about Jesus and share the gospel message with them. I am saying we should live a life where we care about others more than ourselves and that lifestyle will causes others to talk to us about have to live a life differently than how they are living. There will come times when God will lead us to speak to certain people just as Elijah was called to do here.
  - d) In the meantime, time to get back to the story. In case you care, the foreign god that this king chose to go consult is one of the god's of the Philistines. The term Baal, which was used to describe the local foreign deity of that region, is actually describing a number of gods of that area. The term "Baal" can refer to one's Lord (master) of one's life. The point here is this king of Israel was choosing to seek out the god of the Philistines for his life. With that bit of trivia out of my system, its time for the next verse.
7. Verse 5: When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, "Why have you come back?"
- a) Apparently the time frame that the messengers were gone indicated to the king that they did not make it to their destination. Give the messengers a little credit here for their guts. They just disobeyed a direct order from the king in order to pass on this message from the main prophet of the Israelite gods. The point is these messengers feared God more than they feared the king's command and returned to give him Elijah's message.
8. Verse 6: "A man came to meet us," they replied. "And he said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you and tell him, "This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending men to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" ' "
- a) The guards repeat back the story. I believe Elijah's little speech is repeated here to show us that the king did get the message. I also am convinced the God loves to show off when people are obedient to Him. Both Elijah and the messenger's did God's will here, and that is why the basic text is repeated a second time here. With that said, the king is now aware that the God of Israel has placed judgment on him. You may recall from the last chapters of 1st Kings that his father repented when he heard of God's condemnation of him and at that point God held up his punishment on the king's father. With the son here, he had no interest in turning to God even after this announcement. That is the main reason why the king will soon die here and judgment occurred.
9. Verse 7: The king asked them, "What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?" <sup>8</sup> They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."
- a) The point here is the king realized that Elijah was back on the scene and he was the one who gave the king this message like the one he gave to his father. The description of what the man looked like was the key clue here.
  - b) A lot of the commentaries on this verse go out of the way to point out the literal Hebrew here describes Elijah as a "man of hair". Some translations say he was very hairy. Other English translations like this one emphasize garment of hair. The point is the Hebrew can be translated either way. Personally I think it was "garment of hair" and John the Baptist modeled his mode of dress after Elijah. In the Gospel accounts John, wore both a hairy garment and a leather belt in the same manner as described here.

- c) With that said, the main point here is that the king realized that the man who delivered the message is the same one who his mother, queen Jezebel put a death sentence on many years ago. I'm pretty sure that death sentence is still on the books, which is why the king reacted the way he did in the next verse.
10. Verse 9: Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!' " <sup>10</sup> Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.
- a) Here is another fairly famous little bible scene. Upon realizing that Elijah was around, the king sent fifty soldiers along with their captain for the purpose of having Elijah arrested. The reason for so many soldiers is so Elijah would not get away. These soldiers must have realized they were being sent to go arrest a prophet of God. This is a classic case where one has to decide whether or not they were going to do the right thing by disobeying a direct order from a commanding officer. Elijah's only response to these men showing up on the scene is "If I'm truly a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume the fifty men and the captain." God then responds to Elijah's request and just as fire came down and consumed the offering some chapters back, so fire comes down again here and all of the soldiers die here on the spot.
- b) The question to ponder here is, was it right for God to judge these soldiers the way that He did? After all, they were just obeying a direct order. I can think of movies off the top of my head in effect that ask that same question: A fairly recent example is "A Few Good Men" where two marines were on trial and found guilty of obeying a direct order but still failing to do the right thing in that situation. My point here is simply that there are times in life where we may have to disobey a direct order say if it's to do something that violates God's laws. For example we should not steal or murder even if we're given a direct order to do so. Yes we may have to suffer the consequences for being disobedient but obeying God is obviously more important in such a situation.
- c) Speaking of obeying God rather than men, these 50 men and their captain just died here as they refused to believe in God and rather focused on the king's orders. That is why we read of judgment here. Speaking of judgment, time to move on to the next group:
11. Verse 11: At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, this is what the king says, 'Come down at once!' " <sup>12</sup> "If I am a man of God," Elijah replied, "may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.
- a) The point here is the king heard about how these 50 men were killed. You would think the king might have repented after such a dramatic event. Instead he sends out another 50 men and a leader and says, "You guys go arrest him." Personally, if I was part of this second group, I would seriously consider disobeying that order. Here we have another situation of people obeying men rather than God and this group suffers the same fate as the first one.
- b) A question one can ask here is, "Is it fair that all these men has to suffer just because the king refused to believe in God? My answer is I trust in a God that will judge all people fairly for what they did. Like the marines in the movie "A Few Good Men", they were not condemned for disobeying a direct order. They were found guilty for not realizing that the right thing to do was to disobey the direct order. That's the main point in the movie as well as the point here. Bottom line is more judgment occurred here in these verses.
- c) It may help to keep in mind the big picture here: God is trying to get all of Israel to turn back to Him as their god. By these dramatic and public demonstrations God is showing who is really in power over his people: God Himself and not the king of the moment.
- d) Now it's time for the next 50 to try again. Luckily the leader of the next group did better.

12. Verse 13: So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. "Man of God," he begged, "please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants!" <sup>14</sup> See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!"
  - a) It wouldn't be one of my bible lessons without my "loose translations": The leader of this third group of fifty soldiers says in effect, "I may be a soldier, but I'm not ready to die as to disobey God. Yes I was sent here as a direct order. However, I realize that you Elijah are a prophet of God and I want to do the right thing." Notice that the captain and these fifty men as well as the king of Israel was aware of all the facts that happened to this point.
  - b) With that said, let's read Elijah's response:
13. Verse 15: The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.
  - a) To state the obvious, Elijah didn't know what to do. This captain is willing to recognize Elijah as a prophet of God. This captain is willing to trust in God. Yet I'm sure that Elijah truly feared the wrath of this king. After all the king just sent two groups to kill Elijah as stated in the earlier verses. Here God sends a message to Elijah to go with the men and don't be afraid of dying either by these men or by the king himself. You may recall from earlier lessons that Elijah was still human and had fears of dying like everyone else. God had to deal with Elijah in his fear as Elijah ran away from God in 1st Kings Chapter 19.
  - b) The point for you and me is I find that God is always willing to work with us at whatever level of fear we have at the present moment. God likes to say to us, "I am well aware of what you have to deal with at the moment. Keep trusting Me and I'll guide you through this situation for My glory". That's what God is saying to Elijah here and that is what He is saying to you and me as we go through our own lives.
  - c) The bottom line here is that Elijah doesn't call down for fire again, spares the lives of this last group and agrees to go with them to see the king. By Elijah agreeing for "Group 3" he got the message to the king that he is a man of God and not to be taken lightly because he is trusting in God for his life. With that said, we're ready for the confrontation between Elijah and the king.
14. Verse 16: He told the king, "This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" <sup>17</sup> So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken.
  - a) Recall that the king is in bed due to some injury he sustained to start the chapter. In effect Elijah just repeats the message that he gave to start this chapter: You king are going to die because you refuse to trust in the God of the Israelites. Recall that God spared the life of his father Ahab after he repented. Also realize the current king was now aware of the fire consuming his troops, so in effect God is giving this king every opportunity to turn to the God of Israel with his life. Yet because this king refuses to change, judgment day is here.
  - b) Ok John, you are preaching to the choir here. We trust in God. Why do we have to know all of this stuff? From the believers' perspective, the key is to read this from Elijah's point of view and realize that God has called us to tell others of His existence and His love for people and rescue them from a dying world. Yes but we don't get balls of fire coming as evidence of His existence. True, but we get something better: His word. That is why we have these stories to share of His existence to a lost a dying world. Because judgment is coming for all people God asks us in effect, "You believe in Me? Great, now what are you doing about it?" That's the issue that all of us must face.
15. Verse 17 (continued): Because Ahaziah had no son, Joram succeeded him as king in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah. <sup>18</sup> As for all the other events of Ahaziah's reign, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?
  - a) The chapter ends in the king's death and his brother takes over as king.

- b) What these final verses indicate is that Ahaziah the king didn't have any sons. That's why his brother Joram is now the king. For you history buffs, this is actually a confusing little moment in Israelite history as both the king of the Northern Kingdom and the king of the Southern Kingdom have the same name. Sometimes English translations such as the case here, spell the two names differently to keep them straight.
  - c) Like I've said a number of times in the past few lessons, I don't believe God is interested in us memorizing names as much as He is in us learning what these stories are teaching us. Here once again it is how judgment is coming. The point here is the king got judged by God for failing to learn from his past. Hopefully those of us trusting in Jesus' complete payment for all sins don't have to worry about that. What we should be concerned about is whether or not we are a good witness for Him so we can use our time wisely and God won't take away our own ministry opportunities like he did this king over Israel.
  - d) With that said, we're ready for more judgment in Chapter 2.
16. Chapter 2, Verse 1: When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.
- a) Here the scene changes from the king's palace to a discussion between Elijah and Elisha. The key point here is somehow God made it clear to Elijah that his life on earth is about to end and God is going to take him to heaven. Apparently this is public knowledge enough that Elisha is aware of it too. You may recall from 1st Kings (19:4) that Elijah asked God at a low moment in his life for God to take his life now as Elijah felt he couldn't handle being a prophet any more. God also told Elijah at one point to go anoint the next king of Israel as well as the king of the neighboring country of Aram. (1st Kings 19:15-17.) My point is just that Elijah never completed that mission. Maybe God is saying to Elijah in effect, OK, I'll grant what you want and end your time as a prophet for me.
    - i) I state all of this as in the issue of judgment, we always have the option of telling God, "we've had enough, have someone else take over, I'm burnt out or I'm tired of what all of this work cost me". What we have to remember is that if God has called us to do something he also will provide us the strength and ability to carry out that command. However, if we still say no, God will work on our level either to restore our faith or have someone else do what it is He desires to be done.
  - b) The next point of these verses, is we read of Elijah discouraging Elisha to be a prophet. It is as if Elijah, who is much older saying to Elisha, "You have no idea what you are getting yourself into by asking to be my replacement. Your life will be in danger. You may be at the point of near death and have to depend upon animals to feed you. Yes you'll be used by God, but consider the cost before you say you will not leave me."
    - i) So does this mean God wants us to discourage others from getting involved in any sort of ministry work due to the cost? Of course not. But at the same time we do owe it to others to explain to them what is the true cost of being a disciple of Jesus. To put it simply, it costs us nothing and everything at the same time. It means we no longer desire for our will, but His will for our lives. It means we put God and other's needs before our own. It is in effect the only way to live as it is the greatest purpose one can have for living, but one also has to realize the cost of discipleship.
    - ii) The bottom line here is that Elisha either gets it or doesn't care and still agrees to go follow Elijah up to whatever point God decides to take him away.
17. Verse 3: The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," Elisha replied, "but do not speak of it."
- a) The point here is that other prophets were aware that Elijah's ministry is to end soon. Still Elisha says to these other prophets, "It's not proper to speak of death before it happens."

- b) To say it another way, Elijah is depressed enough as it is about this. Don't say anything to him about it. He's well aware of what is going to happen and so am I. So let us be quiet about, do what God has called us to do and watch Him work in our lives on His timing.
18. Verse 4: Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho." And he replied, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went to Jericho.
- a) In the meantime, Elijah is still trying to discourage Elisha from following him to be his replacement. As I stated a bit ago in 1st Kings 19:16, God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his replacement. Now that Elisha wants to follow Elijah to learn from him, Elijah is still trying to discourage him. I suspect that Elijah is discouraged by the fact that he knew his time was about to end soon and didn't want anyone to have to go through what he has been through. Bottom line is Elisha ignored Elijah's request to stop and they both went together to the city of Jericho. If you don't know this is a city on the eastern edge of Israel and borders the Jordan River. With that said, let's read on.
19. Verse 5: The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," he replied, "but do not speak of it."
- a) When they get to Jericho, apparently there are other prophets of God who live there and they too are aware that Elijah is about to die soon. Like he said to other prophets earlier, we read of Elisha saying to this group, "I know all of that. However, it is not proper to speak about his death while he is alive and besides I suspect Elijah is depressed enough as it is about it."
20. Verse 6: Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he replied, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So the two of them walked on.
- a) As I stated earlier, the city of Jericho is near the Jordan River. Now Elijah announces that he is going to travel outside of the city to the river as God has ordered him to do so. Once again, Elijah wants Elisha to stay put while he travels. A question to ponder is if Elisha is interested in replacing Elijah, why isn't he doing what Elijah tells him to do and stay put? Why does he keep following him despite Elijah's demand not to?
- i) One answer is this all may be a test on Elijah's part. This may be Elijah testing to see if Elisha is willing to go all the way and trust God no matter what.
- ii) Another answer is that if Elijah is about to die, Elisha doesn't want to miss to see how it happens so Elisha says in effect, "I'm not going to leave you."
- iii) I suspect that Elisha kept some sort of record of this whole event, which is how it eventually worked its way into the bible, but that's speculation on my part.
- iv) Whatever the reason, Elisha followed Elijah to the Jordan River.
- b) The real question here is why does God want us to know all of this? Part of the answer is that if we're called to be believers, we should be willing to help train up a next generation of believers as well. As I stated a few lessons back, every Paul needs a Timothy and every Timothy needs a Paul. In the New Testament, Paul in his older years helped to train up a young man named Timothy and took the time to work with him to train him properly. In effect, we're seeing the same thing here. The point is we should always be willing to team up with a younger or older believer for proper training in how to live life as God desires.
21. Verse 7: Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan.<sup>8</sup> Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.
- a) Meanwhile back at our story, the other 50 prophets watched the two men leave together to the Jordan river. When they reached the river Elijah took his outer garment (cloak). He rolled it up and struck the river. The river then stop flowing so the men crossed it easily.

- b) To discuss this miraculous river cross, first let me speculate on how, then why.
  - i) If God wants to do a miracle and stop water flow, He can do it anyway He wants to, including just making it stop. Another possibility was some sort of stoppage like a mud buildup, up the river, which caused it stop. Either way, the water stop flowing at the exact moment that Elijah hit the river with his cloak. It is my personal guess that the river bend was dry to the touch as they crossed over it.
  - ii) However it happened, if God is God, the "how" question bores me, as I believe He can do what He wants when He wants. Therefore I just accept that it happens.
  - iii) Now the why: The text doesn't say God commanded Elijah to do this or even just to cross the river. We don't know if this was Elijah's idea or just instinctive. Either way it shows that God is still willing to work miracles through Elijah even though he and apparently a lot of people knew he was about to die.
  - iv) If you know some of your bible history, you may know that God also miraculously got the same river to completely stop hundreds of years earlier when the Israelites first entered the promised land. (See Joshua 3:16). In this case Elijah is traveling in the other direction. In both cases God is allowing a miracle to happen as if to say, "I'm with you. Keep moving and keep trusting Me to guide your lives".
  - v) Whatever the reason it happened, Elijah and Elisha are now walking together after the river miraculously parted so they could cross it together.
- 22. Verse 9: When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.
  - a) To paraphrase Elijah: "I've done my best to discourage you from following me. You still want to be a prophet of God as you've left your family and followed me for a long time now. Since we both know my time is almost up, what else can I do for you?" What is implied in the question is that Elijah has taught Elisha all that he can teach him, so he asks if there is anything else he can do before God calls him home?
  - b) The answer is surprising. Elisha asks for a "double portion". To give you a clue of what is coming up in future chapters Elisha will literally perform twice as many miracles as Elijah if one counts carefully. While Elijah's miracles tended to be on the grander (macro) scale for many people to see, Elisha's miracles will mostly be personal in nature in order to help specific individuals. However I'm getting ahead of the story. The main point is God does grant Elisha's request for a double portion.
  - c) I also need to discuss "double portion" as a right of inheritance. Let me give an example: If a man has four sons whatever he owns at his death is divided into five parts. The oldest son then gets a double portion as a fee to be in charge of distributing the inheritance. The most famous biblical example of this is when Jacob was dying he told his favorite son that he (Joseph) would get a double portion as Joseph's two sons would now be equal in statue with Joseph's other brothers. In other words Joseph got the double portion. (This is from Genesis 48:5).
    - i) The point as it relates to Elisha is that he doesn't just want to be another prophet of God like say the 50 men who are also "seminary students" in Jericho. Elisha wants to be thought of as the head guy who has a special gift from God to lead people closer to Him through miracles.
  - d) At this point it is probably important to talk a little about the "Holy Spirit" as He worked in the Old Testament. That term is rare in the Old Testament, while I do believe God is working all the time in that book. What is implied is that until Jesus paid the price for sin, the Spirit of God came and went and worked through different people at different times as we read here. David once prayed, "Don't take Your Holy spirit from me." (That's from Psalm 51:11). I don't believe Christians are allowed to pray that prayer. If we're trusting in Jesus for our salvation, the Spirit of God always stays with us to guide us as much as we are willing to let Him to do. Apparently that wasn't the case in the Old Testament.



23. Verse 10: "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours--otherwise not."
- a) Elijah's request to the double portion (as if he is the one who can decide that) is in effect, if you get to witness the miraculous way I'm about to die, then know that God has granted your request to be the next "head guy" of those who are called to be His prophets. To say this another way, "Elisha, it's not my job to give you a double portion. It's not my job to decide who will be the next big prophet, but God's alone. However, somehow He has revealed to me that if you Elisha see the miracle of how I die, you'll get the honor and the cost of being the next great prophet of God." Now be quiet and watch what's next.
24. Verse 11: As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.  
<sup>12</sup>Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart.
- a) We now come to the big moment in the story. Here is where Elijah is taken to heaven.
  - b) One of the strange aspects about this passage (even more stranger than the way Elijah's life came to end) is that the text refers to Elijah as going directly to heaven. If you read of death in the Old Testament, it always reads of someone going to "Sheol" a transliterated word that means one's soul joins those who have also died and awaits God's judgment.
    - i) Yet here, we read of Elijah taken directly to heaven. Why that is stated as such is not given in the text. We do know that hundreds of years later, another prophet named Malachi predicted that Elijah will return before the Messiah's coming. (See Malachi 4:5.) That is why to this day religious Jews as part of their ritual for the Passover meal leave an empty chair in case Elijah is to show up.
    - ii) We also read in the New Testament of Elijah miraculously appearing with Moses when Jesus was "transformed" before a handful of disciples in the New Testament. (See Matthew 17:3 as an example). We also read of two witness that appear just before Jesus Second Coming in Revelation 11:4. While these two are not named, one of them performs an Elijah-like miracle by not allowing any rain until he says otherwise. That is why most bible scholars argue that is "the" return of Elijah.
    - iii) My point here is just to show the bible goes out of its way to say that God is not through using Elijah as a witness for God with his big death scene here. The fact that the text says Elijah was taken directly to heaven is the clue that God isn't done with Elijah in his ministry to be a witness for God.
  - c) Now that I've beaten to death the "why" issue, let me quickly talk about how it was Elijah was taken to heaven. At that time, the fastest imaginable means of transportation was to travel by chariots pulled by a team of horses. I believe God wanted to use that image of speed to show how quickly Elijah was taken away. In effect, Elijah was "raptured". That's a word that is not in the bible. It comes from the Latin translation of the bible. However the concept of being instantly taken up to God (that is what raptured means) is in several places in the bible and this is one example of such an occurrence. In 1st Corinthians 15:52, Paul describes the rapture of the believers living at the time of Jesus Second coming as "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye". The point being that when it happens it will happen quickly like Elijah's disappearing.
    - i) For what it is worth, Elijah will forever be associated with "fire coming down from heaven". When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest to see who's the true God, fire came down from heaven to accept Elijah's offering. Here once again we see fire as a sign of God "taking away" Elijah and Elisha witnessing the event.
    - ii) As I stated, the unnamed witness for God in Revelation Chapter 11 is described as having the not cause it to rain, which is very "Elijah like". (Revelation 11:4-6.)
  - d) The bottom line here is that Elisha saw this miracle and cried out to Elijah as his father (think teacher). Since Elisha saw the miracle, he got the "double portion" he desired.

25. Verse 13: He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup> Then he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it. "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.
- a) Apparently when Elijah was taken to heaven, he let go of his cloak before the event. That, or it just dropped at the event. This leads to a classic but fairly trivial bible debate as to how we get raptured if we are alive at the time of Jesus return: Do our clothes go with us or do they stay behind? Personally I don't care and it is God's problem as to how we are dressed in heaven. The point here is that the same cloak used by Elijah to strike the river to make it stop flowing is now used by Elisha to make it stop flowing a second time. That is how Elisha crossed back over the Jordan River into the land of Israel again.
  - b) Another question I pondered is, "why did this miracle have to happen outside of the land of Israel?" Yes it shows the miracle of crossing the Jordan, but I admit I wonder if there is any significance to Elijah being taken to God outside" of Israel? I'm thinking when Jesus said to his disciples in effect that he was the shepherd that leads his sheep "out". Scholars have debated for millennia what Jesus meant by "out". Most likely it refers to the false idea of trusting in one's ability to please God based on one's own works. (See John 10:3.)
    - i) My point here is just as Elijah went outside of the land of Israel to be taken up to God, is it symbolic of not trusting in one's own works in order to trust in God only for one's good standing before Him? I'm not saying I'm positive the ideas are both connected here, just a possibility to consider.
  - c) Meanwhile, Elisha saw the outer cloak that belonged to Elijah, picked it up. That cloak became a symbol associated with God's power. Did the cloak have any magic powers? Of course not, it just became associated with God's power just as Moses had a walking stick that was used when Moses performed his miracles.
    - i) I heard from Chuck Missler (doubt its true, but it's worth sharing) that there is a Jewish tradition that this cloak was then stored in the tabernacle after Elisha was finished with his ministry. The tradition is, the cloak was recovered at the time of the Second Temple (Jesus time) and stored there. When the New Testament does speak of John the Baptist fulfilling the role of Elijah, some suspect he literally took up the same mantle. Again, it's a cute story, but there is no proof of this.
  - d) Anyway, back to reality. The text says that Elisha struck the water the same way Elijah did and Elisha walked on dry ground across the river bend. I see this as Elisha testing to see whether or not he really had some of God's power to do miracles like Elijah.
26. Verse 15: The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. <sup>16</sup>"Look," they said, "we your servants have fifty able men. Let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley." "No," Elisha replied, "do not send them."
- a) Remember that there was fifty other prophets of God (some commentators jokingly refer to them as seminary students) were watching the event. I don't think they actually saw Elijah being taken to God as only Elisha got to witness that event. That's why I hold the view that Elisha wrote this down for us to read about it. The one thing the other 50 men saw was Elisha striking the river the same way Elijah did earlier. Now Elisha is traveling by himself back to the other prophets.
  - b) The point is the other "seminary students" realized that Elisha now had Elijah's power as they saw him strike the river with Elijah's cloak. Therefore the students said in effect, we will now honor you as having Elijah's gift. These men were aware that Elijah is now gone and they want to go find him. To use a Star Trek term, they think God "beamed" Elijah to some other place and now they want to find him. Elisha somehow knew that Elijah is now in heaven and said in effect, "Don't bother to go looking for Elijah".

27. Verse 17: But they persisted until he was too ashamed to refuse. So he said, "Send them." And they sent fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him.<sup>18</sup> When they returned to Elisha, who was staying in Jericho, he said to them, "Didn't I tell you not to go?"
- a) The bottom line here is that Elisha tried to stop these men to search for Elijah and gave up trying. So the men spent three days searching for Elijah and then came back in defeat. It is at this point the 50 men who were aware that Elijah was going to die soon, that not only is he gone, but his body can't be found. To say that in New Testament terminology, these 50 "bible students" just realized Elijah got raptured.
  - b) Elisha ends this debate by saying, "Didn't I tell you not to go?" In other words, you were aware of the fact that Elijah was going to die soon. I told you not to go bother to go look for the body but you went anyway. Now that you can't find the body, do you believe me now that I say that Elijah was taken up to heaven?
  - c) With that done we are now ready for Elisha and the "bible students" to do something else.
28. Verse 19: The men of the city said to Elisha, "Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive."
- a) Most likely the "city" refers to Jericho. There is a water spring in the middle of the desert there, which is why that city has existed for millenniums even after Joshua destroyed it. At this point, one of the prophets says to Elisha, we have a problem. The place where we are living now (I suspect either Jericho or close to it) is unlivable as our water source has gone bad. The "students" say in effect, "Since you have Elijah's power, can you help us so we don't have to move somewhere else?"
  - b) As I stated earlier, while Elijah's miracles tended to be grander in scale to show an entire nation who was God, the miracles that will be associated with Elisha are more personal and in this case he is asked to help out the "bible students" living in this town.
29. Verse 20: "Bring me a new bowl," he said, "and put salt in it." So they brought it to him.<sup>21</sup> Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, "This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'"<sup>22</sup> And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.
- a) One has to admit, this is a strange thing to do. The drinking water is bad. The way that Elisha makes it good is that he puts some salt in a new bowl and pours it on the water. Then Elijah lays out a blessing to say in effect, "May you this water, never curse this area of land again". Then the writer of "Kings" (tradition says Jeremiah many centuries later) says the water is still good at the time the book of "Kings" was written.
  - b) How the salt cured the water, is in effect God's business. As I love to state, if God can do anything, he can make water good even by a little salt in there. As I stated earlier how He does things has always bored me. Why God does things is the question for us to ponder as we study our bible.
  - c) With that said, let me discuss the symbolism behind this miracle. Elisha requested for a new bowl. That is to say God is about to do something new here. It was common in the middle east to use a new bowl for some sort of new ritual, so there was nothing new of that aspect of this miracle. As to the use of salt, remember that this was a spring of water here in the desert. A bit of salt can't contaminate a spring of water. If you study all of the sacrifices as stated in Leviticus made to God, salt as mixed with those sacrifices. Salt is a preservative. In a hot dry climate like Israel, salt is necessary as preservative. That is why God required salt as part of the sacrifice to give us a word picture of God preserving an item that has been dedicated to him. That is also why Jesus refers to our witness to Him as being like "salt and light" (See Matthew 5:13) as our witness for Him is a light to others as well as a preserving influence over the evil of this world.
    - i) The point here is the bible students with Elisha would understand that God uses the idea of salt as a symbol of a preservative of His power. That's why the miracle involved salt being poured on the bad water in order to make it good again.

- ii) So does this mean I can make, say salt water drinkable by pouring a little more salt on it? Most likely no, unless it is God's will. However, let this miracle God wants us to be "salt" (a preservative) as a witness for Him to the world around us.
  - iii) Meanwhile, we have one more judgment to go to finish this chapter.
- 30. Verse 23: From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. "Go on up, you baldhead!" they said. "Go on up, you baldhead!" <sup>24</sup> He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. <sup>25</sup> And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.
  - a) To explain this story, imagine you are walking through a really bad neighborhood late at night by yourself. Now imagine a group of local teenagers walking toward you. Would you rather they just came out of a bar or came out of a bible study to share Jesus with you? Even if we were not a devout Christian, in that situation we would much rather be met by someone wanting to tell us about Jesus than want to hurt us.
  - b) I share that story because in this case we have the opposite. The prophet Elisha is about to be met by a group of thugs who just wanted to cause trouble. Why they called Elisha a baldhead is unknown. Maybe Elisha he lost his hair at a young age or maybe he shaved his head. Either way, he was being insulted for how he looked. Also, Elisha was told to "go up". The idea is like saying, "Hey your buddy Elisha is gone up somewhere, why don't you go wherever he went and leave us alone?"
    - i) The point is don't take this lightly. Like walking through a bad neighborhood and being met by a large group of thugs late at night, that's the type of danger Elisha is facing here. The good news is that God judged these men. All of a sudden two bears mauled (hurt) these men.
    - ii) So does this mean if we are walking through that bad neighborhood being a good witness for God, He will protect us and harm others? I have no idea. I do know that our lives now belong to Him and we trust in His guidance and protection. As I have been taught, God never promises to keep us from danger, but He does give us a rope to pull us through whatever situation we are in. That's the lesson here.
  - c) The final verse of this chapter says that Elisha at this point travels to Mount Carmel. You may recall that this is the spot of the "great contest" between God and the prophets of the false god "Baal" where fire came down from heaven to prove God is God. Why Elisha did travel to this spot is part of Chapter 4. The point is that Elisha did what God commanded him to do and he moved to where God wanted Him to go. I admit that if two bears just rescued me from being hurt, I would probably do whatever it was that God commanded me to do as well. So Elijah moved on and these young men are judged by God for going against God's will for the nation of Israel.
- 31. OK, that's enough judgment for one lesson. The point to remember is that God's judgment is not always about eternal damnation. It is also about us being a good witness for Him in all situations as we live based on what He desires of us in our lives. As we have just read, judgment can come in other forms of suffering as these youths suffered. God also can allow bad things to occur such as the water source going bad in order for Him to show off His power in the world. The point is God is more than willing to work through us in order to prove of His existence and for us to learn to trust Him so that we can make a difference for Him in the world around us.
  - a) As I also love to state, the greatest purpose one can have for living out one's life is to use it to make a difference for God in this world. Living for fame, fortune or success will lead to an empty life. Living to make a difference for God not only blesses us eternally, but also brings more joy than any other accomplishment one can have in life.
- 32. With that said, it's time for my closing prayer. Father, like the prophets in this story, You have called us to live to make a difference for You. Protect us as we go out in the world in order to

make that difference. Guide us so that every aspect of our life may be a witness for You and used for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.