

ARE WE THERE YET?: PASSING THE MANTLE

ELIJAH & ELISHA (1 KINGS 19:19-21)

BEFORE THE LESSON

Elijah comes on the scene as a prophet during the reign of King Ahab in the 9th century B.C. These were tumultuous times for the nation of Israel. After the death of King Solomon in 931 B.C., Rehoboam his son ruled the smaller southern kingdom called Judah, while Jeroboam led a revolt in the north establishing the kingdom of Israel. Israel is a divided kingdom and Elijah is called to serve the Lord in the north, which is led by King Ahab, who is described in 1 Kings 16:30 as one who “did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.” He and his wife Jezebel led the northern kingdom into the idolatrous worship of Baal and Elijah is called to turn back the nation to follow the true God, Yahweh. Elijah is one of the most fascinating figures in the Bible. He did not die a natural death but was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. He is mentioned over 30 times in the New Testament and always with great respect, as during the time of Jesus there was the expectation among his fellow countrymen that Elijah would appear again and usher in a glorious messianic kingdom (Malachi 4:5,6). Some people thought Jesus was Elijah (Matthew 16:14) which shows how much even after 900 years this man captured the imagination of the Jewish people. The disciples wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven just like Elijah did when he walked the earth (Luke 9:54). Elijah appears on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and Moses and will make a repeat appearance before the return of Jesus (Revelation 11:4-6).

Elisha carried on the prophetic ministry of Elijah with power after his translation into heaven having received a “double portion” of the spirit of Elijah. He also served the northern kingdom of Israel and was recognized by kings and the common man as one with great spiritual authority. He is mentioned only once by Jesus in the New Testament when Jesus informs his hometown in Nazareth in Luke 4:27, “And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.” The amazing ministries of both Elijah and Elisha are recorded in the Old Testament from 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 13. In these accounts we see God powerfully at work through these faithful prophets raising people from the dead, controlling nature (like parting the waters of the Jordan), calling down fire from heaven, and miraculously feeding people during a time a drought much like Jesus feeding the 5000 with a few loaves of bread and fish.(2 Kings 4:42)

STARTING THE LESSON

Elijah was directed by God to “ordain” Elisha as his successor in ministry in 1 Kings 19:16 “and anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.” This change of leadership is where the term “passing the mantle” originates. A mantle is simply an outer cloak, and at the beginning of their relationship in 1 Kings 19:19, Elijah threw his cloak over Elisha, indicating to Elisha that he was being selected as Elijah’s apprentice for a period of time until he was ready to the fill Elijah’s position as prophet to Israel. Elijah was transported to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11 when, “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.” During this amazing event which Elisha witnessed personally, Elijah’s “mantle” or cloak had fallen from him and was picked up by Elisha. This was very significant for Elisha, as it was an answer to his prayer in which he requested a “double portion of Elijah’s spirit” (2 Kings 2:9). Elisha used that cloak to part the waters of the Jordan river, and this was a sign to the other prophets that the “mantle” of prophetic leadership had truly been passed from Elijah to Elisha.

Elisha faithfully and humbly served Elijah as his servant for many years until he was ready to take over the “mantle” of lead prophet for the nation of Israel. He had the reputation as one who “used to pour water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kings 2:11). He is an excellent example of servant leadership in his humble service to Elijah. As Elijah was leaving him, he

cries out “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel! (2 Kings 2:12). This shows the depth of their relationship as father and son much like Paul and Timothy’s relationship in the New Testament (Philippians 2:22). This is the biblical model of servant leadership in which we “Humble ourselves under the mighty hand God that He may exalt us at the proper time, casting all our anxieties upon Him because He cares for us.” (1 Peter 5:6,7) We can glean valuable lessons about successful leadership transition from the relationship of Elijah and Elisha.

TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

As you prepare for this lesson, spend time in prayer for each member of the group asking the Lord to give you insight and discernment into this passage so as to comfort and challenge your group to live in a way that pleases the Lord.

Strive to create an atmosphere of openness by sharing personal stories of how the Lord is working in your life and affirming group members when they share personal stories from their own lives.

STARTER QUESTION

- What would you consider a high point in your week? What was a low point? What did you learn from these experiences? What was the Lord teaching you?
- Are you a person who gets excited about change and new opportunities or do you prefer the status quo and a comfortable routine?

OPENING PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would clear our minds of the distractions of this day and help us to focus on your love for us and your purposes for our life and in this world. Help us to hear and be in step with the leading of your Holy Spirit now and in the week to come. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to restore our relationship with you and

give us the blessed hope of eternal life in Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

- Changing leadership is challenging in any organization. What are some biblical examples of a good transition to new leadership? Why do you think the transition was so effective?

The transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua was smooth and very effective. Joshua had served Moses faithfully for many years as a battle commander, as a faithful spy of the promised land, and as his personal assistant. He had the respect of the Israelites and in Deuteronomy 31:1-8 Moses presented Joshua to the Israelite nation in a very public way to “continue the story” that God had begun with the leadership of Moses. He summons Joshua in the presence of all Israel and encourages him to “Be strong and courageous” as he leads the nation into promised land of their forefathers. In Deuteronomy 34:9 it says, “Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.” There are many parallels between Joshua and Elisha as successors to Moses and Elijah. Both Moses and Elijah had an “air of mystery” attached to their deaths. Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind and Moses was buried by the Lord in a secret place. Both Joshua and Elisha participated in the spirit of their masters and demonstrated their fitness for office by a miraculous crossing of the Jordan river. Other examples of a successful transition of leadership are Jesus to Peter (John 21:15-19) and Paul to Timothy (Phil. 2:19-22).

1 Kings 19: 19-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. ²⁰ Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you."

"Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"

²¹ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.

QUESTION 2

- What are some biblical examples of a disruptive or disastrous change of leadership? What led to the negative outcome of this plan of succession?

When King David was advanced in years and the time was fast approaching to name a successor, he did not communicate quickly enough or clearly enough so one of his sons, Adonijah took it upon himself to proclaim himself as king. (1 Kings 1:5) He was building alliances with military leaders like Joab and holding royal ceremonies to win the support of the people while David remained silent and in poor health. Adonijah made a point to exclude rivals from any of his events, like his half-brother Solomon. Finally Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, appeals to David in 1 Kings 1:20, "My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him." Solomon eventually became king and Adonijah was put to death, but the transition was messy because of poor planning and poor communication.

King Solomon also had a disruptive transition to new leadership after his death because he chose one of his sons, Rehoboam, who had questionable character and through harsh taxation of the people fomented a rebellion that resulted in a divided kingdom.

The priest Eli is another an example of a disastrous change of leadership. He never disciplined his sons, so that when they took on the responsibilities of the priesthood they were self-serving and disqualified themselves from the job through their wickedness. God then rejects the house of Eli as priests and declares, "I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind." (1 Samuel 2:35)

QUESTION 3

- What do we learn about Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21? What was his socio-economic status? What kind of relationship did he have with his parents? How did he relate with his neighbors? What kind of relationship did he have with Elijah?

Elisha was the son of Shaphat and from the town of Abel-meholah on the west side of the Jordan river in the northern kingdom of Israel. It seems that he was raised in a wealthy family considering he was helping to operate a plow that had twelve pairs of oxen when Elijah came to visit him. This indicates a family with an abundance of resource and land. He had a close relationship with his family to such an extent that he wanted to part with his parents with honor and on good

2 Kings 2:9-15 (NIV)

⁹When 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.

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, it will not."

¹¹As 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. ¹²Elisha 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 garment and tore it in two.

¹³Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah 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.

¹⁵The 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.

terms. As he was preparing himself for a life of service to the Lord and Elijah, he used his wealth to provide a meal for his neighbors which belies a selfless and generous spirit. His relationship with Elijah was one of humble servitude. He left a privileged life to become Elijah's attendant and eventually a prophet of the Lord.

QUESTION 4

- What was Elisha's initial response to Elijah's invitation for him to become his apprentice? Was this response appropriate or did it show a misplaced priority in Elisha?

Elisha's initial response was "Let me kiss my mother and father good-bye and then I will come with you". I think this was an appropriate response given the fact that Elijah encourages him to "Go back" to his family for a final farewell. It seems Elisha wanted to put his affairs in order the way a missionary might prepare to go to the mission field. He wanted to honor his mother and father and bless his community so that his closest relationships could celebrate and participate with him in his new life-direction to being the attendant of Elijah, this great man of God.

QUESTION 5

- How is Elisha's response in 1 Kings 19:20 different from the person in Luke 9:61 who wanted to say good-bye to his family before he followed Jesus? Jesus seems to rebuke this person and claim that he is not fit for service in the kingdom of God.

In this passage in Luke, Jesus is challenging people who want to follow him but who have divided hearts. Jesus is describing to these people the cost of following Him. Elisha wholeheartedly intends to follow the Lord and serve Elijah and is willing to pay the cost. He gives up his oxen and farming equipment and uses them to bless others. He just wants to honor his father and mother as his covenant faith prescribes before he embarks on his life of ministry

QUESTION 6

- In 1 Kings 19:20, Elijah responds to Elisha's request to say good-bye to his parents with the question, "What have I done to you?" What is intended by Elijah in this question? Is it a rebuke of Elisha or something else?

In the Message translation of the bible, this passage reads, "Elisha deserted the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, 'Please! Let me kiss my father

and mother good-bye – then I'll follow you.' 'Go ahead', said Elijah, 'but, mind you, don't forget what I've just done to you.' Elijah allows Elisha to put his personal affairs in order and say his final farewell to his family before he embarks on a

lifetime of service to Elijah and the Lord. If anything, it might be a gentle reminder from Elijah to Elisha to stay focused on the task at hand and that is exactly what Elisha did. After he said his final farewells, this passage reads, "Then he left and followed Elijah, becoming his right-hand man."

QUESTION 7

- In 2 Kings 2:1-11, Elisha is informed several times (vss. 3 and 5) by others that "The Lord is going to take your master from you today". What is Elisha's response to this major change that is about to happen in his life?

Elisha is persistent in his pursuit of Elijah. Even though he is encouraged to stay behind, he refuses. He is determined to serve his master to the very end. Even though the other prophets try to discourage him with the sad news of Elijah's departure, Elisha remains hopeful and as a result receives a tremendous blessing, "a double portion of Elijah's spirit" and his cloak (mantle). In Luke 18:1, Jesus told the disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. Elisha refused to give up and served Elijah until he was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire.

QUESTION 8

- In 2 Kings 2:7, Elijah leaves 50 men of the company of the prophets on one side of the Jordan river and miraculously takes Elisha with him through the river on dry land to the other side to continue on his journey. Does this remind you of any encounter that Jesus had with His disciples shortly before His death on the cross?

Jesus selected a small group of disciples, Peter, James and John, to be with him in his anguish during his time praying to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane. His purpose was that He would not be alone in his suffering and that they could join him in prayer and "keep watch" with him at this time when Jesus describes to these three that "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death". (Matthew 26:36-38) This experience left a lasting impression upon these future leaders of the early church as they witnessed Jesus calling out to his heavenly Father in his hour of greatest need. Peter later writes to fellow believers in 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

QUESTION 9

- In 2 Kings 2:9, Elijah asks Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elisha's response is "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit". Is this an arrogant or presumptuous demand? Is he asking to outdo his master by twofold or is he seeking something of a more spiritual nature?

Francis A. Schaeffer in his book "No Little People" says, "I do not think Elisha was asking for more than Elijah had. Rather, I think "double portion" is like the French word 'double', meaning a carbon copy or twin. Elisha, I believe, was saying to Elijah, 'I want what you have had'." Elisha was asking for God's resource to accomplish God's task. Jesus said to his disciples in John 14:7, "...it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Holy Spirit (Counselor) will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you." Jesus is encouraging the disciples that each one of them will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purposes on this earth. Jesus says to them in John 14:12, "...anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father". It is not selfish to be greedy for the things of God. In the words of the old Vineyard spiritual, "More love, more power, more of You in my life".

QUESTION 10

- What is Elijah’s response for Elisha’s request of a “double portion of his spirit” in 2 Kings 2:10? What is the one requirement for Elisha’s request to be fulfilled?

Elijah’s response is somewhat cautious. When he says this is difficult for me to provide, what he is trying to say is that this is impossible for me to provide. Only God can give you what you are asking for. But Elijah gives Elisha a sign. If you actually witness me being lifted to heaven with your own eyes, then you will be granted your request. In 2 Kings 2:10, Elijah says to Elisha, “if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours...”. This is exactly what happened and as a bonus sign, Elijah’s cloak (mantle) is left behind for Elisha to cherish and use for the rest of his life as a prophet of the Lord.

QUESTION 11

- In 2 Kings 2:12, Elisha calls Elijah, “My father! My father!”. What does this tell us about the nature of their relationship and the success of one leader passing his responsibilities to the next generation?

Elijah and Elisha had a special mentoring relationship which was very much like a father to son relationship. As Paul says of Timothy in Philippians 2:22, “But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel”. Elisha was a servant to Elijah for many years before he was given the mantle of leadership. When he took the reins of leadership, he was a trusted prophet. In 2 Kings 3:11, righteous King Jehoshaphat of Judah was looking for a “prophet of the Lord” for wisdom in battle. An officer for the king of Israel said “Elisha, son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.” Jehoshaphat response was “the word of the Lord is with him”. In Acts 4:13, Peter and John were arrested for healing a crippled man and those in authority noted that they had amazing courage and wisdom even though they were “unschooled, ordinary men” but it says “they took note that these men had been with Jesus”. Peter and John had been discipled by Jesus and Elisha had been discipled by Elijah. The mantle of godly leadership was successfully passed to the next generation.

QUESTION 12

- In 2 Kings 2:14,15, Elisha picked up the cloak (mantle) of Elijah and asked the question, “Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?”. How did God answer this question for Elisha? How did the company of the prophets from Jericho respond to this change in leadership? Did they encounter any dissonance in this new era of leadership?

Elisha was a man of faith and he knew that Elijah had promised him that if he personally witnessed with his own eyes Elijah being taken to heaven then his request for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah would be granted to him by “the Lord, the God of Elijah”. As a sign that this was fulfilled, he was rewarded the cloak (mantle) of Elijah which he would carry with him for the rest of his life. When Elisha approached the Jordan river to cross he looked at those waters through the eyes of faith. As Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” As he touched those waters with the cloak of Elijah, the power of God parted the Jordan in the same way he had done for Elijah. Once the prophets for Jericho witnessed this, they had confidence to follow Elisha with the same devotion that they followed Elijah. They knew God had chosen a new leader for them. Some, though, couldn’t believe that Elijah was really taken to heaven and wanted to go look for him. Elisha had a sense of humor and let them spend the day looking for Elijah and then said when they returned, “I told you so.” Now let God’s story continue with this new era of prophetic leadership.

- Begin your prayer time by inviting the Holy Spirit to come and lead and guide your group through prophetic words, pictures, or encouragement from the Scriptures. Allow a period of silence and encourage your group members to have a receptive posture by kneeling or opening up their hands to the Lord. If you have new people in the group who are unfamiliar with the Vineyard Prayer Model, take some time to introduce them to the value we place on making time to listen and hear from the Lord in prayer.
- After several minutes have passed, ask if anyone has heard from the Lord in regards to how to direct our prayer time. If there are very specific prophetic words that apply to people in the group you can choose to pray as a group for those people who want prayer. Sometimes it is wise to break up into groups of two or three which gives more people the opportunity to pray. At other times it may be wise to separate into groups along gender lines. You can mix it up from week to week as the Lord leads and with input from the other group members.