

LESSONS FROM ELIJAH AND ELISHA

Remember! **“Everything written in the past was to teach us” (Rom. 15:4).** Certainly there are many lessons that Elijah and Elisha can teach us. This article will list a few of these lessons. It is significant that these few lessons came on the last day these two great men spent on earth together. I will list only seven lessons. I’m sure you can find others.

The first book of Kings ends abruptly in the middle of the reign of Ahaziah, son of Ahab. The book of Second Kings takes up the history at this point and carries it forward to the end of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

2 Kings begins with the story of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, falling and injuring himself. He sent messengers saying: **“Go and consult Baal-Zebub the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.” (2 Ki. 1:2).**

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

When the wicked king heard this he was enraged at Elijah and sent a captain with 50 men to arrest him. Elijah called down fire from heaven and burned up the captain and his men. Then the wicked king sent another captain with 50 other men and the same thing happened to them. When the king sent the third captain with 50 other men **“The 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! See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life” (2 Ki. 1:13-14).**

At this point the angel of the Lord told Elijah to go with the captain to the king and not to be afraid. Elijah did so, rebuked the king for his idolatry, and told him again that he was going to die. **“So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken” (2 Ki. 1:17).**

Then we are told: **“When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal” (2 Ki. 2:1).**

LESSON # 1 WAS AT GILGAL (NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD – LK. 1:37)

God has blessed us with five senses. We can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Obviously, the more of our senses that are involved, the better we learn. Therefore God directed Elijah to various locations where Elisha could experience in person more than just his ability to hear. In person Elisha could not only hear, but also see, smell, and touch the sites where God directed him.

As we have said, this day was especially important for it was their last day together on the earth. The company of the prophets at Jericho said to Elisha: **“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” (2 Ki. 2:5).**

The lessons for Elisha began at Gilgal. Gilgal was the first place Israel stayed when they crossed over the Jordan to inherit the Promised Land. Joshua wrote: **“On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, ‘In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.”** (Josh. 4:19-24)

When Elisha saw with his own eyes the memorial of twelve stones he was reminded that nothing is impossible with God. God can dry up the Red Sea and God can also dry up the Jordan River. God can do anything! Moses composed a song giving God the glory for their deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 15:1-21) and this is the same song we will be singing in heaven (Rev. 15:3-4). Our spiritual victory is only possible with the help of God!

Lesson # 1 is that God can do anything!

LESSON # 2 WAS AT BETHEL
(THE DANGER OF FALSE RELIGION)

“Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Stay here; the Lord hath sent me to Bethel.’ But Elisha said, ‘As surely as the Lord lives and so as you live I will not leave you.’ So they went down to Bethel” (2 Ki. 2:2).

The word “Bethel” means “house of God”. It is first mentioned in Gen. 12:8 when Abram first built an altar there. It is mentioned again in Gen. 13:3 because in Bethel Abram called on the name of the Lord. It is mentioned again in Gen. 28:19 when Jacob called it “Bethel” for there he had a dream of a stairway reaching to heaven.

When Elijah and Elisha came to Bethel, however, it was not a godly place at all. When Jeroboam became the king of the Northern Kingdom he didn’t want people to go to Jerusalem and worship as God commanded. Therefore, **“After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt’. One of them he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there. Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites”** (1 Ki. 12:28-31).

Because of his idolatry the Lord sent a man of God from Judah to rebuke Jeroboam (See 1 Ki. 13:1-6). Further, the man of God shriveled Jeroboam’s hand and prophesied that Josiah, born to the house of David, would offer pagan priests on that altar and human bones would be burned upon it. As a sign the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out.

When Elisha saw this altar with his own eyes he learned the dangers of false religion. God has warned about false religion since Eden. Jesus warned of wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15). Paul

warned that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-14). John warned: **“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1).**

Lesson # 2 is that there is danger in false religions!

**LESSON # 3 WAS ALSO AT BETHEL
(THE CONSEQUENCES OF BELIEVING A LIE)**

After the man of God performed a miracle and healed Jeroboam’s withered hand, the king invited him to his home and promised him a gift. The man of God answered: **“Even if you gave me half of your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: ‘You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came’. So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel” (1 Ki. 13:8-10).**

As the man of God was going back home as God commanded him, an old prophet met him and said: **“I too am a prophet as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord: ‘Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water’ (But he was lying to him) So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house” (1 Ki. 13: 18-19).**

“While they were sitting at the table, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, “This is what the Lord says: ‘You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your ancestors.’” When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was left lying on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it. Some people who passed by saw the body lying there, with the lion standing beside the body, and they went and reported it in the city where the old prophet lived.” (1 Ki. 13:20-25).

The Devil is a liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44). The Devil lied to Adam and Eve, he lied to this man of God, he would also lie to Elisha, and he will also lie to you and me!

Lesson # 3 is that believing a lie can lead to death!

**LESSON # 4 WAS AT JERICHO
(THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE)**

“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” (2 Ki. 1:4).

Jericho was a well fortified city protected by walls. Conquering Jericho was the first challenge faced by Joshua’s army. The Scriptures state: **“Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the Lord said to Joshua,**

“See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.” (Josh. 6:1-5).

There has never been a city conquered like this in the history of the world. These commands must have sounded ridiculous! Joshua then had to decide whether he would obey God or make his own plans. Elisha would also have to make that same decision. We also have to make that same decision. The Scriptures teach: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Prov 3:5).** WHEN JOSHUA OBEYED GOD THE WALLS OF JERICHO COLLAPSED AND THE CITY WAS CONQUERED! (Josh. 6:20).

I am told by those who have seen the ruins of Jericho that after almost 3,000 years it is still evident that the wall of Jericho “collapsed” as the Bible says and were not beaten down by military machines. It must have been even more obvious to Elisha! Elisha obviously learned the lesson of obedience. We do not have to understand why God commands something, but we still have to obey God whether we understand it or not.

Not long after this Naaman, the commander of the army of king of Aram, came to Elisha to be cured of leprosy (2 Ki. 5:1-14). Elisha did not meet with him personally but sent a messenger saying: **“Go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed” (2 Ki. 5:10).**

Naaman went away angry! He could not see any connection between obeying this command and being healed. He reasoned that the rivers of Damascus were cleaner and better than the muddy waters of the Jordan. Finally, his servants convinced him to obey whether he understood it or not. **“So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy” (2 Ki. 5:14).**

Lesson # 4 is that we should always obey God whether we understand why or not!

LESSON # 5 WAS AT THE JORDAN RIVER
(THOSE WHO OBEY GOD HAVE NO REASON TO FEAR DEATH)

“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. Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. 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.” (2 Ki. 2:6-8).

It is common among students of the Bible to believe that the Jordan River symbolizes death. Egypt symbolizes our life before we were converted. The wilderness symbolizes the struggles we face living the Christian life. The Promised Land symbolizes heaven. The Jordan River symbolizes death as it stands between us and the Promised Land. Note that when Elijah smote the river, the waters

divided, and these two prophets of God crossed over on dry ground. As Christians we can experience death with the same confidence that Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan. The Christian has no reason to fear death!

In 1934 a postman named Charles Durham composed the hymn “I Won’t Have to Cross Jordan Alone”. The words are:

When I come to the river at ending of day,
When the last winds of sorrow have blown;
There’ll be Somebody waiting to show me the way,
I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.

I won’t have to cross Jordan alone,
Jesus died all my sins to atone;
When the darkness I see, He’ll be waiting for me,
I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.

Paul wrote: **“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body . . .”** (Phil. 1:21-24).

Paul insisted that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). He was ready to die because he knew that the Lord would give him a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). This promise is not just for Paul, but for all who have longed for his appearing.

Lesson # 5 is that Christians have no reason to fear death!

LESSON # 6 WAS ALSO AT THE JORDAN RIVER
(BE BOLD WHEN YOU PRAY)

“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. “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.” 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. Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” (2 Ki. 2:9-12).

Please note that the bold prayer of Elisha was answered: **“And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. Elisha then picked up Elijah’s cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He 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.”** (2 Ki. 2:12-14).

God wants us to always pray and not to give up (Lk. 18:1). He taught us: **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”** (Matt. 7:7-8).

We are, however, warned against selfish prayers: **“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures”** (Ja. 4:3).

Please consider this story of Elisha and the widow: **“The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.” Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?” “Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.” Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.” She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”** (2 Ki. 4:1-7)

We too can be bold in our prayers for God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20).

Lesson # 6 is to be bold and selfless in our prayers to God!

LESSON # 7

(BEING GUIDED BY GOD CAN BRING YOU SUCCESS)

“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. “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.” 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. When they returned to Elisha, who was staying in Jericho, he said to them, “Didn’t I tell you not to go?”” (2 Ki. 2:15-18)

Elijah was not anywhere on the earth for **“Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind”** (2 Ki. 2:11) and **“Elisha saw this”** (2 Ki. 2:12). Hopefully, these fifty men from the company of the prophets learned a lesson from this. Hopefully, in the future they would seek the guidance of God before launching out on their own. They didn’t experience success and wasted three days because they were not in touch with God and wouldn’t believe what Elisha told them.

Close contact with God is essential to success! Jesus said: **“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does”** (Jn. 5:19). In the very next chapter Jesus fed a multitude of 5,000 people. Jesus knew that God wanted those people fed so he

said to Philip, **“Where will we buy bread for these people to eat? He said this to test him for he already had in mind what he was going to do” (Jn. 6:5-6).** Philip could have done what Jesus did if he had only realized what God was going to do!

Noah survived with his family because he knew what God was going to do (Gen. 6:1-22). Because Abraham was the friend of God it was revealed to him what was going to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-29). Joseph was able to save his family from starvation because God revealed to him about a seven year drought (Gen. 45:4-7). Etc.

To his credit, David continually sought guidance from God – here are a few examples: 1 Sam. 23:1-3; 1 Sam. 23:4-5; 1 Sam. 23:10-11; I Sam. 23:12-14; I Sam. 30:8-9; 2 Sam. 2:1-2; 2 Sam. 5:17-21; 2 Sam. 5:22-25; 2 Sam. 21:1, Etc. It is always wise to seek guidance from God!

On July 30, 2020 at 7:50 a.m. EDT NASA launched a mission to Mars on an Atlas V-541 rocket. Mars is 40 million miles from the earth and yet the rocket safely landed on Mars on Feb. 18, 2021. NASA has developed an accurate guidance system, but the guidance of God is better. It is foolish to not seek the guidance of God!

There are many examples in the Bible of Elisha being guided by God. Here are a few:

- With the guidance of God the Moabites were defeated (2 Ki. 3:13-27).
- With the guidance of God the widow’s sons were saved from slavery (2 Ki. 4:1-7).
- With the guidance of God the Shunammite’s son was raised from the dead (2 Ki. 4:8-37).
- With the guidance of God a pot of poison stew was purified (2 Ki. 4:38-41).
- With the guidance of God Naaman was cured of his leprosy (2 Ki. 5:1-14).
- With the guidance of God an axe head was made to float (2 Ki. 6:1-6).
- With the guidance of God the army of the Arameans was unable to attack (2 Ki. 6:8-23).
- Etc.

Lesson # 7 is that we need to be guided by God if we are going to be successful!

THE TURNING POINT

Elijah and Elisha stood by the Jordan and **“When they crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken up from you?’” (2 Ki. 2:9).**

Solomon said: **“The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1).** As they crossed the Jordan Elisha made a bold decision. Elijah had said: **“Tell me what I can do for you”** and Elisha made a bold request.

Elisha said: **“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit” (2 Ki. 2:9).** This bold prayer was a turning point in his ministry! Even though it was a “difficult thing” he asked for, God granted his request. Elijah worked 16 miracles that are recorded in the Bible but Elisha worked 32. The last miracle of Elisha was performed after he died when a dead man touched his bones and came to life again (2 Ki. 13:21).

PERHAPS IT WILL BE ALSO A TURNING POINT IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU DARE TO ASK GOD TO DO A DIFFICULT THING!