



# The Ministry of Elisha

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## Lesson 1: Sought by Some, Hated by Others

### *Introduction*

#### **Elisha - His Times**

Elisha the prophet was the successor to the great prophet Elijah, and lived during the turbulent days of life in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Although the notorious King Ahab and his wife Queen Jezebel were both dead, at the beginning of Elisha's ministry Ahab's son Joram sat on the throne, and 2 Kings 3:2 tells us he was every bit as wicked as his father. Politically Ahab had been an accomplished king, and he left a sizeable kingdom to his sons. But because of his unbelief, God would punish Israel by reducing the size of their territory. And so, during Elisha's ministry, God raised up various enemies to attack. As far as time frame is concerned, we can date the ministry of Elisha around 848-797 B.C.

But, at the same time, the situation wasn't hopeless. Though worship of Baal and Asherah dominated, the Bible gives us many clues to the working of God's grace in the land:

1 Kings 19:16 - \_\_\_\_\_

1 Kings 19:18 - \_\_\_\_\_

2 Kings 2:3, 5 - \_\_\_\_\_

And included among these other acts of grace was that, instead of taking his Word away from Israel, God anointed Elisha to succeed Elijah and continue the ministry of the Word.

#### **Elisha the Man**

Many parallels can be drawn between the life and ministry of Elijah and that of John the Baptist. Both were said to wear "a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist" (2 Kings 1:9). Both Elijah and John preached a condemning message to their hearers. Both confronted rulers whose lives were polluted with sin.

But one major difference remains. Elijah did not come to prepare the way for Elisha in the same way that John came to prepare the way for Jesus. Some people also try to draw comparisons between Elisha and the Christ. They note how some of the miracles done through Elisha are similar in nature to the miracles done by Jesus. But the striking difference, of course, between them is that Christ performed his miracles by his own power, while Elisha had no power of his own to do the same. Yet the Lord was with him.

To begin our study, let's review how God chose Elijah's successor Elisha, and how rather suddenly he was thrust into the role of "chief" prophet in Israel.

### **Read 1 Kings 19:19-21 and 2 Kings 2:9-14.**

- What details from the calling of Elisha strike you as noteworthy?
- What is a divine call? What do you perceive are some real challenges – for both called workers and lay-people – to maintain the truth of the *divinity* of the call?

### **Sought by Some Needy Men**

Elisha was now the "chief" prophet in Israel. Those who had at one time looked to Elijah now looked to Elisha for help. But while Elijah often felt like an outsider in his own land, Elisha was not ostracized to the same extent as his predecessor was. In fact, many people sought him out. After Elijah had been taken by the Lord to heaven, Elisha went with the company of prophets back to Jericho, where the men of the city asked a favor of him.

### **Read 2 Kings 2:19-22.**

- What problem did the inhabitants of Jericho face?
- What light do **Joshua 6:26** and **1 Kings 16:34** shed on this incident?

### **Hated by Children**

Though Elisha was heralded by some as a wonderful man, others treated him the way in which Elijah had been treated. On his way from Jericho to Bethel, Elisha came across a group of youths who, though they recognized him as Elijah's successor, did not show respect toward him.

### **Read 2 Kings 2:23-25**

- Was this a deliberate encounter or just a chance happening?
- What do you think is the meaning of the youths' words: "Go on up, you baldhead!"?
- Why go so far out of the way to Mount Carmel, if one's destination is Samaria?

### **Hated by Kings**

Many of the problems that existed in the Northern Kingdom under kings like Ahab, though somewhat better under Joram (a.k.a. Jehoram), continued to plague the nation. But one thing did change after the death of King Ahab. The people of Moab were not willing to be subject to the King of Israel any longer. Suddenly the tribute stopped coming in, and Joram was forced to go to war.

### **Read 2 Kings 3:1-10**

- How much tribute had the king of Moab supplied the king of Israel with?
- Though Jehoshaphat did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, what did he agree to do? What route did the three kings choose to use and what problem did they run up against?
- Who did Joram blame for the predicament they were in?

## Sought by Kings

The presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, could have meant the difference between utter defeat and overwhelming victory. He believed in the Lord God and convinced the other kings of the need to "inquire of the Lord" through one of his prophets. The prophet who would be called was no one less than Elisha.

### Read 2 Kings 3:11-20.

- How did Elisha respond when called upon to appear before the king of Israel?
- What two-part message does the Lord provide through his servant?

### Read 2 Kings 3:21-27.

- How did the Lord draw the Moabites out of position?
- What did the king of Moab do as a last-ditch effort?
- Having the victory in sight, what did the three kings do?

## Sought by Some, Hated by Others

Like many of God's servants before and after him, Elisha was ridiculed and looked down upon. Occasionally, even those outside of the faith saw and took advantage of the personal benefit they could derive from their contact with God's representative, as did Joram. In today's world there are those who view their membership in the church more as another opportunity to make business contacts than as a place of worship and praise. And of course, Christians are still persecuted and scoffed at for their faith.

1. How do the words of Jesus in John **15:18-27** prepare us for our lives as disciples of Christ?
2. In what way is the focus of this lesson still true in the public ministry today? cf. **2 Co. 2:12-17**
3. How should we evaluate a sudden growth or decline in the size of a congregation? Along those lines, what is a "successful" ministry?