

## PROPHET ELISHA

Elisha the prophet continued the efforts of Elijah in restoring proper worship. Elisha's work serves as a model in teaching righteousness and faith.

As Elijah was nearing the end of his ministry, God directed him to anoint a younger man named Elisha to take his place. Elisha, son of Shaphat, was from Abel Meholah, of the Jordan Valley (1 Kings 19:16). After a few years of training, Elisha would become God's spokesman to the northern kingdom; and his ministry would be filled with signs and miracles, proclamations and warnings. He would become known as the prophet of peace and healing.

Elijah was divinely directed by God to seek his successor, and Elijah found Elisha out in a field plowing on his father's farm. Elijah placed his mantle (an outer garment, like a cloak) on Elisha's shoulders, and Elisha apparently understood this symbolic act as being appointed to the role of a prophet. Without hesitation, Elisha accepted the call to service, leaving the comfort of his family and home to follow a less predictable life that would require personal sacrifice (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Elisha began his ministry as Elijah's student and personal attendant. The young man would first prove himself faithful in small things, such as the humble duty of pouring water on the hands of Elijah (2 Kings 3:11). Elisha's training under Elijah would gradually prepare him for a work that he would one day take up alone.

The miracles Elisha performed are, for the most part, acts of helpfulness and blessing, such as the healing of Jericho's waters (2 Kings 2:21), the resurrection of the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37), and the curing of Naaman's leprosy (2 Kings 5). Some of Elisha's miracles, such as the multiplication of 20 barley loaves to feed 100 men, strongly resemble some of the miracles of Christ (2 Kings 4:42-44; cf. Matthew 16:9-10).

### Healing of General Naaman

Naaman was the commander of Syria's (Aram's) army and well regarded as a military man, but he had leprosy. One of Israel's enemies was neighbouring Syria. During one of the wars, a Jewish girl was taken captive to Syria and she became a slave in Damascus. Her mistress was the wife of Naaman. The servant girl told her master that she was sure that the prophet of her people could heal him. Naaman left for Israel, taking a large gift with him and a letter from Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, asking the king of Israel to heal Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-6). The king of Israel's reaction was panic—how could anyone heal leprosy? The king of Israel thought Ben-hadad was trying to start a fight (2 Kings 5:7).

When the prophet Elisha heard of the king's distress, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8). Naaman then came to Elisha's house with his chariots, gifts, and servants.

Elisha did not even come out to greet Naaman. Instead, he sent a message to wash in the Jordan River seven times to be healed. “Naaman was angry and went away, saying, ‘Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings 5:11–12).

Naaman’s servants urged him to reconsider, and Naaman wisely did. After dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times, he was completely healed as Elisha had said. In fact, “his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy” (2 Kings 5:14). Naaman returned to Elisha and said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant” (verse 15). Elisha refused the gift and sent the Syrian commander away in peace.

However, Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, followed Naaman and deceitfully asked for a gift in Elisha’s name. Naaman gave him “two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing” (2 Kings 5:23). Gehazi hid the loot and returned home, where Elisha confronted him. Gehazi lied again to cover the matter. The Lord had given Elisha insight, and the prophet told Gehazi, “Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever” (verse 27). Gehazi immediately contracted leprosy.

### **Elisha dethrones the king of Israel**

The prophet Elisha had been chosen, as had Elijah before him, to defend the true religion of the Israelites. Elisha decided that he must put an end to the dynasty of Omri because Omri and his sons had persisted in worshipping false gods and idols, bringing evil to Israel. Omri's dynasty had reached its most evil point when Ahab and Jezebel reigned. Now, Ahab and Jezebel's son, King Joram, was continuing in their pagan ways.

Elisha sought out a general in the army named Jehu and anointed him King of Israel. He encouraged Jehu to rebel against Joram and take over the throne and wipe out Ahab's family. When his fellow-commanders pledge their support to Jehu as their new king, he sets out for Jezreel, where Israel’s King Joram, Judah’s King Ahaziah, and Jezebel (Joram’s mother and Ahab’s widow) are staying. As Jehu races toward Jezreel, both Joram and Ahaziah go outside the city of Jezreel to meet him, not suspecting that a revolution is in progress. Providentially, they meet at the property that belonged to Naboth. Joram seeks to flee, as does Ahaziah, but both are executed.

Jehu then marches upon the city of Jezreel, where he instructs those standing near Jezebel to throw her out of the window from which she was taunting him. Jezebel probably died as the result of her fall, but being trampled under the feet of Jehu’s horses (and perhaps also being run over by his chariot) certainly ended not only her life, but a reign of wickedness. When the dogs devoured most of all her remains, the prophecies pertaining to her death were fulfilled. (2 Kings 9:36).

### **The significance of these events**

In both the incidents we see highlighted the authority that the prophet Elisha received from God in order to guide His people. His fame as healer was acknowledged not only by Israelites, but also by a Syria, Namaan - who was brought to acknowledge Yahweh as the only true God. The same Yahweh uses Elisha to dethrone Joram who failed to abide by the covenant with the one true God. The people realize that their salvation lay in listening to the prophets who always speak on behalf of God. We too learn that God's guidance and correction comes to us through leaders and elders in the church who speak on behalf of God.