

## Who was Elisha in the Bible?

Elisha, whose name means "God is salvation," was the successor of Elijah in the office of the prophet in Israel (1 Kings 19:16, 19-21; 2 Kings 5:8). He was called to follow Elijah in 1 Kings 19:19, and he spent the next several years as the prophet's protégé, until Elijah was taken into heaven. At that time, Elisha began his ministry, which lasted about 60 years, spanning the reigns of kings Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash.

The initial call of Elisha is instructive. After a mighty display of God's power against the prophets of Baal and a return of the rain after a long drought, Queen Jezebel sought Elijah's life. Afraid, the prophet fled. He was refreshed by an angel and prepared for a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb. There, Elijah confessed that he believed himself to be the only faithful prophet remaining. God told Elijah to go back home, anoint Hazael king of Aram, Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha to succeed him as prophet. God said, "Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu" (1 Kings 19:17). He also reassured Elijah that there were 7,000 remaining who had not bowed to Baal.

Elijah obeyed God's word and found Elisha, who was plowing with a pair of oxen at the time. Elijah put his cloak around Elisha—a sign that Elijah's responsibilities would fall on Elisha, and Elisha left his oxen and ran after the prophet. Elisha asked only to say goodbye to his family and then would return to Elijah. Elisha went back, slaughtered his oxen and burnt his equipment, gave the meat to the people, then followed Elijah as his servant. Elisha responded to the call immediately. He completely removed himself from his former life—essentially hosting a celebration and leaving himself no option to return to his oxen. Not only did Elisha leave his former life, he became a servant in his new life (1 Kings 19:21).

Elisha seemed to love Elijah like he would a father. He refused to leave Elijah before Elijah was taken into heaven, despite Elijah's telling Elisha to remain behind. Elijah permitted Elisha to stay with him, and he asked what he could do for his protégé before he left. Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit. This was not a greedy request but rather one indicating that Elisha wanted to be considered as Elijah's son. Elijah told Elisha that, if he saw Elijah when he was taken, then the double portion would be Elisha's. Elisha did, indeed, see the chariot of fire and horses of fire that separated the men, and he saw Elijah taken to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak and walked to the Jordan River. Elisha struck the water with the cloak, and it divided, just as it had done for Elijah. The other prophets who witnessed this recognized that Elijah's spirit now rested on Elisha. As God had decreed, Elisha would now be His prophet to the people (2 Kings 2:1-18).

As God had told Elijah on the mountain, it was during Elisha's ministry that organized Baal worship was eradicated (2 Kings 10:28). In his ministry Elisha traveled widely and served as an adviser to kings, a companion of the common people, and a friend of both Israelites and foreigners.

There are many well-known accounts of Elisha's service as prophet. He healed the waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-21) and was jeered by youths upon whom he called a curse resulting in their death by mauling bears (2 Kings 2:23-25). He multiplied a widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1-7). He prophesied a son for a wealthy Shunammite family who hosted him and later resurrected that same son (2 Kings 4:8-37). Elisha also removed poison from a pot of stew (2 Kings 4:38-41) and multiplied twenty barley loaves to feed one hundred men (2 Kings 4:42-44). He cured Naaman of leprosy (2 Kings 5) and made a borrowed ax head float

(2 Kings 6:1-7). The miracles Elisha performed are, for the most part, acts of helpfulness and blessing. Others strongly resemble some of the miracles of Christ, such as the multiplying of food (Matthew 16:9-10) and the healing of lepers (Luke 17:11-19).

Elisha offered counsel to the king of Israel. One incident tells of Elisha warning the king about the king of Aram's movements. When the king of Aram found out it was Elisha foiling his plans, he sought to capture the prophet. When Elisha's servant, Gehazi, saw the Arameans that had come against them, he was afraid. But Elisha told him not to be afraid because "those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:16-17). One cannot help but recall how Elisha had seen similar chariots of fire when Elijah was taken to heaven. Elisha then prayed for the Arameans to be struck with blindness. Elisha led them to Samaria, the capital of Israel, before asking the Lord to open their eyes. The king of Israel wondered if he should kill the captives, but Elisha counseled him to prepare food for them instead. When they were finished with the feast, the Aramians returned to their master, and Aram ceased raiding Israel. Elisha also prophesied other events of national and international importance regarding Israel and Syria.

King Jehoash, or Joash, was reigning at the time of Elisha's death. The king visited Elisha while the prophet was ill and wept over him. Elisha instructed Jehoash to get a bow and arrows and shoot them out the window. When Jehoash did so, Elisha told him this was God's arrow of victory over Aram. Elisha then told the king to strike the ground with the arrows, but Jehoash stopped after only three times. Elisha was angered. Had Jehoash struck the ground five or six times, he would have completely destroyed Aram but

would now only defeat them three times (2 Kings 13:14-19).

Of Elisha's death, 2 Kings 13:20 simply says, "Elisha died and was buried." But the passage goes on to talk about Moabite raiders who came to Israel every spring: "Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet" (2 Kings 13:21). It seems that God chose to demonstrate His power through the prophet even after his death.

Jesus spoke of Elisha in Luke 4:27. The people had rejected Jesus in Nazareth and He told them that "no prophet is accepted in his hometown" (Luke 4:24). Jesus said there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's time, yet only Naaman, a Syrian, was cured.

A study of the life of Elisha will reveal the prophet's humility (2 Kings 2:9; 3:11), his obvious love for the people of Israel (2 Kings 8:11-12), and his faithfulness in a lifelong ministry. Elisha was obedient to God's call, following Elijah eagerly and faithfully. Elisha clearly believed God and trusted Him. Elisha sought after God, and through him God worked powerfully.