

The Days of Elisha

By Nick Gill

Scripture for the Lesson: II Kings 2-9

KEY VERSES: I Kings 19:15-21 (Matt 9:9-13; 19:22); II Kings 4; 6:20-23; 8:11-13; 9:1-10

INTRODUCTION/ SUMMARY:

This lesson will focus on the life and character of the prophet Elisha. Elisha was the apprentice of Elijah. When Elijah died, Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Like Elijah, Elisha was a devout follower of God, whose obedience to God led him into conflict with the different rulers of the nations around Israel, as he reminded those rulers of the sovereignty of the One True God. Whereas Elijah's ministry directly attacked the worship of Baal, God called Elisha to work more subversively. While his community suffers famine as a result of royal choices, Elisha uses his miraculous abilities to show them the power of God over all aspects of life. In this way, Elisha undermines the hold that Baal worship possessed over the hearts and minds of people. For approx. 50 years, Elisha is the focal point of God's work. In every way, he exemplifies the double portion that he asked for: his miracles, his interactions with royalty, and his unswerving faith consistently show that it is the enemy of God that is truly vulnerable, despite wealth and worldly might. It is those who obey the transforming power of God that are able to do and experience the impossible.

GOAL(s):

1. The purpose of this lesson is to familiarize the students with the character of the prophet Elisha.
2. The second purpose of this lesson is to show the students that God is interested with every aspect of our lives.
3. The final purpose of this lesson is to remind students of how joyous, God-trusting lives can influence the world around us.

OBJECTIVES:

K – 1st:

Students will . . .

1. Locate I Kings 19 and II Kings 6 in their Bibles.
2. Define ANOINT, YOKE, and FEAST
3. Answer the following questions about the calling of Elisha:
 - a. How many oxen did Elisha have?
 - b. What did Elijah give to Elisha?
 - c. What did Elisha do with his oxen?
4. Explain how God makes the king of Syria look foolish.
5. Explain why Elijah's servant stopped being afraid.

2nd – 3rd

Students will . . .

1. Locate I Kings 19, II Kings 4, and II Kings 6 in their Bibles.
2. Define ANOINT, YOKE, and FEAST
3. Answer the following questions about the calling of Elisha:
 - a. How many oxen did Elisha have? What does that mean?
 - b. How did Elisha control his oxen? What did Elijah give Elisha?
 - c. Why did Elisha sacrifice his oxen?
 - d. Compare w/Matt 9:9-13 (Matthew giving up his job for Jesus)
4. Demonstrate understanding of God’s concern for helpless poor as shown in II Kings 4. Think of ways our families can help the poor.
5. Explain how God makes the king of Syria look foolish.
6. Explain why Elijah’s servant stopped being afraid.

4th – 5th

Students will . . .

1. Locate I Kings 19, II Kings 4, and II Kings 6 in their Bibles.
2. Define ANOINT, YOKE, FEAST, and MISSION
3. Compare and contrast the calling of Elisha to episodes when Jesus called wealthy people to follow him. (Matthew, Zacchaeus, Rich Young Ruler, etc.)
4. Demonstrate understanding of the symbolic relationship between the oxen’s yoke and Elijah’s cloak.
5. Explain in their own words how the miracles of II Kings 4 show how God is concerned with what the world would call “little things.” Think of ways we can show the love of God to our families w/“little things.”
6. Relate in their own words the story of Elisha’s fearful servant.

Important points include:

 - a. The foolishness of the king
 - b. The courage of Elisha and the fearfulness of the servant
 - c. The unexpected ending of the story (feast rather than slaughter, compare with I Kings 20:26-30)
 - d. Applying the lesson of God’s provision to times when acting Christian seems hopeless or very scary.

6th – 8th

Students will . . .

1. Locate I Kings 19, II Kings 4-6, and II Kings 8 in their Bibles.
2. Define all vocabulary.
3. Work through the following activities concerning the calling of Elisha:
 - a. Relate in their own words God’s command to Elijah (19:15-18)
 - b. Compare and contrast the calling of Elisha to episodes when Jesus called wealthy people to follow him. (Matthew, Zacchaeus, Rich Young Ruler, etc.)
 - c. Demonstrate understanding of the symbolic relationship between the oxen’s yoke and Elijah’s cloak.

4. Analyze the miracles of II Kings 4-5. What do they say about God's attitude towards:
 - a. The helpless poor?
 - b. Everyday struggles in life?
 - c. People who don't know Him yet?
 - d. How do these miracles confront Baal worship differently than the fiery attacks of Elijah?
5. Relate in their own words the story of Elisha's fearful servant. Important points include:
 - a. The foolishness of the king
 - b. The courage of Elisha and the fearfulness of the servant
 - c. The unexpected ending of the story (feast rather than slaughter, compare with I Kings 20:26-30)
 - d. Applying the lesson of God's provision to times when acting Christian seems hopeless or very scary.
6. Split into groups and summarize II Kings 8:7-15 (Group One) and II Kings 9:1-10 (Group Two) in light of the answer to 3.a above. Compare answers, and use those answers to demonstrate understanding of the ongoing mission of God.

9th – 12th

Students will . . .

1. Locate I Kings 19, II Kings 4-6, and II Kings 8 in their Bibles.
2. Define all vocabulary.
3. Work through the following activities concerning the calling of Elisha:
 - a. Relate in their own words God's command to Elijah (19:15-18)
 - b. Compare and contrast the calling of Elisha to episodes when Jesus called wealthy people to follow him. (Matthew, Zacchaeus, Rich Young Ruler, etc.)
 - c. Demonstrate understanding of the symbolic relationship between the oxen's yoke and Elijah's cloak.
4. Analyze the miracles of II Kings 4-5. What do they say about God's attitude towards:
 - a. The helpless poor?
 - b. Everyday struggles in life?
 - c. People who don't know Him yet?
5. Relate in their own words the story of Elisha's fearful servant. Important points include:
 - a. The foolishness of the king
 - b. The courage of Elisha and the fearfulness of the servant
 - c. The unexpected ending of the story (feast rather than slaughter, compare with I Kings 20:26-30)
 - d. Applying the lesson of God's provision to times when acting Christian seems hopeless or very scary.

6. Split into groups and summarize II Kings 8:7-15 (Group One) and II Kings 9:1-10 (Group Two) in light of the answer to 3.a above. Compare answers, and use those answers to discuss the challenges and joys of participating in the ongoing mission of God.

VOCABULARY:

1. **Anoint**—literally, to pour oil over the head of a person; symbolically, to announce that God has chosen them for a specific purpose.
2. **Yoke**—literally, a harness for controlling and guiding draft animals in their work; symbolically, any means of guidance and control. By NT times, *yoke* could also mean a teacher’s way of interpreting the Scriptures. Thus, by comparison to the yoke of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus’ yoke was easy – following Him, rather than memorizing the sayings and traditions and commentaries of the fathers.
3. **Feast**—a grand celebratory meal
4. **Mission**—a special assignment given by a higher authority to a specific person/group. The mission of God, assigned to his people throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, is for the world to know that He alone is the One True God, unique and universal. There is none like Him, and He alone rules everything.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE/PLACES:

1. **Elijah**—Prophet of God (his name means, ‘The Lord, He is God’) who trained Elisha (‘God saves’), violently confronted the worshippers of Baal, and was carried up to God in a fiery chariot.
2. **Baal**—Ancient Middle-Eastern Storm God, armed with thunder and lightning, symbolized by the bull (golden calves). Believed to fertilize the land with the rain. Baal worship was an attractive addition to worship of the One True God. In Kings, YHWH’s attack against Baal worship has two parts: Elijah’s fiery, aggressive, miraculous slaughtering the leadership, and Elisha’s quieter, subversive, miraculous provision of gifts that the priesthood of Baal could not provide. By this two-step process, YHWH glorifies Himself over mere idols, but the people still reject Him, and are eventually taken away into exile.
3. **Shunem**—A city in the territory of Issachar. It was approximately 7 miles south of Nazareth and 2 miles north of Jezreel. It was home to the woman and her husband who built Elisha a room onto their house.
4. **Aram/Syria**—pagan nation northeast of Israel. Israel’s rival, along with Judah, for political power in Palestine.
5. **Samaria**—Capital of the northern kingdom (Israel). Jerusalem, Samaria, and Damascus are the three cities around which the action in Elisha’s ministry revolves.



SUGGESTED ANSWERS FOR THE OBJECTIVES:

If you need a format to help teach class, look to the beginning of the QUARTER. A page dedicated to organizing classes will help you manage time and present the lesson effectively to meet our objectives. Be sure to cover, in the very least, the KEY VERSES listed at the beginning of the lesson.

Answers to Objectives:

- 1) **How many oxen did Elisha have?** 24 (12 yoke, each yoking a pair together)
Having that many oxen shows an uncommonly high level of wealth/prosperity. Elisha's family was very well-off.
- 2) **How did Elisha control the oxen?** He placed them in leather and metal harnesses called yokes, that fit closely to their necks and shoulders and let them pull heavy loads without strain or injury or chafing/blistering.
- 3) **What did Elijah give Elisha?** His cloak, symbolizing his prophetic office – his submission to God's control of his life.
- 4) **What did Elisha do with his oxen?** He sacrificed them as a fellowship offering, celebrating that God had chosen him to be the great Elijah's disciple and, eventually, successor.
- 5) **How does God make the king of Syria look foolish?** (2 Kings 6:8-14)
 - i. Several times, Elisha the prophet tells the king of Israel where the king of Syria plans to ambush him.
 - ii. The king of Syria thinks he has a spy among his advisors.
 - iii. The advisors say, "No, the king of Israel has a real prophet."
 - iv. So the king of Syria plans an ambush for the prophet... the same prophet who has been telling the king of Israel about all his ambush plans.
- 6) **Why did Elisha's servant stop being afraid?** He saw the armies of God encamped all around him, how powerfully God was working to protect and support Elisha's work.
- 7) **What about the unexpected ending (II Kings 6:20-23)? Feasting rather than slaughter (I Kings 20:29-30)?** This contrast shows the difference between the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. Although they both serve the same God, they serve Him in different situations. Elijah is, in a sense, setting the stage for Elisha. Before the people can understand that "God saves" (El-i-sha), they must first understand that "the only real God is the Lord" (El-i-yah). Thus most of Elijah's miracles are aggressive, attacking the servants of Baal, while most of Elisha's miracles are peaceful, healing and protecting those who might serve his God. Elisha has the lives of this whole group of Syrian troops in his hand, but rather than have them slaughtered by the king of Israel, he offers peace and salvation.

- 8) **How do the miracles of II Kings 4 show God's concern for "little things?"** Here, while all sorts of turmoil rages between the kings of the different nations, the prophet of God is not out picking fights with the high priests or drawing the ire of the different rulers. He is caring for a widow, showing compassion to one little family, and feeding a multitude in the midst of a famine brought on by the sins of the kings. The God of Elisha heals, provides, and brings life from death. In II Kings 5, He shows Himself to be the God, not just of Israel, but the UNIVERSAL God, of Syria and of the entire world. In II Kings 6, with the axe-head, He shows Himself again to be concerned with the "little" needs of his people.
- 9) **How do II Kings 8:7-15 and II Kings 9:1-10 relate to I Kings 19:15-18?** Elijah only completes one part of God's instructions in I Kings 19:15-18 (calling Elisha). The rest is left for Elisha to complete. The mission of God is not always easy or pleasant to do: Elisha grieves bitterly that he must appoint Hazael to be king of Syria, as it will bring to futility the work of reconciliation that Elisha has done in II Kings 6 (feast rather than slaughter). Elisha must give specific instructions about hasty fleeing to the prophet who will anoint Jehu, because he knows that as soon as Jehu is anointed, chaos will erupt until the whole family of Ahab/Jezebel is wiped out. "What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?" (II Kings 9:22) Some people would like to have a God that keeps Himself distant from such awfulness; our God gets right in the middle of the wreckage we humans create and constantly works for righteousness and salvation.

CLOSURE

Pray thanksgiving that Almighty God is deeply concerned with every aspect of our lives; that He passionately desires each of us to grow up to be just like Jesus. Ask God to help us to always trust Him, even when things around us seem frightening and terrible. Ask Him to help us to never give up, but to always keep striving to serve Him, no matter how hard it seems at the moment. Let us always remember that He is working out His will right alongside us, and we've been given the awesome privilege of participating in the beautiful saving work of the One True God!