

Chariots of Fire: 2 Kings 2:1-18 Explained

Scriptures for Today: 2 Kings 2:1-18

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And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el. 3 And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. 4 And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. 5 And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. 6 And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. 7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. 8 And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. 9 And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. 10 And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. 11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. 13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; 14 And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. 15 And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. 16 And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. 17 And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. 18 And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?""

Introduction — A Fiery Transition in Israel's History

To understand the magnitude of 2 Kings 2, we must step back and survey where we are in the Bible's story:

God has formed a nation, rescued them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, raised up judges, given them kings, established Jerusalem, and made a covenant with David that would shape all of history.

After David came Solomon — glorious, wise, wealthy, yet a man whose compromises tore the kingdom in half. The northern kingdom Israel plunged into idolatry under Jeroboam, setting a pattern of wicked kings — Baasha, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah.

In this dark backdrop, God raised up **prophets** — not politicians, not generals, not kings. Prophets or preachers of the word of God. This includes men who confronted kings, called fire from heaven, shut the mouths of false religion, and refused to bow when everyone else did.

And above them all, at this time in history, stands **Elijah** — God's lightning prophet. He confronted king Ahab to his face. He called down fire on Mount Carmel. He exposed Baal for the fraud he was. He ran faster than a chariot. He prayed and shut heaven for three and a half years.

But Elijah is nearing the end. His ministry is almost finished. His successor is beside him, Elisha, plowing farmer turned prophet. And now God will remove Elijah from the earth, not by death, but by **whirlwind and fiery chariot**. But before we dive into that fiery ascent into the heavens, we need one more layer. What happened in the previous part of this book?

Summary of 2 Kings 1:1-18 — Elijah's Final Stand Against Ahaziah

In the previous sermon, Ahaziah, the wicked son of Ahab and Jezebel, fell and injured himself. Instead of calling upon the LORD, he sent messengers to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron. Elijah intercepted those messengers and declared judgment:

""2 Kings 1:4

Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

Ahaziah sent soldiers to arrest Elijah. Twice fire fell from heaven and consumed them. The third captain humbled himself, and God spared him. Elijah went to the king and repeated God's judgment. Ahaziah died exactly as Elijah prophesied.

And now, with the king dead, with judgment executed, and with the prophetic office about to transition to Elisha from Elijah, we arrive at one of Scripture's most dramatic moments. Please hear this today and remember the Scriptures.

Verse 1 — The Lord Is About to Take Elijah

""2 Kings 2:1

And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal."

This is not an accident. Not a sickness. Not old age. **The LORD would take up Elijah.** This is God's appointment for Elijah. God Himself will remove Elijah from the earth. Only two men in Scripture leave earth without dying: 1) Enoch (Genesis 5:24). 2) Elijah.

The phrase "take up" teaches intentional divine action. Elijah's departure is not escape, it is promotion to the heavens above. And notice Elijah begins this final journey at **Gilgal**. This is the place where Israel renewed covenant under Joshua. His ministry ends where Joshua was set apart for God's use.

Verses 2-3 — Elisha Refuses to Leave

""2 Kings 2:2-3

And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el. And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."

In verse 2 through 6 today, we will see THREE times Elijah says, "Stay." And THREE times Elisha says, "Never." Elisha is going to cleave to Elijah. Why? Because true loyalty stays to the end. Because true ministry cannot be inherited from a distance. Because anointing is not handed to spectators BUT only to followers.

The "sons of the prophets" knew Elijah's departure was coming. It was not a secret — it was a divine event heaven was broadcasting. Elisha says, "Hold your peace." Meaning: "Yes, I know. But don't distract me from what God is doing." He says, "YEA, I KNOW IT."

Verses 4-5 — The Same Pattern Continues

""2 Kings 2:4-5

And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. 5 And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."

Beth-el is where Jacob met God. Jericho is where Joshua fought God's battle.



Elisha is retracing Israel's spiritual journey as if God is walking him through the prophetic heritage before handing him the role. Every step matters. Every city speaks. Every test verifies Elisha's commitment.

Verse 6 — One Last Test

""2 Kings 2:6

And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. ""

Jordan — the river of transition. The river of crossing over. The river of new beginnings. And only **two** go forward. Everyone else watches. Only Elisha walks with Elijah to the last moment. Many admire prophets from afar. Few walk with them to Jordan.

Verse 7 — A Witnessing Crowd

""2 Kings 2:7

And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. ""

Fifty men watch. Two men walk. Spectators never receive mantles. Observers never receive double portions. Distance is safe — but distance never inherits power. But notice, these men are watching from afar. FIFTY MEN of the sons of the prophets.

Verse 8 — Elijah Parts the Water

""2 Kings 2:8

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. ""

The same God who split the Red Sea... The same God who split the Jordan for Joshua... Now splits it again for His prophet. So, in the entire Bible, we see 4 times waters being divided like this. Moses does it. Joshua does it. Elijah does it. And Elisha does it. Remember that.

Miracles do not belong to eras or to the people — they belong to God. Elijah crosses on dry ground because he is walking into glory. Elisha crosses because he is walking into calling. Elisha is learning from Elijah. He is following him wherever he goes.

Verse 9 — Elisha Makes a Bold Request

""2 Kings 2:9

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. ""



Most people ask for comfort, fame, ease, or success. Elisha asks for **responsibility**. He is going to take over for Elijah as God's prophet. The "double portion" is inheritance language — he is asking to be Elijah's rightful successor, the firstborn spiritual heir.

He is not asking to be twice the prophet Elijah was — no one can be Elijah twice. He is asking to continue the ministry with full authority.

Verse 10 — A Hard Thing

""2 Kings 2:10

And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. """

The mantle cannot be given. It must be seen. Elisha must watch God take Elijah. He must endure the pain of separation. He must remain steady even as heaven pulls Elijah away. Spiritual inheritance requires steadfast faith.

Verse 11 — The Chariot of Fire Arrives

""2 Kings 2:11

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. """

What a scene. Fire from heaven for Israel's deliverance. Fire from heaven for judgment on Carmel. Fire from heaven for consuming soldiers. And now fire from heaven for Elijah's exit.

But notice — the chariot does not "carry" Elijah. The text says a **whirlwind** takes him. The chariot **separates** Elijah and Elisha — cutting the earthly bond so God can make a heavenly one.

Elijah does not die. He ascends. This is a preview of Christ's ascension. This is a picture of resurrection power. This is a prophecy of future glory.

Verse 12 — Elisha's Cry

""2 Kings 2:12

And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. """

Elisha calls Elijah "**my father**." This is spiritual sonship. He tears his clothes — symbolizing the end of one era and the beginning of another.



The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof means: **Elijah was Israel's real defense — not armies, not kings.** When God removes His prophet, the nation loses its protection.

Verse 13 — The Mantle Falls

""2 Kings 2:13

He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan. ""

Elijah's mantle is his outer prophetic cloak or garment that identified him as a prophet of God. Heavy, rough, recognizable piece of clothing usually made of animal hair. The mantle falls, not because Elijah dropped it, but because God passed it down. Elisha picks it up, not to be Elijah, but to continue Elijah's work. The work of Elijah goes on through Elisha.

Elijah goes to heaven. The mantle falls to earth. Elisha picks up what heaven left behind for Elisha to continue.

Verse 14 — The Test

""2 Kings 2:14

And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. ""

This is not doubt. This is declaration. "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" Translation: "I know where Elijah went — but God, are You here with me now?"

God answers immediately. The waters part again. God is with Elisha. That is God saying: "I am not just the God of Elijah — I am the God of every man who walks in My Spirit."

When we're out there soul winning and we need to find someone to preach the Gospel to: "God, are you with me right now?" And then what happens? Someone shows up to hear the Gospel as we use our feet. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" We know He is here with us.

Verse 15 — The Prophets Acknowledge Elisha

""2 Kings 2:15

And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. ""

They saw the miracle. They saw the mantle. They saw the authority. They bow, not to worship, but to acknowledge leadership. God publicly confirms those He privately anoints.

Verses 16–18 — One Final Misunderstanding

""2 Kings 2:16–18

And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. 17 And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men, and they sought three days, but found him not. 18 And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?""

Even after everything they saw... Even after they saw the waters parted earlier in this chapter... They still think Elijah might have been dropped somewhere. Only Elisha saw Elijah ascend into heaven, but these prophets saw miracles. And they don't trust Elisha a prophet of God.

Unbelief survives even in religious circles. Elisha lets them search, not because he doubts, but because he knows they will learn only by failure.

They kept urging Elisha until he was ashamed meaning they wouldn't be quiet about it so he tells them to go on and search for Elijah. Three days wasted. Three days proving God's word stands.

There are many people out there that want to prove God's words. I just go ahead and immediately believe His words. And I move forward. I don't go back and try to prove all of what God said is true. I know it's true. I don't need proof.

Practical Applications

1. Stay with God's calling until the end. Elisha refused to leave Elijah. Many start close. Few stay close. Faithfulness is not measured by excitement but endurance.

2. If you want spiritual inheritance, you must walk close. Mantles do not fall on casual followers. God entrusts power to those who follow with consistency.

3. God uses transitions to prepare the next generation. Elijah is taken. Elisha rises. God is never without a voice.

4. Don't fear the departure of great men because God remains. Every great leader dies or departs. But God's work never stops.

5. God may remove you before He rewards you. Elijah did not retire — he ascended. Faithfulness ends in glory.

6. Ask big things from God. Elisha asked boldly. Lukewarm prayers get lukewarm answers.

7. The God of Elijah is still the God of today. He still parts waters. He still answers the faith-filled cry. He still passes the mantle.

Conclusion — When God Takes One Man, He Raises Another

2 Kings 2 is more than a miracle story. It is the story of divine transition: A great prophet is taken. A new prophet is raised. A nation is reminded that God, not Elijah, is the true power behind the ministry.

And here is the sermon in one sentence: **When God removes His servant, He multiplies His Spirit.**

Elijah goes up. The mantle comes down. Elisha steps forward. And the God of fire continues His work through another man willing to walk by faith. That's how this works.

You can see that throughout the entire Bible. People willing to walk by faith are used by God and they continue on. And we pass that on, from faith to faith.

Let's pray.