



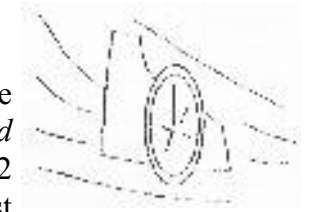
Fire from Heaven

Eight Studies in the Life of Elijah
from 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2
by **Peter J Blackburn**

8. A Chariot of Fire!

Bible Reference: 2 Kings 2.1-18.

Elijah had served the Lord – often alone – over many years. “*The time came for the Lord to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind*” (2 Kings 2.1). The prophet had stood out against the Baal-worship of his time and had been the means through whom the truth and power of the Lord had been seen in drought, fire and rain. He had boldly called the people to accept the truth and to live in integrity. His humanity had been visible as he ran from Jezebel's threats to Sinai. There he wrestled with his lonely task, learnt to listen to God's quiet voice and heard again the call of God. Part of that call was the anointing of Elisha as his successor. Elijah had directly confronted Ahab over the matter of Naboth's vineyard. Elijah also confronted Ahab's son, Ahaziah, who had sent messengers to consult Baalzebub. Once again there was a dramatic reminder of the presence and power of God.



Reflect:

- When Jesus asked his disciples what other people were saying about him, one of the comments was that he was Elijah (Matthew 16.14). Why would people have made that comparison?

What about Elisha?

But Elijah's ministry was almost over. What about Elisha? As we read 2 Kings 2, we sense a great restlessness in Elijah's spirit. He

wanted to be alone. Was this a testing of Elisha? Certainly, Elisha was determined to stay with Elijah, no matter what.

Read: 2 Kings 2.1-8

Perhaps Elijah was visiting all the groups of prophets before he was taken away by the Lord. What did those prophets think about Elisha? Their words, *“Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?”* (vv. 3,5), may even infer that this untried servant cannot follow in his master’s steps! Elisha’s reply, *“Yes, I know. But let’s not talk about it”*, suggests that he was aware of his own inadequacy for the task.

Reflect:

- Put yourself in Elijah’s position. You’ve done what the Lord called you to do and now you hear the call of the Lord to leave it all behind. You’ve had Elisha with you for a number of years now. Over the time he has been with you constantly, but hasn’t actually “done” anything yet. What are you thinking and feeling just now?
- Put yourself in Elisha’s position. A few years ago you were ploughing with a team of oxen. Elijah the prophet came along, took off his cloak and put it on you. He wanted you to follow him. You acted decisively – killed the oxen, cooked the meat over a fire made from the yoke. It has been amazing watching and listening to the prophet. But now he is about to go – and you are wondering what it might mean for you. What are you thinking and feeling just now?
- Put yourself in Simon Peter’s position. Three-and-a-half years ago you were out fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came along the shore and called out, *“Come with me, and I will teach you to catch men.”* So you left your fishing to follow Jesus. Now you’ve seen his miracles, heard his stories, come to a point of saying that he is *“the Christ the Son of the living God”*... Then you saw him nailed to a cross, dead and buried. And you’ve seen him alive from death. But he says he’s leaving for the Father and he has given his final instructions (Matthew 28.19-20)... What are you thinking and feeling just now?

A Chariot of Fire

Reading: 2 Kings 2.9-18.

In an incident reminiscent of the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses’ leadership and the crossing of the Jordan under Joshua, the waters parted and Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

Elisha was still with him – *“Tell me what you want me to do for you before I am taken away.”* Elisha requested, *“Let me receive the share of your power that will make me your successor”* (v. 9). The footnote in the Good News Bible says, “Elisha asked for the share that the first-born son inherited by law from his father (see Deut 21.17).” Elijah’s reply makes it clear that Elisha’s persistence in being with Elijah was the key to fulfilling this request.

“Suddenly a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire came between them, and Elijah was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind” (v. 11). Full of grief, Elisha took Elijah’s cloak, went back to the Jordan and struck the water with it. It divided and he walked over to the other side. The prophets from Jericho said, *“The power of Elijah is on Elisha!”* (v. 15).

Reflect:

- Malachi 4.5 foretells the return of Elijah. While John the Baptist denied fulfilling that prophecy (John 1.21), Jesus made that identification (Matthew 11.14). And on the mount of transfiguration, the three disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus *“about the way in which he would soon fulfil God’s purpose by dying in Jerusalem”* (Luke 9.30-31). What does this say about the continuity of God’s plan through the prophets?
- Think about the “great commission” of Jesus (Matthew 28.18-20; Luke 24.45-49). What provision was made so that they could continue the work?