

**Sermon Notes:** February 11, 2024

[Lectionary Readings](#)

**Focus:** Before the Transfiguration, Elisha and Elijah

I thought it might be interesting to look at another transfiguration besides Jesus: Elijah's fiery chariot ride. The first reading comes from the second book of Kings, 2 Kings 2:1-12 to be specific. Today's reading is about the transfer of power from Elijah to Elisha in the chariot scene.

You will not be able to get a full arc of 1st and 2nd Kings in one, or even ten sermons. The title kind of gives it away. The books are about the role of Kings who were expected to usher in the Messiah. The Kings were the spiritual great grandkids of the covenant promises that God made with Abraham. 1st and 2nd Kings are an encyclopedia of how Kings fell short of these goals. In the mix of all these corrupt leaders, we hear about the ongoing stories of the prophets, especially Elijah and Elisha.

### **Quick primer**

skip this if you already know the two prophets well.

1. ***Elijah's Ministry Begins:*** Elijah the Tishbite emerges as a prophet during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, challenging their worship of Baal and prophesying drought.
2. ***The Contest on Mount Carmel:*** Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal, where he calls down fire from heaven to consume his sacrifice, leading to mass killing of the opposing prophets.
3. ***Elijah's Flight and Encounter with God:*** After Jezebel threatens his life, Elijah flees into the wilderness, experiences despair, and encounters God in a "still small voice".
4. ***Elisha's Call:*** Elijah finds Elisha plowing with oxen, throws his cloak over him as a sign of his call to prophetic service, and Elisha follows Elijah.
5. ***Miracles and Prophetic Acts of Elijah:*** Elijah raises a widow's son from the dead, feeds people during famine, and calls down fire from heaven.
6. ***Elijah's Opposition to Ahab and Jezebel:*** Elijah frequently confronts Ahab and Jezebel over their actions, especially for stealing Naboth's land.
7. ***Transfer of Authority:*** Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan River together, with Elijah striking the water with his cloak to part it.
8. ***Elijah's Ascension:*** Elijah is taken up to heaven witnessed by Elisha, who picks up Elijah's fallen cloak—a symbol of the transfer of prophetic authority.
9. ***Elisha's Ministry Begins:*** Elisha 're-parts' the Jordan with Elijah's cloak, mirroring Elijah's earlier miracle, and he goes on to heal Naaman of leprosy.
10. ***Elisha continues:*** Elisha continues Elijah's mission and is an advisor to kings embodying the spirit and power of Elijah.

**Jason Byansee, a minister in Canada,** writes about Elijah and Elisha: *Their (Elijah and Elisha's) relationship recalls Moses' relationship with Joshua. Just before Moses dies, he hands leadership over to Joshua, who conquers the promised land. There's a reason these two—Moses and Elijah—turn up at Jesus' transfiguration. And Elijah never dies—he's taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot—so he can turn up at odd moments in Israel. Jewish families leave a chair unoccupied for Elijah at Passover, because Elijah's not dead.*

**Furthermore Dennis Tucker,** a professor in Waco, Texas writes: *On the way to crossing the Jordan river, Elijah parts the Jordan, bringing to mind vividly the activities of Moses at the Red Sea and Joshua at the Jordan. Elijah rolls up his mantle, perhaps suggesting to the reader the image of a rod (Moses' rod, no doubt). When Elijah struck the water, the waters parted, and they walked through on dry land (cf. Exodus 14). Having departed from Jericho and having crossed the Jordan River, they now stand literally in the region where Moses had died (Deuteronomy 34). Just as Moses died opposite Jericho with Joshua prepared to enter into the land, so too is Elijah taken up, with Elisha prepared to return to the land.*

I think the history, summary and commentary give us a great context to understand the fiery chariot and Elisha's prophetic mantle. Elisha literally gets a double mouthful to carry on the work of Elijah. To get even more literal, the rabbis give Elijah's miracle count at 8 and Elisha scores 16.

I leave you with some final thoughts. Be more like Elisha:

- Aim for a double portion for yourself and others. What's the worst that can happen?

*Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."*

- Keep going, especially when turned away

*Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."*

- Be generous with your time, be a mentor and be mentored

*Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.*

- Be ready to change course if you get what seek

*Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.*

(Because he would wear Elijah's mantle)

**Todd**