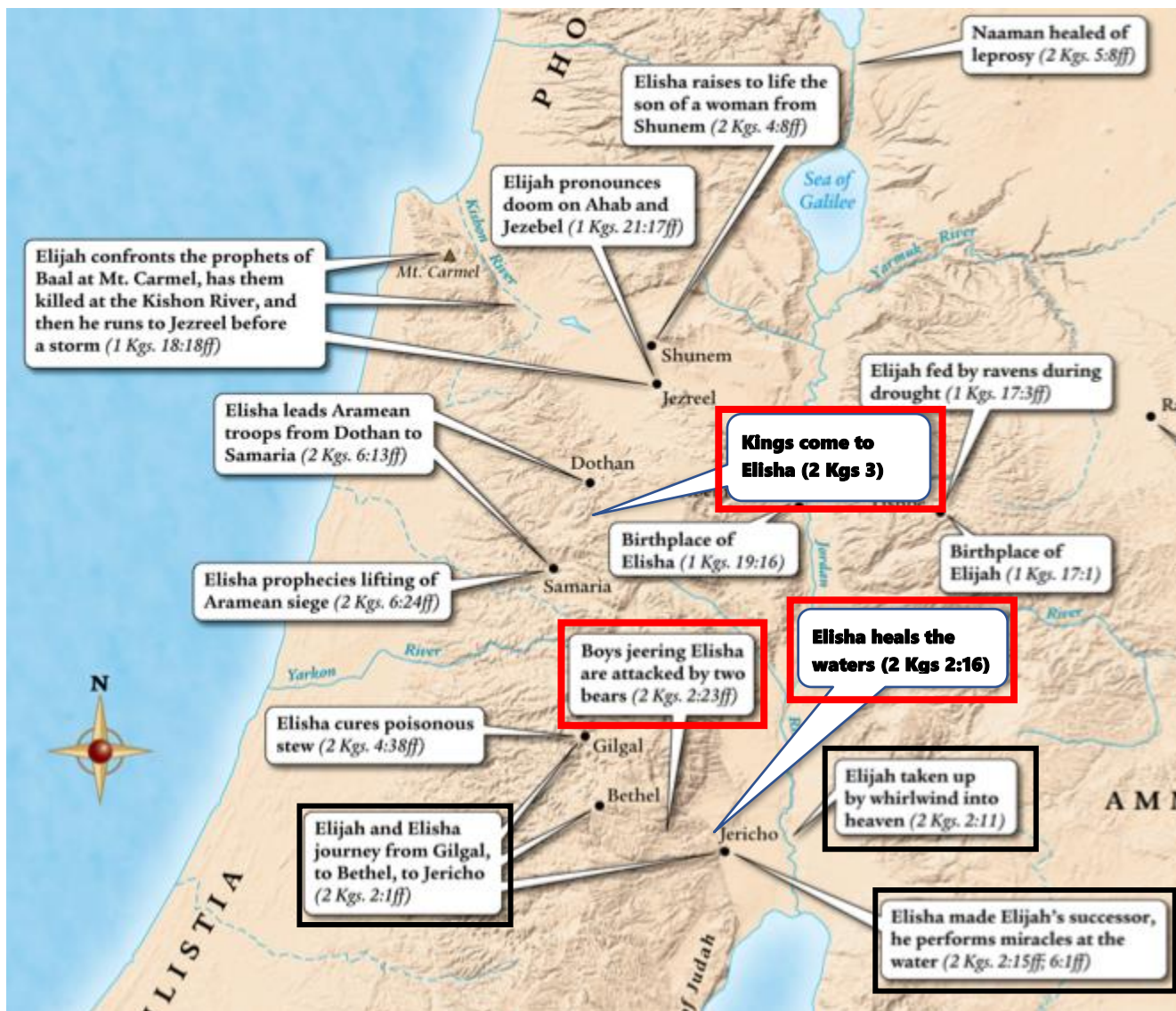


And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. (2Ki 2:3)

Today we will continue our investigation into the life and acts of Elisha, seeking patience and comfort from these things that have been written for our learning

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Rom 15:4)



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. 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. 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. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not? (2Ki 2:15-18)

So we pick up with Elisha having taken possession of his master's mantle and crossed the parted Jordan to come upon these sons of the prophets, who simultaneously perform opposite actions.

First, they bow themselves to Elisha as their new master but also begin hounding him to send men to find Elijah, "just in case".

This could be as simple as there being two schools of thought amongst these men. While they couldn't deny Elijah's mantle being present on Elisha's shoulders, not all of them were convinced of Elijah's permanent departure – there was no unity of spirit amongst them. They show him the respect of carrying the mantle of their master but can't get their minds wrapped around his being truly gone.

Elisha isn't hard with them but knows there is no point in this pursuit of fleshly validation. It is a truly pointless exercise that wastes time and energy – they went to witness what would happen, remember

"And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan." (2Ki 2:7)

So this isn't a situation of "I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it". This is a situation where they did see, at a minimum, that Elijah went across the Jordan and did not come back, which is what they went to witness!

The pull of the flesh is strong, especially resisting change. This was a dramatic and emotional change for all of them, and even in the face of God's dramatic action here, they simply couldn't put it away, pressing and pressing Elisha until he finally accedes to the request.

He doesn't just let it go, when they inevitably return with the expected result

"And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?" (2Ki 2:18)

Notice he doesn't berate them. It's a simple admonition that likely shamed them as much as they had shamed him with their badgering Elisha to send the search party. I am reminded of Paul's exhortation in Romans 14

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” (Rom 14:1)

There’s no reason to mistreat these young men who are having difficulty walking in their faith. Similarly, there is no reason to expend energy in useless disputation – the truth is absolute. We can’t force people to walk in faith – the Lord will provide it to them or he won’t, but us getting into silly, pointless disputes over them is not our way.

- Patience and longsuffering is always appropriate as faith and belief grows in our fellow pilgrims. Remember that just because you are strong today in this bit of faith, does not mean you will be the strongest in another, and you will want to experience that patience in your hour of weakness.

After resolving the question regarding Elijah’s definite departure, Elisha is immediately implored to put his hand to a serious life or death problem.

“And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.” (2Ki 2:19-22)

I admit I have for a long time been a little puzzled by this event. Jericho had been under a curse from the days of Joshua:

“And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.” (Jos 6:26)

So if Jericho was under a curse, why is Elisha helping them? I think it comes down to a simple matter that the curse was filled and had not been renewed or reinstated in any way

“In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.” (1Ki 16:34)

The Lord’s curse was fully realized. This man Hiel, from Bethel, in the days of Ahab stands as a representative for the rebellion that ruled throughout the land. This wasn’t just Ahab and Jezebel that provoked the Lord in those days. These provocations

permeated the entire kingdom such that a man thought he could mock the well-known curse Joshua pronounced. Think about that for a second – it takes a long time to build a city, and when he built the foundations his oldest son died. And he ignored that clear and obvious message so that when he was putting the finishing touch on it – the gates that secure it – he lost his youngest. Many expositors think he lost all his children in the process of rebuilding this city.

After the line of Hiel is cut off, there is no further commentary on Jericho as a cursed place. The curse had been pronounced and through the judgement of God fulfilled, and so the placing of a school of prophets and Elisha's visitation to the city were of no ill consequence, and indeed were a blessing.

Elisha came upon a situation that needed resolving, and where many people would be helped. Were he not to involve himself, many would likely die. He acted with kindness and mercy to address a situation others could not.

Salt would not naturally heal a poisoned water source that caused anything fruitful to cast its young or produce, as the word translated barren means "cause to miscarry". Notice the sincerity in the ask, however. These men of the city genuinely believed that Elisha had the power to address this problem and gave no objection or argument to his orders. Elisha gives instruction that would seem illogical, to bring salt and bring it in a new cruse, or pot. But that is precisely what they do.

These seemingly ridiculous instructions are given for a reason. There is nothing that could be attributed to the cruse being some sort of holy vessel responsible for healing the waters and no one would attribute salt to doing so either. If these instructions solved the problem, it would have to be the Lord working through Elisha that did so, not anything accomplished by human strength. Thus, Elisha saying "[T]hus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters..." – it wasn't a magic trick or a power of Elisha that solved the problem.

- God's servants are vessels **through which** He accomplishes His will, not the mechanism or creator of the miracle.

"And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria." (2Ki 2:23-25)

This event and miracle creates a lot of different viewpoints in the expositor world, and some of what has been written I think creates some possible confusion. It's important we stick to the words and not let the flesh drive our viewpoint.

First, remember that this is Bethel, and while a school of prophets was apparently thriving here, it was an extremely evil place, established by Jeroboam as one of the houses of his false god:

“Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.” (1Ki 12:28-29)

This was a place steeped in long-standing evil, and the grandparents and parents who followed Jeroboam were actively teaching the children. We’ve seen this play out for 30 years, haven’t we? These weren’t young adults. The expositors who like to make the argument that this word children is used to mean “young men” in other places are just trying to make excuses for God’s word. There is no place I find where the word translated “children” is combined with “little” to mean young adults or young men. Don’t make excuses for God, friends.

It might seem difficult to take in, that God would answer the call for a curse from one of His prophets with the slaughter of young children, but I don’t apologize for God’s judgement here anymore than I apologize for any of God’s judgements; I don’t apologize for the suckling babes destroyed in Sodom or those drowned in Noah’s flood. These were young children mocking a man of God and mocking God’s glorious deliverance of His servant Elijah.

Just like Elisha couldn’t actually fix the water with a cruse of salt, he couldn’t have set bears on these children. He called on God to avenge **His glory** and the evidence of His love for Elijah here, and God did what was right to Him. He brought down a judgement that only He could, and it was a sore one; it fell on the children themselves, their parents, grandparents, siblings, the community, the nation, all who spat upon God regularly. These children had been taught to treat God so cavalierly that it was a simple and natural act for them to mercilessly mock this gentle man’s appearance – because there was nothing else to mock him for – and simultaneously mock the glory of God associated with His servants.

This was a grievous thing these children did in mocking God – they were mocking the taking up of Elijah which was a direct display of God’s glory – and that grievous mockery deserved a grievous answer. God is not **always** slow to anger (Psa 103:8); sometimes His judgement is swift and His mercy absent.

- We don’t pass judgement on the judgements of God. All that He does is righteous and holy. God’s glory is a thing to hold in awe, and how you think of it, speak of it, and teach your children of it should be carefully considered.

As Elisha travels through the land, there are other movings and shakings going on, and they result in a rather remarkable event, that in these days seems highly unlikely if not impossible to happen.

*“Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses. And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. **And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab! But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.”** (2Ki 3:1-19)*

I've bolded for emphasis the piece of this story that is most remarkable to me. Consider how amazing it is that the king of Israel, who had learned at the feet of Ahab, would acquiesce to Jehoshaphat and genuinely seek out a prophet to help them get out of the mess they were in.

The mess was significant, no doubt. These kings had not properly counted the cost of going to war against the Moabite rebels and were paying a dear price for it. They recognized the depth of their problem well enough that they left the war camp to go seek out Elisha and entreat with him very respectfully.

I also find Elisha's response to be remarkable in its own right. The servant of God who hasn't been sent by Him to deliver a message isn't on retainer to the princes and rulers of this world, some get out of jail free card to be used at their leisure. Elisha is under no obligation to the king of Israel. Jehoram had the power to take down the golden calves and return to the proper worship of God – but he didn't. He maintained his own stable of false prophets and Elisha rightly refers him back to them – if you're going to reject the ways of God, you don't get ready access to His benefits and helps.

“Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.” (Jdg 10:13-14)

The thing Elisha does next is a great lesson for us all, I believe. It is difficult if not impossible to properly commune with God in a state of mental distress or turmoil. Elisha wasn't in the business of doling out his own personal wisdom, and the frustration and righteous indignation he felt toward Jehoram had him in a bad mental spot. So rather than just fire off some words, he settled himself to be a proper vessel for God's words. This is an example we would do well to take notice of and work to emulate as our natural approach.

It isn't a natural thing to control our tongues in a stressful situation and call on the Lord. It takes supreme discipline over our mind and body, and a great deal of humility to operate at a practical level to first know and acknowledge the weakness and then be willing to take the measures necessary to overcome that weakness.

Elisha does both here. There is no theatre going on, despite his disdain for the king of Israel and his desire to not see him, much less be in his presence. He doesn't rush into some proclamation, he stills himself. The Lord is worthy of our best efforts in serving Him, and to be a proper and complete vessel for His message requires work on our part. The diligent study of His word and the submission of self are required to be useful vessels for our Lord. He can use any part of His creation to send His messages

“And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luk 19:40)

This readying ourselves isn't just when speaking to kings, I believe any time it behooves us to deliver a message that we ought to still ourselves and be fully ready for the business at hand

“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.” (Ecc 5:2)

- Finding peace and stilling our spirits is crucial to delivering a pure Gospel. Our message shouldn't come from a roiling place of human emotion but a stilled human heart and a spirit directed by God.

I pray that “...the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1Th 5:23)