

Elijah and Elisha



Elijah and Elisha #9

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Today I'm trying something different: I will be speaking without notes and just the slides. This is the close of the series on the Old Testament prophets, Elijah & Elisha, we have been doing since Easter.

Elisha and Elijah are pretty incredible, partly because of their many miracles. But these miracles also leaves me with some anxiety and some questions that I don't have answers to:

What makes Elijah and Elisha so different?
Why don't I see these kinds of miracles today?

The problem is not with my questions; it's with my expectation for quick, clear, definitive answers. Our culture expects these kinds of quick answers as well. However, some questions need a long conversation that doesn't end with a clear answer: we are uncomfortable with this.

God doesn't always communicate quickly and clearly, either. Often he answers with another question or an answer that is very challenging.

Today's text has a question that I couldn't shake:

Why All the Miracles?

Here is my answer:

2 Kings 6:1-7

said, "Go."

The company of the prophets said to Elisha, "Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us. ²Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to meet." And he

³Then one of them said, "Won't you please come with your servants?"

"I will," Elisha replied. ⁴ And he went with them.

The Company of Prophets

The Company of Prophets is part of the audience for the miracle and holds clues to the answer: these are actually prophets who are background characters in many other stories about Elijah and Elisha. They are devoted people pursuing a life serving God by apprenticing under either Elijah or Elisha.

When I think about the company of prophets, I think about medieval contemplative monks which didn't just pray but were more like working-class people with families. Some were married with kids who had loans and financial hardships. We know this from last week's story where Elisha refused a lavish payment for a healing miracle but Elisha's servant Gehazi didn't want to let this opportunity go.

They went to the Jordan and began to cut down trees. ⁵ As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron axhead fell into the water. "Oh no, my lord!" he cried out. "It was borrowed!"

⁶ The man of God asked, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float. ⁷ "Lift it out," he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.

The miracle of iron floating: we've all had the experience of damaging something we borrowed: Do I fix it? Replace it? I learned to just pay for it...but at this time, iron was not easy to find for repayment. Blacksmiths, in fact, were intentionally removed from Israel

God Uses Miracles to Form His People to

- Be aware of His presence and power
- Trust God
- Equip his people to do good work

at one time: Replacing an iron axe may have cost about a month's wage (or maybe \$4000, the cost of a cheap car). This is important because it helps us understand part of the reason for this miracle, which is financial. But we know that God could provide the money they needed. So there must be something more. Miracles are a tool of formation for

people who know that God is present with them. He doesn't make their houses but gives them the tools to do it.

But the text doesn't end here:

2 Kings 6:8-12

⁸ Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

⁹ The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." ¹⁰ So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

King of Israel

King of Aram

I'd like to consider the context of the audience for this miracle: There are two kings at war with each other. The King of Israel is Joram, the son of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The king of Aram was Ben-Hadad II. These kings have seen miracles already from Elijah and Elisha.

2 Kings 6:13-23

¹³ "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴ Then he sent horses and

chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, “Strike this army with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

¹⁹ Elisha told them, “This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for.” And he led them to Samaria.

²⁰ After they entered the city, Elisha said, “LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see.” Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, “Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?”

²² “Do not kill them,” he answered. “Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.” ²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory.

There is a lot in these passages but I’d like to focus on the audience to these miracles:

The King of Aram

Between stimulus and response, there is a space where we get to choose our response. With this in mind, perhaps God uses miracles to give us opportunities to trust him more with some form of choice given to the witness of the miracles.



God uses miracles to offer opportunities for people to

- Grow in awareness of His presence and power
- Grow towards deeper trust in God
- Equip his people to do good work

But this isn't the end of the story: instead of being killed, the enemies are fed and sent home.

The King of Israel His response was to ask whether to kill the opposing army; notice he calls Elisha "father" which signifies some kind of spiritual authority. The king didn't push back on Elisha and he submits to Elisha's leadership, agreeing to even give him a feast and send them home. This was an asset, really.

Elisha is the one whom God is performing the miracles through but he is also part of the audience for what God is doing. The result is that he is formed into a person who heals his enemies and shows them mercy. His response of love is also miraculous!

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hard. (Later this year we will talk more about this in the upcoming series on Matthew 5.)

If you look at all Bible miracles, the answer might change but I think these reasons mostly apply. So let's talk about the miracles we might witness today: they aren't perhaps as noticeable. Maybe it's just amazing or weird things that happen to us. I'd like to take 3 minutes now for us to think about miracles that have happened to us.

I would add to this original list to love enemies, to offer mercy to those who dislike or even hate us. To do this in the moment and pause and choose love in the face of challenges is really

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- Encourage them towards love, even love of their enemies