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God Calls Elisha

Key Theme

- God uses imperfect people to accomplish His plans.

Key Passages

- 2 Kings 2:6–15, 5:8–18

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe God's call of Elisha to be His prophet.
- Explain how Elisha showed he was a prophet of God.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

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Write on the board, "Why is the gospel considered foolish by many?"

Students will place paper strips at 2 Kings 2 and 5.

Students will practice the memory verse by unscrambling the words on the activity sheet and then reciting the verse to each other or to the class.



Studying God's Word

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God whisked Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, and Elijah's mantle fell to Elisha. Right away, miracles confirmed Elisha's role as a prophet of God, and the healing of Naaman's leprosy spread the fame of the Lord as far as Syria.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Read through 2 Kings 2 and 5.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Fully Cleansed

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Students will be examining the parallels in the account of Naaman's cleansing and the cleansing that comes through trusting in Christ.

Student Guides

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

Jezebel was seeking to kill Elijah because of God's triumph over the false prophets at Mount Carmel and the subsequent execution of those false prophets (1 Kings 18:36–40). In fear, Elijah ran for his life into the wilderness. In desperation, he prayed that he might die (1 Kings 19:2–4). But in obedience, he ate the food God provided and continued his journey south for 40 days to Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings 19:8). In a cave on this mountain, Elijah again encountered God (1 Kings 19:9), learned that God had appointed Elisha to replace him (1 Kings 19:16), and was encouraged to know that God had spared 7,000 in Israel who were faithful to Him (1 Kings 19:18). As Elijah then returned north toward Damascus, he met Elisha plowing with oxen. Before Elisha knew what was happening, he had Elijah's mantle (an outer garment like a cloak or robe) on his own shoulders (1 Kings 19:19). Elisha would have understood that this meant that God had appointed him to be a prophet like Elijah. Elisha followed the great prophet and became his servant (1 Kings 19:21).

The transition of Elisha assuming Elijah's role occurred at the Jordan River about 20 years after Elisha had left his home. Elijah and Elisha stood by the river. Elijah rolled up his mantle, struck the water, and the river divided so they crossed on dry land (2 Kings 2:8). God would bestow to Elisha the blessing he requested through Elijah—a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elisha witnessed Elijah's unique ascent into heaven as he was taken up in a whirlwind after a chariot of fire with horses of fire appeared (2 Kings 2:9–11). In his distress at this sight, Elisha retrieved the mantle of Elijah that had been left behind and approached the Jordan

River. Elisha then struck the water with the mantle as he cried out to the God of Elijah; the river divided again, and he crossed over (2 Kings 2:12–14). The sons of the prophets acknowledged Elisha's status as a prophet of God when they declared, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15).

Elisha prophesied during a dark time in Israel's history, and God revealed His power, validated Elisha's position as prophet, and gave him the authority to perform many miracles in His name. The Creator God used His prophet Elisha as a means of accomplishing His perfect plans on earth.

Elisha not only ministered to Israel, but was also called upon to spread God's fame throughout the earth. We see this in the account of Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, a powerful Gentile nation. The Bible tells us that Naaman served as the chief commander to Ben-Hadad and had won many battles by the hand of the Lord. But Naaman was a leper (2 Kings 5:1). If not for his status as commander, his power, and his wealth, this disease would have caused him to be shunned by many.

Upon hearing through an Israelite servant girl about the prophet of God in Samaria, Naaman sought permission from his king to pursue the prophet's healing power (2 Kings 5:4–6). When Naaman approached Elisha's house, the prophet sent a messenger to tell him to wash in the Jordan River seven times to be restored. Naaman became furious at the advice, too proud to oblige these humble, uncomplicated instructions (2 Kings 5:10–12). After some persuasion from his servants to follow the simple command of the prophet, Naaman conceded. He dipped seven times in the Jordan, and his flesh was restored and made clean (2 Kings 5:14). God had healed the leprosy and had changed the heart of this foreigner to acknowledge the true God (2 Kings 5:15).

God used many people to influence Naaman and

bring him to a realization of the true God who had the power to heal through such an apparently silly, simple act. God still uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plans. The New Testament confirms this as we read of Elijah in the book of James: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17–18).

You can trust that in your obedience the sovereign and omnipotent one is using you (despite your failings) in the lives of people around you to proclaim His glory and to further the gospel of Jesus Christ.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The miracles of Elisha are often cited by skeptics to discredit the Bible as a source of authority. They question why God would send bears to kill a bunch of boys mocking a prophet (2 Kings 2:23–24). They don’t believe that throwing a stick in the water would make an axe head float (2 Kings 6:1–7), or that a poisonous pot of stew could be purified with a bit of flour (2 Kings 4:38–41), much less that a dead child could be raised to life by lying on top of him (2 Kings 4:8–37). But these doubters don’t know and fear the Creator and Sustainer of all things—the one true God. God used His prophets and their miracles to accomplish His purposes and to glorify His name among His people.

As we look at the laws delivered to Israel by Moses, various forms of skin disease were referred to as leprosy, not just the disease we call leprosy today (Leviticus 13–14). Consequently, we don’t know exactly what afflicted Naaman. We know it was clearly a skin disease classified broadly as leprosy. Naaman’s leprosy

appears to have been localized (2 Kings 5:11), and he had surely sought many cures in Syria. Upon his healing, Naaman knew that he had experienced a miracle at the hand of God. He was now clean.

If we are honest and look closely, we can easily connect Naaman’s leprosy to the leprosy that fills the heart of every human—sin. This disease has separated us from God. We are unclean and can’t stand in His presence . . . unless He washes us. Those who receive Jesus Christ, believing in the cleansing and forgiveness offered to sinners through the death of Jesus, can rejoice at the freedom Christ offers. Like Naaman, those forgiven through Christ no longer have to worry about the disease that has tainted them since birth—but can stand before God, knowing they are clean from sin in Christ for all eternity.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Heavenly Father, you can use me to accomplish your plans, even though I am imperfect. Do that, Lord. Use me to affect the lives of others around me, those you have put in my sphere of influence. Help me proclaim your glory to the students in my class, to my neighbors, my family, and friends, and anyone you call me to minister to. I want you to find me faithful. Provide me with more opportunities to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. Keep me grounded in you. And prepare the hearts and minds of my students, so they are ready to receive the truth you have prepared for them this week.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will mark their Bibles at 2 Kings 2 and 5 with strips of paper.
- They will say the memory verse after they unscramble the words on the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the memory verse. We have provided an activity sheet on the Resource DVD-ROM for you to use. Students should unscramble the letters of the missing words and then recite the verse to you or another student. Each week the verse will get harder to unscramble. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.



Review

Last week, we looked at Elijah and his role as a prophet of God. One of his major efforts was to confront the false prophets who promoted the worship of the false god Baal.

? How did God demonstrate His power over

Baal? *At Elijah's prayer, God sent fire to consume the waterlogged sacrifice and the altar it was offered on.*

? What relationship did we see between idolatry and God's jealousy? *God is jealous for the worship of His creatures. Idolatry is offensive to God and brings His wrath.*

Because God is the Creator, it is right that He alone is worshipped. Whenever we give our affections to things that He has given us

rather than to Him, we are acting just as the idolatrous Israelites. Unfortunately, the idols we tend to worship aren't as obvious as the statues and shrines worshipped in many false religions. They are much more subtle, harder to identify, and easier to hide. But just because they are not made of wood and sitting on our mantle doesn't mean that God isn't jealous when we worship them. We need to identify the idols in our hearts and seek to honor God alone with our worship and affections.

Today, we are going to look at the transition from Elijah to Elisha as God's prophet in Israel.



Studying God's Word

➤ Write on the board, "Why is the gospel considered foolish by many?"

READ THE WORD

In 1 Kings 19, we meet Elisha. After the showdown with the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled from Jezebel and retreated clear to Mount Horeb (another name for Mount Sinai) in despair, believing he was the only person serving the Lord. God assured him that there were 7,000 people who had not bowed to or kissed Baal. God always keeps a remnant to preserve His people.

As Elijah headed toward Damascus at the Lord's command, he stopped along the way to call Elisha to follow him by placing his mantle—his outer garment—on Elisha. As we start reading today, we pick up the storyline almost 20 years after Elisha began serving Elijah. You can read about what happened in those years in the last part of 1 Kings and 2 Kings 1.

Let's read 2 Kings 2:1–18 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

2 Kings 2:1–18

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What literary device is being used in verse 1?** *This is a foreshadowing of what was about to happen.*
- ? **Did Elijah know what was going to happen?** *It seems so, and that is likely why he was trying to get Elisha to stay behind.*
- ? **Did Elisha know what was going to happen?** *He seems to have known that Elijah was to be taken, according to verse 5, but it is not clear if he knew exactly what would happen.*
- ? **What miracle did Elijah perform?** *He struck the Jordan with his mantle and the waters stopped and they crossed on dry ground.*
- ? **Elijah offered Elisha a request before he was taken away. What did Elisha ask for?** *He requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Knowing that Elijah was the prophet of God, Elisha was asking that God work through him with twice as much power as He did through Elijah. The double portion of the inheritance was also given to the firstborn son, so this can also be seen as a clear transfer of authority, which had already been indicated to both men by God.*
- ? **What does this reveal about Elisha's character?** *He was seeking after godliness rather than any personal gain.*
- ? **How did Elisha respond to Elijah's departure?** *He cried out and tore his clothes in grief.*
- ? **What was left as Elijah was taken into heaven by the whirlwind?** *His mantle was left behind, so Elisha picked it up.*
- ? **What phrase that we commonly use comes from this passage?** *"The passing of the mantle" is a phrase that refers to the transfer of a legacy or of authority.*
- ? **What transfer of authority happened in this same place in the past?** *This parallels the transition of authority from Moses to Joshua. The parting of the Jordan at Jericho was the sign God used to exalt Joshua to the role formerly held by Moses.*
- ? **When Elisha returned without Elijah, how did the sons of the prophets know that Elisha was now the principal prophet?** *He had Elijah's mantle, and they may have seen him part the river. It is also possible that God had revealed it to them, just as they knew Elijah would be taken away before it happened.*
- ? **How do the two acts of parting the Jordan River compare?** *They are virtually identical, and the performance of the miracle is an authentication of the transfer of the role of prophet.*

Joshua 3:7–8

Discover the Truth

After Elisha had served 20 years with Elijah, the transfer of authority to Elisha had come. He was now the prophet in Israel, and his authority was authenticated by carrying Elijah's mantle and by performing the miracle of parting the river.



READ THE WORD

We are going to jump over the accounts of several other miracles that Elisha performed. You can read about him providing for a widow, raising a child from the dead, making a pot of poisonous stew safe, and other miracles in chapters 2 through 4.

2 Kings 5:1-19

Let's read of another account involving Elisha in 2 Kings 5:1-19. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What was Naaman's position in Syria?** *He was a commander of the army. He served under Ben-Hadad and was sent to Israel with a letter of commendation.*
- ? **How did Naaman hear of Elisha's healing power?** *An Israelite slave girl who was serving Naaman's wife told her that the prophet in Samaria could heal the leprosy.*
- ? **What did Naaman take with him to Samaria, to the king of Israel?** *Ten talents of silver (750 pounds), 6,000 shekels of gold (150 pounds), 10 changes of clothing, and a letter from the king.*
- ? **How did King Jehoram, the king of Israel, respond to Naaman's appearance and the letter?** *He thought the Syrian king was looking to pick a fight since Jehoram could not heal Naaman's leprosy. He tore his clothes as a sign of despair over the situation.*
- ? **In verse 8, what phrase is used as a synonym for "prophet"?** *"Man of God" is a term used of prophets throughout the Old Testament.*
- ? **How did Elisha respond when Naaman came to him?** *Rather than meeting him, Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman.*
- ? **What was Naaman asked to do?** *He was told to wash in the Jordan River seven times.*

► This was King Jehoram of Israel according to 2 Kings 3:6.

- ? **How did Naaman respond to this offer to be cleansed?** *He rejected it in a rage and walked away.*
 - ? **How did Naaman try to justify his refusal to wash in the Jordan?** *He thought that he deserved Elisha's immediate attention and a hand-waving ceremony to cleanse him. He also complained that there were cleaner rivers in Syria that he could have washed in.*
 - ? **What finally convinced Naaman to be obedient to Elisha's command?** *His servants convinced him to do a simple act since he would have been willing to do a great act.*
- Samaria is at least 25 miles from the Jordan River. Naaman would have been gone for several days before he returned to Elisha's home.
- ? **How was Naaman's skin described after washing seven times?** *It was restored as the flesh of a child.*
 - ? **What confession did Naaman make about God?** *He acknowledged that God is the only God.*
 - ? **How did Elisha respond to the offer of a gift?** *He refused the gift from Naaman, likely to show that he was not turning a favor, as many pagan priests would have expected to receive gifts for their services.*
 - ? **Why did Naaman want to take back some dirt from Israel?** *This goes back to the false idea of regional deities. Naaman thought that he needed some soil from Israel to worship the God of Israel. But he also committed himself to offer sacrifices to the Lord alone.*

Discover the Truth

More than cleansing from his skin condition, Naaman had also come to faith in God, acknowledging that He alone is God in the earth. This miracle of cleansing from the leprosy was another example of the authenticity of Elisha's role as a prophet of God. In a way, Elisha was calling Naaman to humble himself and trust that God would heal him through a seemingly foolish act. When Naaman obeyed, he was cleansed. It was this willingness to submit to and acknowledge God above all other gods that brought his conversion. Responding to the words of God spoken by a messenger of God brought him cleansing and a new life.





Fully Cleansed

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Students will be examining the parallels in the account of Naaman's cleansing and the cleansing that comes through trusting in Christ.

In your Student Guides you will find the activity Fully Cleansed. Take a few minutes to think about some of the parallels that exist between the account of Naaman's cleansing and the gospel message. We will talk about those connections in a minute. Help the students make the connections as needed.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's talk about some of the parallels you saw.

1. Many people believe that the good things they do or the abilities they have will get them into heaven (Ephesians 2:8–9). *Naaman thought his status or a gift would earn him an audience with the prophet.*
2. Many people get angry at the suggestion that their own efforts or their own methods are not adequate to make them right with God (Matthew 5:20). *Naaman was furious when his plan was rejected and he was told to do something simple that required nothing of his own power.*
3. Many who hear the simple gospel message of repentance and faith view it as foolishness (1 Corinthians 2–3). *Naaman was asked to do something that seemed foolish to him.*
4. People receive the message of the gospel from Christ's messengers (2 Corinthians 5:20). *A messenger delivered the method of cleansing to Naaman.*

5. When people repent and trust in Christ's work on their behalf, all of their sins are removed (1 Peter 2:24). *Naaman's defiled and unclean flesh was restored to that of a child.*

? As we think about parallels in these ideas, there is a danger in taking things too far. Based on this account of Naaman, can we say that people can only be saved if they dip seven times in the Jordan River? *To extend the ideas to this level is dangerous and distorts the text. To take a descriptive text from a historical narrative and construct specific prescriptive doctrines can lead to some very distorted ideas. Other sections of Scripture must inform our understanding.*

Naaman's first reaction to Elisha's instructions exposes the sinfulness of the human heart. Naaman came with a plan in his mind and expected Elisha to do things on Naaman's terms. Naaman expected Elisha to wave his hand and say a magic incantation while taking a gift for his services. But that isn't how God works.

God's wisdom puts man's wisdom to shame. God doesn't want our works and our gifts to receive salvation. He offers it freely to those who repent of their sins and trust that Christ has done what they could never do.

Humility and submission to God's plan is the only remedy for the condemnation we face for our sin. All we can contribute to our salvation is our sin taken by Christ. God, through Christ, does everything else. If we think otherwise, and believe that we earn salvation by our status or the things we do, we have completely misunderstood the gospel, much like Naaman.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

God used Elisha in many wonderful ways. He was a mouthpiece for God and demonstrated godly character. He readily submitted to God and was able to exalt God through his actions. People everywhere knew of the power of God through the works of Elisha. As Naaman returned to Syria, he carried with him the truth of the God of Israel—the only God above all other gods. It is through the work of people that God accomplishes His plans in the world. Just as God used Elisha, He will use us to point others to Christ and the forgiveness that is available by His death and Resurrection.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **What have you learned, realized, or understood better about God after studying this passage?** *Discuss various answers.*
- ? **What ideas do you need to continue to explore as a result of studying this passage?** *There are many interesting ideas in the text that were not covered by the questions in this lesson.*
- ? **How could you use the account of Naaman to help someone you know to understand the message of the gospel?** *This account could be used as a way to talk about the cleansing that comes when we submit to God in repentance and faith.*
- ? **Many people use the miracles performed by Elisha to discredit the Bible. Ax heads don't float in rivers. Flour doesn't remove poison. Dipping in a river seven times doesn't take away leprosy. How can you best respond to claims like these made against the Bible?** *We must call people to trust in God. Apart from trusting God, all of these things will seem foolish. It will also be helpful to challenge their worldview and the rejection of such miracles. They likely have no legitimate reason to reject miracles. Helping them understand that the world makes no sense apart from the truths revealed in Scripture and apart from a God who fits the God revealed in those Scriptures. We must look to the Bible as the authority rather than the philosophies of men.*
- ? **While we cannot part rivers by striking them with our jackets, how can we demonstrate to others that the gospel message we carry is authentic?** *The way that we live our lives should adorn the gospel message that we proclaim. Titus 2 and other passages talk about this relationship. If our actions speak contrary to the life in Christ we claim to be living, people will think we are hypocrites, and the message will be offensive because of our hypocrisy. Seeking to live a life of godliness supports our testimony of God's power in our lives and the truth of the gospel.*





MEMORY VERSE

1 Chronicles 29:10–11 Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: “Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.”



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for the opportunity to know Him through His Word.
- Praise God for His work in the world through broken vessels.
- Ask God for wisdom and boldness in proclaiming the gospel message and our hope in Christ.