

STUDY 2 ELISHA: SEEING THE HAND OF GOD AT WORK

INTRODUCTION

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Serve God and Others.

The stories from the life of Elisha point us to his faithfulness to obey God through meeting the needs of others. We are to be sensitive to the needs and hurts of others, stepping in to help and serve as Christ's followers.

Writer Bio

Robbie Peay

has served in local churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia. He is currently the pastor of First Baptist Church of Ray City, Georgia and lives with his wife Terri in Nashville, Georgia.

Dr. Luetta Varnado

adapted this study for the YOU audience. She is the founder and president of Heaven's Heart Ministries. She received a Doctor of Educational Leadership degree with a concentration in ministry from Dallas Baptist University. She is a Christian writer, speaker, and native of Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She is passionate about teaching Sunday School and loves to travel.

Darchelle M. Garner

wrote the Daily Readings for this study. She is a member of The People's Community Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, where she serves as newsletter editor and media ministry writer. She also serves with the missions ministry and a domestic violence ministry. Darchelle is a consultant for Christian nonprofit organizations.



A STUDY ON THE HAND OF GOD WORKING IN OUR LIVES

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I am a less-than-average guitar player but dream of becoming a guitar virtuoso. Recently, I had the opportunity to play an electric guitar that had been endorsed by one of the best guitar players in the world, Eric Clapton. It was an exact copy of the one he uses on tour. When I strapped it on and plugged it in, it felt awesome. I couldn't believe I was getting a chance to play it! I played a few chords, hoping to sound like Clapton, but was disappointed by what I heard. Once again, I was reminded that it's not the guitar that makes the music, it's the hands.

In the study, Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work, all five sessions include a miracle. In each instance, it was God's hand at work through Elisha.

This might cause us to wonder how ordinary people like you and me could be used by God.

Through Elisha's ministry, we will learn that God:

- Invites us to join Him in His work.
- Provides for our needs.
- Blessed as we serve others.
- Restores us as we are obedient to Him.
- Is more powerful than those who oppose us.

When we are in God's hands, He can do amazing things. Let this study encourage you to make yourself available to God and watch His hand work in your life.

GOD'S HAND IN CALLING US TO SERVE

Leader pages on pp. 137-141

THE POINT:
GOD INVITES US TO JOIN HIM IN HIS WORK.

1 KINGS 19:19-21; 2 KINGS 2:7-15

¹ Kings ^{19:19} Elijah left there and found Elisha son of Shaphat as he was plowing. Twelve teams of oxen were in front of him, and he was with the twelfth team. Elijah walked by him and threw his mantle over him.

²⁰ Elisha left the oxen, ran to follow Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you."

"Go on back," he replied, "for what have I done to you?"

²¹ So he turned back from following him, took the team of oxen, and slaughtered them. With the oxen's wooden yoke and plow, he cooked the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he left, followed Elijah, and served him.

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² Kings ^{2:7} Fifty men from the sons of the prophets came and stood observing them at a distance while the two of them stood by the Jordan.

⁸ Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water, which parted to the right and left. Then the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you." So Elisha answered, "Please, let me inherit two shares of your spirit." ¹⁰ Elijah replied, "You have asked for something difficult. If you see me being taken from you, you will have it. If not, you won't." ¹¹ As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire with horses of fire suddenly appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went up into heaven in the whirlwind.

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¹² As Elisha watched, he kept crying out, "My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!" When he could see him no longer, he took hold of his own clothes, tore them in two,

¹³ picked up the mantle that had fallen off Elijah, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ He took the mantle Elijah had dropped, and he struck the water. "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" he asked. He struck the water himself, and it parted to the right and the left, and Elisha crossed over.

¹⁵ **When the sons of the prophets from Jericho who were observing saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." They came to meet him and bowed down to the ground in front of him.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Mantle (v. 19)—The Hebrew term is associated with both a physical outer garment (cloak or robe) and the idea of splendor and glory.

Sons of the prophets (v. 7)—The group of prophets were under the authority of a greater prophet of God (2 Kings 6:1).

Picked up the mantle (v. 13)—By picking up Elijah's mantle, Elisha picked up not only the physical clothes but also took on Elijah's spiritual role as God's prophet.

The spirit of Elijah (v. 16)—The sons of the prophets recognized that the Spirit who had rested on Elijah now rested on Elisha.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND WHEN GOD CALLS US TO AN ASSIGNMENT?

I receive invitations on a regular basis. Not the big invitations such as, “The President and First Lady invite you to spend Christmas at the White House.” The invitations I receive are more mundane. This past week I received a number of invitations in the mail. The local car dealer invited me to look at their new inventory and maybe even spend thousands of dollars on a vehicle. I’ll pass. I also received an invitation from the county to pay my property taxes in a timely fashion and avoid jail time. I might take them up on that one.

One is God’s invitation to join Him in His work, and the primary way He delivers the invitation is to reveal what He’s doing. Elisha sets the example for how we should respond to God’s call to join Him and serve.

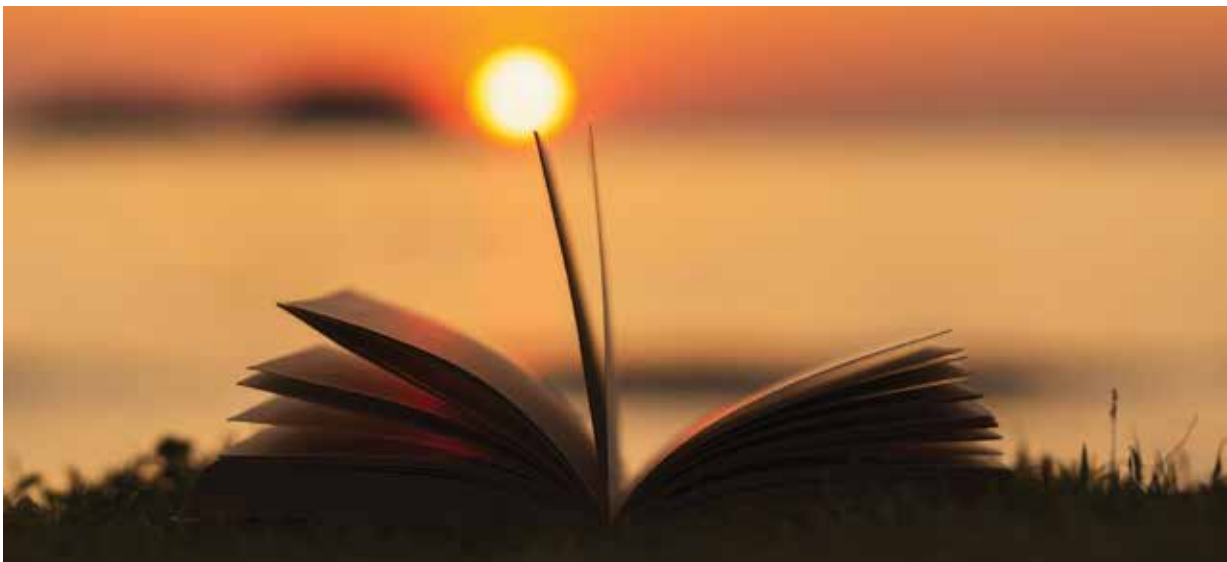
Relinquish All // 1 Kings 19:19-21

Very few men in the Old Testament measure up to Elijah. But he was a mere man, and the end of his ministry was approaching. This didn’t mean that God was finished with His work in Israel; it simply meant it was time to select Elijah’s successor.

In 1 Kings 19:16 God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his replacement and Elijah quickly obeyed. Finding Elisha, the Bible says he threw his mantle over him. To be clear, “mantle” means a large garment, like a robe or cloak. That may seem like a strange way to anoint someone, but the mantle communicated specific aspects of God’s call upon Elisha’s life. Transferring the mantle to Elisha was God’s way of saying three things:

- God had chosen Elisha to be a part of His work.
- The office of prophet had now been transferred to Elisha.
- Elisha had the ability to accomplish it.

Prior to his call, we know very little about Elisha, though verse 19 implies he was a farmer. It seems his family was wealthy enough to own at least twelve teams of oxen, but there isn’t any biblical evidence that Elisha had a special relationship with God. He may have had some connection with what the Bible calls “the sons of the prophets,” but nothing official is suggested. Yet God invited Elisha to be a part of His work.



THE POINT: GOD INVITES US TO JOIN HIM IN HIS WORK.

Even though I've been following Jesus for over fifty years, it still amazes me that God invites us to join Him in His work in the world today. As believers, we know that God is all-powerful. We know that He doesn't need us to accomplish His will. God can do anything as long as it retains His sovereignty and is the natural expression of His character, yet He willingly invites us to be active participants in His work.

When God makes known His desire for us to join Him in His work, the three things said to Elisha are the same three things He says to us: I want you to be a part of my work to redeem the world, I have a specific mission for you, and I will enable you to accomplish it.

To his credit, Elisha immediately responded with what could rightly be called "all-in obedience." He didn't say, "Let me pray about this" or "I'll do it if no one else will." Through his words and actions, Elisha demonstrated "all-in obedience" in three ways.

- In verse 20 it tells us that after Elijah threw his mantle over him, Elisha "left the oxen," and "ran to follow Elijah." This shows Elisha knew his previous vocation would now take a back seat to his call of prophet.
- His request to kiss his father and mother may sound similar to Luke 9 where Jesus admonished a potential disciple for wanting to go back and say goodbye to his family before following Jesus. Jesus's strong rebuke shows He knew the man's heart and longings still resided at home. But Elisha's request wasn't rooted in hesitancy or looking back with longing for the life he had previously lived. It shows Elisha knew that his relationship with God now had to be the top priority in his life, even above father or mother.
- When Elisha slaughtered the oxen and fed the people, it was his way of saying, "There's no going back. I'm all in!"

Elisha could have said, "I'm not going to trade my place of comfort and ease in a wealthy family for a life of hardship and controversy as a prophet." Or he could have said, "My father and mother need me to stay here and work the land for them." And then there's the obvious one: "Who am I to take the place of the great prophet Elijah?" No, for Elisha the issue was simple: "God has called me so I will go." That's what God wants to hear from you and me when He calls.

HOW CAN CONCERN FOR TEMPORAL MATTERS HINDER OUR RESPONSE IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS?



DIGGING DEEPER ELIJAH

Elijah was a prophet whose name means "My God is Jehovah." Little is known about his family background other than he was a Tishbite hairy man. One way to understand the life of Elijah is through the examination of his prophetic role and ministry. The ministry of Elijah embraced a strong opposition against false god or Baal worship and social injustice. Consequently, Elijah constantly gave prophetic denunciations that placed him at odds with many people of his day. Remembered for his sudden ascent to heaven, Elijah's ministry of uncompromising faith and courageous confrontation terminates with his prophetic mantle passed on to his successor, Elisha.

How does Elijah's life inspire you to consider the kind of legacy you want to leave behind?

Request God's Presence //

2 Kings 2:7-11

Some time had passed between Elisha's call in 1 Kings 19 and 2 Kings 2. During that time, Elisha had the benefit of some on-the-job training. He watched as Elijah confronted Ahab, the king of Israel, with his murder of Naboth and the theft of his vineyard. He saw Elijah call down fire and consume the king's soldiers who had been sent to take Elijah to the king. He listened as Elijah told Ahaziah, the next king of Israel, that he would not recover from his injuries incurred by a fall; he would certainly die. These were not minor events. The consequences that followed affected the nation. We can safely assume Elisha realized this and that they were all part of the process God used to prepare Elisha for his life's work. Soon, God would ask Elisha to serve in the same way.

Sensing this was a defining moment, Elisha said, "Please, let me inherit two shares of your spirit." Asking for two shares wasn't greed or ambition to outdo Elijah. He was using the law as a guide. When the firstborn became the patriarch of a family because of the father's death, by law he was given a double portion of the inheritance. This was not only a sign of favor, but it also gave the firstborn the necessary resources to provide for the household. Elisha's request showed he understood he was the heir of Elijah, stepping into the role of prophet. Therefore, Elisha boldly asked for the resources he would need to successfully carry out his new mission. What does Elisha's request say about his attitude toward God?

Whenever God calls a believer to a specific task today, there's often a defining moment, and Elisha models for us the right response. God was with Elijah, and Elisha knew he needed God to be with him, so he boldly asked. We should do the same, and it makes sense to do so. When we ask for God's presence as we serve, we are demonstrating three important truths:

- **God is the Master, we're the servants.** We acknowledge that we are just the conduit God works through to accomplish His purposes. His agenda is the priority, not ours.
- **God's presence will heighten our spiritual sensitivity.** Being able to see Elijah's

supernatural exit would be the indicator that Elisha had received his request. Likewise, God's presence helps us discern the hand of God at work.

- **God equips us for service.** That's what happened with Elisha, and God continues to work in this same way. This is what enables every believer to serve the Lord.

That remains true for believers today. The writer of Hebrews understood this concept well. He wrote in Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need."

HOW HAS GOD'S PRESENCE MADE A DIFFERENCE AS YOU'VE SERVED HIM?



Readily Take Up the Mantle //

2 Kings 2:12-15

Elisha knew God had called him and he knew his role was to be Elijah's successor. There could be no question about either of those things, but there might have been one last question in Elisha's mind: Can I fill the shoes of the greatest prophet in the history of Israel?

In response, God gave three signs which made it abundantly clear that all Elisha had to do was one thing—rely on God and His power.

THE POINT: GOD INVITES US TO JOIN HIM IN HIS WORK.

The first sign that encouraged Elisha to rely on God's power was related to Elisha's request for two shares of Elijah's spirit. Elijah answered, "If you see me being taken from you, you will have it. If not, you won't" (v. 10). Elisha not only saw the chariot and horses of fire but also saw Elijah ascend to heaven in a whirlwind.

The second sign that encouraged Elisha to rely on God's power was the mantle. I've tried to imagine what verses 11-12 must have been like for Elisha. Nothing else of Elijah remains, only the mantle. The mantle God used to tell Elisha, "I have chosen you to succeed Elijah. You can do it because my Spirit will be with you." Elisha got the message because he "picked up the mantle."

The third sign that encouraged Elisha to rely on God's power was the parting of the Jordan river. Could Elisha rely upon God and His power just like Elijah did? God emphatically said "YES!"

Our ability to serve the Lord well is directly related to our willingness to depend upon Him and His power. Jesus told His disciples in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me."

HOW DOES GOD EMPOWER BELIEVERS TODAY TO DO HIS WORK?

DID YOU KNOW?

The popular sport of track and field events trace its origins to the Olympic Games of Greece dated back to 776 B.C.⁹ Specifically, the athletic competitions for modern relay races started in early 1900's.¹⁰ As with all organized sports, there are rules that must be followed. For example, the first sprinter must pass the baton to the second runner without dropping the baton. Jamaica's team competing in London's Olympic 2012 games consisting of Usain Bolt identify all too well with these rules because they won gold. This illustration should remind you of Elijah's mantle passed along to Elisha because it represented the handover similar to an Olympic game. While the mantle symbolized a continuation of ministry and divine purpose for the next generation, Elisha's rule required him to see Elijah's earthly departure (2 Kings 2:10) which provided a confirmation of God's calling in his life.

Biblical Truth: When the baton of ministry is passed, we must keep the mission of God moving forward.

How do you seek confirmation of God's calling in your life?

LIVE IT

How will you join God in His kingdom work this week?

God not only wants us to live in a world that honors Him and exhibit godly conduct and character, but also God wants us to join Him in His work. The implication for our means living as a light in the world shining brightly for others to come to know Him. Choose one of the activities below to jump start your involvement in God's work.

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- **Confess.** Pray and ask God to reveal to you any excuses you have used regarding God's call upon your life and serving Him. Confess and repent from them.
- **Assess.** Complete a spiritual gift assessment. You can download one at <https://s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/Spiritual%5FGifts%5FAssessmentpdf.pdf>. Ask God to use it as a guide towards serving Him.
- **Persist.** Remain dedicated to living a life of faithfulness and obedience to God. Realize God's work may be revealed gradually and through simple acts of love, service, and generosity to others.

DAILY READINGS

1. "YES!" TO GOD'S CALL // 1 KINGS 19:19-20

Harrison was a young, brilliant, award-winning musician. In college, he studied music and helped direct choirs on campus. After graduation, he taught music in the public schools and served as a musician in his church. Harrison was destined for a successful career in the music field. But for several years, Harrison had felt—and ignored—God's strong call to ministry. When he finally accepted it, God set him on a path of pastoring and preaching, which ultimately yielded immeasurable fruit and changed the lives of thousands. And throughout the years, God made way after way for Harrison to use his musical talents to bless His people and bring Him glory. Sometimes, God's purpose overshadows our passions.

We need only say "Yes" to His call.

2. EVEN YOU // 1 SAMUEL 17:12-15

Just like the prophet Elisha, who was an ordinary farmer, Diandra came from humble beginnings. And just as Elisha was called by God to leave his life for something greater, so was Diandra. Diandra's family were not travelers. Yet, from a young age, Diandra envisioned making a positive difference wherever she went. God placed this dream in her heart, and when the time was right, God brought it to life. Diandra went on to impact and influence countless lives worldwide through missions, charity work, and even her professional career. God shaped for her a life of impactful visits to more than 20 countries across four continents.

God can use anyone anywhere in any way for His purposes, even you!

3. ALL YOU NEED // EXODUS 31:1-5

Bezalel was Moses's chief artisan, a master of design in works of metals, wood and gemstones. God called him to lead the creation of the tabernacle, where He would ultimately live among the Jewish people. That's a huge task! But Bezalel did not have to figure it out on his own. God gave

him His Spirit to empower and guide him as he worked to fulfill his calling. God filled Bezalel with "wisdom, understanding, and ability in every craft to design artistic works in silver, gold, and bronze" (Ex. 31:3-4). When God calls you, He will enable and empower you. No matter how daunting the task may be, God will give you everything you need.

Trust God to provide all you need.

4. EXPECTATIONS // HEBREWS 11:1

As Christ followers, we have all prayed to God. But have you ever prayed a prayer that you were not certain God would answer? Maybe you believed God could grant your desire, but deep down you wondered if He would! Any prayer to our Father is a reflection of some measure of faith; when we turn to Him, we automatically believe on some level that He can answer our prayers. But what about "impossible" prayers, those prayers carrying some—or maybe lots of—doubt? When we seek God with our requests, there should be no room for doubt. Of course, God can do the seemingly impossible. But when we pray, we must also expect that He will do it.

The highest expectations of God are warranted whenever we pray.

5. DON'T WAIT! // JOSHUA 6:14

Sometimes God tells us to do things that just don't make sense in the moment. A famous gospel singer told the story of how he was on a plane headed for a city where he was to start a new job. As soon as he landed, God told him to immediately return to his former home for a different assignment. And that's just what he did. He boarded another plane and made the return. Did that make sense? Maybe. But some of us might first wonder if we heard God correctly or choose to pray about it for weeks before deciding to return. Some might not return at all. Yet we know God's plan for us is perfect.

So, no matter what, we need only to obey – immediately!