



Elijah's Chariot

Colour me!



2 Kings 2:7-18

Elijah knew that his life on earth was coming to an end. So, along with his friend and follower Elisha, he went near the river Jordan. Many prophets began following them too.

Fifty prophets followed Elijah and Elisha from Jericho, then stood at a distance and watched as the two men walked towards the river. When they got there, Elijah took off his coat, then he rolled it up and struck the water with it. At once a path opened up through the river, and the two of them walked across on dry ground. After they had reached the other side, Elijah said, "Elisha, the Lord will soon take me away. What can I do for you before that happens?" Elisha answered, "Please give me twice as much of your power as you give the other prophets, so I can be the one who takes your place as their leader." "It won't be easy," Elijah answered. "It can happen only if you see me as I am being taken away."

Elijah and Elisha were walking along and talking, when suddenly there appeared between them a flaming chariot pulled by fiery horses. Straight away, a strong wind took Elijah up into heaven. Elisha saw this and shouted, "Israel's cavalry and chariots have taken my master away!" After Elijah had gone, Elisha tore his clothes in sorrow.

Elijah's coat had fallen off, so Elisha picked it up and walked back to the River Jordan. He struck the water with the coat and wondered, "Will the Lord perform miracles for me as he did for Elijah?" As soon as Elisha did this, a dry path opened up through the water, and he walked across. When the prophets from Jericho saw what happened, they said to each other, "Elisha now has Elijah's power." They walked over to him, bowed down, and said, "There are fifty strong men here with us. Please let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord carried him off to some mountain or valley."

"No," Elisha replied, "they won't find him." They kept begging until he was embarrassed to say no. He finally agreed, and the prophets sent the men out. They looked three days for Elijah but never found him. They returned to Jericho, and Elisha said, "I told you that you wouldn't find him."

Commentary

Elijah is one of the most remarkable men of God in the Old Testament. Though so often in hiding, when he did turn up to speak on God's behalf, he was uncompromising and courageous. God used him to perform miracles and, most importantly, to challenge King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who had led Israel into increasing faithlessness. Elijah regularly reminded everyone of the true God and of how God should be worshipped and served. Elisha was his young apprentice, who longed to be like his master.

When the time came for Elijah to die, Elisha wanted to stay close, because to receive a blessing from Elijah would confirm him as Elijah's true successor. There were other prophets too, but it was Elisha who stayed closest to Elijah and even saw him swept up to heaven in a chariot made of fire. He took on Elijah's job, and he also inherited his God-given powers to perform miracles—solid evidence that God was at work. Elijah's body was never found, and he is therefore one of only two people in the Old Testament who walked straight from this life into heaven. Elijah's cloak was now Elisha's as he started out on his work for God in his generation.

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Questions

- ▶ Elisha was a devoted follower of Elijah. He wouldn't let him out of his sight. Who inspires you like this?
- ▶ Elisha was, in effect, a disciple of Elijah, like the disciples of Jesus. What does being a disciple mean?
- ▶ Why did God choose to take Elijah to heaven in this dramatic way?
- ▶ Elijah's miraculous crossing of the River Jordan reminded people of how God had done the same for Joshua and the Israelites centuries before. What else does it remind you of?



Visual aid

Find a piece of clothing that has been handed down in your family— maybe from a parent to a child or from an older child to a sibling. Elijah’s cloak was like a badge of office that was passed on to Elisha.



Activity idea

This story has inspired one of the most famous African-American spirituals, ‘Swing low, sweet chariot’. Look up the words on the internet. Perhaps you can listen to it being sung or even try singing it yourselves. It is all about the sure promise of heaven that awaits Christians, as it did Elijah. Talk together about what you think heaven is like.



Prayer idea

Elisha learned about God by watching and listening to Elijah. We do the same as we read about and talk with Jesus in prayer every day. Ask God to help you do what Jesus would do.

Key verse

Elisha answered, “Please give me twice as much of your power as you give the other prophets, so I can be the one who takes your place as their leader” (2 Kings 2:9).

New Testament story link

Luke 24:44-49: These are some of the last words of Jesus to his disciples before he left them. He promised them that God’s power would be passed on to them.



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