

File No. 76

II KINGS 2:1–18

ELIJAH GOES TO HEAVEN

(SBS Bk 3 Story No. 18)

Story Notes

Background Information

Throughout the books of I & II Kings, Israel had turned their affection away from God's covenant and commands. Elijah the prophet had been sent to turn them from their wickedness and back to God. Elijah's work was now coming to an end. Elisha had been chosen to be with Elijah and was preparing to take over from him.

Main Lesson

The whole prophetic community knew that Elijah would soon be taken from them. What would this mean for Elisha? Whatever it meant, he could not be persuaded to leave his master. The Spirit of the Lord had been on him and that Spirit was Elisha's only hope of being a successor in the task of bearing witness to the reign of God in the midst of an idolatrous people.

Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan in a manner reminiscent of Moses leading Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 14:16), but this time, only a small prophetic contingent saw the miracle. They were a remnant who still lived by the power and love that had brought the whole nation into existence. Elisha asked for twice the portion of Spirit, which had been on Elijah; perhaps he felt twice as needful of it. He saw the chariot of Israel with its horsemen. He cried out to Elijah who had been father to him, but he had been taken up in a whirlwind. This vision of Israel's spiritual protection would be greatly needed by Elisha in days to come (6:17).

Elisha was now leader of the prophetic movement and began his ministry as his 'father' had left it, by parting the water, and also, as Joshua had led Israel into their land. Perhaps the prophets were encouraged to think of the new things God would do rather than dwell on the nation that had rejected Elijah. They made a shaky beginning however, and wanted Elisha to search for Elijah in whose physical presence they had taken comfort.

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