

Week 6: The Calling of Elisha and the Downfall of Ahab – 1 Kings 19:19–2 Kings 1

Hook



Main Point: The Lord alone is God; He raises up kings and pulls them down.

Q: When in your life have you felt most in control?

Q: When in your life have you felt that you had no control?

Fantasy football leagues put the fans in control. These leagues find their origin in the early 1960s. A creation of Bill Winkenback, part owner of the Oakland Raiders, the original league was titled “The Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League,” or GOPPPL for short.¹ While the league began with insiders in the Raider’s orbit, by 2022, more than 29 million Americans were playing fantasy football.² Fantasy football places *you* in control – you choose the team; you make the trades; you win or lose. However, all it takes to crumble even the most beautifully assembled fantasy league team is a player injury. In 2025, 309 players found themselves on the injured reserved list through 15 weeks of regular season games.³

Q: Have you ever had a fantasy league dashed by injury?

Q: What events in life make us most aware of our limited control?

Transition: Today’s lesson places a new player on the board – the prophet Elisha – and removes the dynasty of King Jeroboam, reminding us that only God is in control, even over prophets and kings.

RECAP: In the first lesson, we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God’s messengers, calling His people to repent and how they pointed ahead to Jesus. In week 2, we saw God’s provision for both Elijah and the widow of Zarephath during the drought, which was a consequence for Israel’s idolatry. In lesson 3, God raised the widow’s son from the dead, which not only showed His sovereign power, but also His

care for the vulnerable and His heart for all the nations, not just Israel. In lesson 4, we saw God's superiority over other "gods" as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. In lesson 5, Elijah ran for his life from the wrath of Jezebel and found refuge in the Lord. We saw God speak to Him not in the thunder and lightning but in the still, small voice.

In this lesson, God calls Elisha to succeed Elijah, and Elijah prophesies the deaths of Jezebel and Ahab. Ahab repents, and God delays the destruction of his dynasty for one more generation.

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Book

Main Point: The Lord alone is God; He raises up kings and pulls them down.

1 Kings 19:19–21 [Read]

Talking Point 1: God calls us to follow Him with our whole lives and never look back.

Q: Why did Elijah throw his cloak on Elisha? What might that signify?

Q: What does Elisha's sacrifice of the oxen tell us about his choice to follow Elijah?

In the last section, Elijah ran for his life from Jezebel and found refuge in God. The Lord told him to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be his own successor. So Elijah went and found Elisha, the son of Shaphat (“judge”), who was plowing a field with 12 yokes of oxen (24 total). This was indicative of substantial wealth and status in ancient Israel. This number of oxen would have been very expensive, and meant they had a lot of land to plow. Elisha, even though being from a very wealthy family, was not too proud to do the work of farming himself, whereas Elijah's background and family trade are unknown – he just “appeared on the scene” as a prophet, as if from nowhere.

Elijah passed by Elisha and threw his cloak on him, a sign of choosing him as his successor. Elijah's cloak was a symbol of his prophetic authority. While the cloak was not magic, it symbolized the power of God given to His chosen prophets. Elijah used it to part the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8) and after his death, Elisha picked it up and also struck the Jordan with it and the Jordan parted (2 Kings 2:14). Elijah's throwing the cloak on Elisha creates a visual of Elisha's taking on Elijah's role. As a robe symbolized the authority of a king, Elijah's cloak represented his prophetic authority. Stories such as this from the ancient world are where the modern phrase “pass the mantle” comes from.⁴ The meaning was clear. He wasn't just asking Elisha to follow him as his servant or a disciple; he was asking him to take over for him. But Elijah didn't choose Elisha as his successor of his own initiative; he may not have even known him before. He was simply following God's instructions.

In the moment, Elisha left the oxen in the field and ran after Elijah. But he asked Elijah if he could say goodbye to his parents first. Elijah allowed it and Elisha sacrificed the oxen (just the 12th pair), using the yoke as the firewood on which to burn them. Elisha didn't destroy all his family's oxen; his intention wasn't to make his whole family destitute. He was making a statement about his own life and calling. By destroying the oxen, he was committing to leaving his life of farming and never looking back. This was a costly sacrifice; he was leaving a very comfortable life for an economically uncertain one. His

actions foreshadowed the disciples who left their nets to follow Jesus, and Levi who left everything to follow Him (Matthew 4:20; Luke 5:27–28).⁵

But he didn't just kill the oxen; he offered them as a sacrifice to the Lord, demonstrating his commitment to follow God's mission for his life as a prophet. And he didn't burn up all the meat like the burnt offering, grain offering, guilt offering or sin offering. He gave the meat to the people, and they ate it together as a celebratory meal, making it a peace offering or fellowship offering. These were not offerings to atone for sin but to celebrate together in communion either thanksgiving for something God had done, to seal a vow before the Lord, or simply as a freewill offering, a spontaneous celebration (Leviticus 7:11–18). Elisha was celebrating his vow with his family, his commitment to follow God's call on his life. His sacrifice points ahead to Paul's call to all believers to offer our whole lives as a "living sacrifice" to the Lord (Romans 12:1–2). It also points ahead to the Lord's Supper, where we celebrate Christ's sacrifice for us together as a sacred celebratory meal.

Q: In what ways have you left your old life behind to follow Jesus? What things did you sacrifice to follow Him? Why was it worth the sacrifice?

Q: What are some other examples in the Bible of men and women who sacrificed to faithfully follow God?

Q: In what ways can we celebrate Christ's sacrifice for us together?

1 Kings 21:17–29 [Read]

Talking Point 2: God forgives the repentant, but there are always consequences to our sin.

Q: Why do you think Ahab finally repented?

Q: What does it tell us about God that He delayed the end of Ahab's dynasty?

Because Elijah and Elisha don't appear in 1 Kings 20:1–21:16, we will just quickly summarize what happened there:

- The king of Syria attacked Samaria, the capital of Israel (the northern kingdom). God told Ahab He would deliver Israel so Ahab would know He is the one true God. Israel defeated Syria twice, but Ahab let the king of Syria go instead of destroying him as God had commanded. So God told Ahab his life would be required in return.
- Ahab wanted to buy Naboth's vineyard because it was close to his house, Naboth refused because the Lord didn't want him to sell it. Jezebel had Naboth falsely accused and stoned to death, and they took his vineyard.

Elijah was sent to Ahab to hold him accountable for killing Naboth and taking his vineyard. Through Elijah, God told Ahab that in the same place where Naboth had been stoned and dogs had licked up his blood, so dogs would lick up Ahab's blood. Ahab still

considered Elijah his enemy, which is telling considering he was the true prophet of God. But Ahab's greeting to Elijah shows a role reversal: Instead of Ahab and Jezebel's searching for Elijah to kill him, Elijah "found" Ahab to pronounce *his death* by God. Elijah was no longer afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; he boldly confronted them. God's presence and comfort in the "still, small voice" worked. He gave Elijah a new confidence in his mission and in His power to guide and protect him. Elijah also knew Elisha would take over for him soon, so he wasn't as fearful of death as before.

Elijah not only prophesied Ahab's individual death but also the end of his dynasty. When Ahab heard that, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted, cultural expressions of mourning, humility and repentance. The text specifically tells us there was no one before in Israel who had done as much evil as Ahab, yet when God saw he had finally humbled himself, He relented on Ahab's punishment. He didn't completely remove the punishment, but he delayed it. Instead of the dynasty's ending with Ahab, it would end with his son.

His oldest son, Ahaziah, became the next king and followed in the idolatry of his parents. He died after falling through the lattice of the upper room of his palace (1 Kings 22:51–2 Kings 1:18). Because he had no children, another son of Ahab, Joram, became king in his place. He also followed in the idolatry of his parents, and it was during his reign that Elijah's prophecy came true. He was killed by Jehu, whom Elijah had anointed to be the future king as God had commanded in the still, small voice on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:15–17). By this, Jehu avenged the blood of the prophets Ahab had killed (2 Kings 9:6–7).

Ahab's repentance story shows us that the invitation to repent and turn to God is open to all, even the most wicked king in history. But it also shows us that even when we repent, there are consequences to our sin. Even though Ahab repented, his sons continued in idolatry because of what they had seen their parents do. Even though Ahab repented, his sons were killed and his dynasty ended. Though God may have forgiven Ahab, the consequences of his actions played out in his family and in the nation. We can trust that there is never anyone too far gone to be reached by God's love and grace, and we rejoice in that. But we also need to take seriously the truth that our sins have real consequences in the world around us and, many times, generationally in our families.

Q: How does knowing no one is beyond God's grace make you feel?

Q: No one is too far outside of God's love and forgiveness. Who is someone that you are praying for or need to pray for today that needs Jesus?

2 Kings 1 [Read]

Talking Point 3: When the future is uncertain, the only place to turn is to the Lord.

Q: Why did Ahaziah consult Baal-zebub instead of Yahweh? How did the Lord respond?

Q: How did Ahaziah's life and death fulfill Elijah's prophecy to Ahab?

Ahaziah was Ahab's oldest son. He became king when Ahab died, and he practiced idolatry as his parents had done. After he fell through the lattice in his palace in Samaria, he sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub ("lord of the flies"), the local god of Ekron, one of the five major cities of Philistia, whether he would die. This is not the same god as Baal, the chief male god of the Canaanites, whom Ahab and Jezebel had worshipped with Asherah, the chief female goddess.⁶ God told Elijah to go meet those messengers and asked a rhetorical question – are you going to Baal-zebub because there's no god in Israel to ask? Then he pronounced that Ahaziah would surely die.

These messengers didn't know who Elijah was, because when they returned, they had to describe him to the king instead of just saying his name. But Ahaziah immediately knew who he was as soon as they told him about the garment of hair and leather belt. The king sent a group of 50 soldiers to ask Elijah to come down from the hill where he was sitting. To prove Elijah was a "man of God," fire came down from heaven to consume the men.

This is similar to God's sending down fire on Mount Carmel, but not exactly. Both events proved Yahweh's superiority over other gods and showed that Elijah was Yahweh's prophet. But this time, instead of the fire's lighting the altar, the fire consumed Ahaziah's army. Elijah's question, "Is there no god in Israel?" also echoes the standoff at Mount Carmel, when Yahweh showed Himself but Baal did not. Mount Carmel proved there was a God in Israel – Yahweh – but these other "gods" didn't even really exist.

The consuming fire happened twice, but the third time, the captain fell on his knees before Elijah and begged him to spare their lives. The angel of the Lord told Elijah it was safe to go with him to the king. When Elijah arrived, he repeated the same prophecy, that Ahaziah would die. And he did.

At the end of his life, Ahab had repented, but his son still worshipped false gods. Ahaziah knew who Elijah was; he knew about Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal and his prophecies about Ahaziah's family, yet he still inquired of false gods instead of Yahweh about his future. God had proven Himself to be the one true God, so why did Ahaziah still consult these false gods, who were no gods at all? Because Ahab had repented, God gave his family another chance, but they continued to chase after empty idols.

This story exposes a human pattern that is still painfully familiar today. People still turn to empty substitutes even when God has repeatedly shown Himself to be the one true God. Most people today don't worship pagan gods or wooden idols, but we still chase functional idols that promise security, control, success, blessing or happiness. Elijah would ask us today: Is it because God isn't real that you trust money more than Him? Is it because God isn't good that you look elsewhere for happiness? Is it because God isn't powerful that you depend on your own strength? Those things may bring temporary

security or happiness, but they can never give us real, abundant, everlasting life. The things of this world will eventually end in death. When our future is uncertain, will we turn to the empty temporary things of this world or the One who brings eternal life?

Q: In what ways might we as a culture need to humble ourselves before God? In what ways might we need to repent and turn back to Him?

Q: In what ways are you tempted to trust in other things besides God for peace, security, happiness, joy or comfort? What would it look like to trust in God completely?

Q: How can we grow in our boldness for Christ that we may stand for Jesus no matter the cost?

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Took

Main Point: The Lord alone is God; He raises up kings and pulls them down.

As we leave today, remember that the Lord alone is God – He calls us to follow Him fully, He shows mercy to those who repent, and He alone holds our future in His hands. Like Elisha, we are called to follow God without looking back, surrendering whatever competes for our loyalty. Like Ahab, we are reminded that God’s grace is always available to the humble, yet our choices still shape the lives around us. And unlike Ahaziah, when life feels uncertain, we must resist the temptation to look to empty substitutes for security and instead turn to the Lord alone. This week, ask yourself honestly: *What am I trusting most to give me peace, security or hope?* Consider the following inventory list to evaluate in whom or what you are placing your trust.

- **Money:** Are you trusting your finances for security, or are you demonstrating trust in God by giving generously and stewarding your resources faithfully?
- **Career/Success:** Are you looking to your job or achievements to give you identity and worth, or are you finding your identity in God?
- **Control:** Do you constantly feel the need to control outcomes, or are you able to surrender situations to the Lord in prayer?
- **Approval:** Are you shaping your life around the opinions of others, or around what God says about you?
- **Comfort:** Are you prioritizing convenience and comfort over obedience when God calls you to something difficult?
- **Relationships:** Are you depending on people to meet needs that only God can ultimately fulfill?
- **Future Security:** When you think about the future, do you respond primarily with anxiety or with trust in God’s sovereignty?
- **Time:** Does your schedule show that God is a priority, or is time alone with the Lord something you fit in when everything else is done?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about how you might be turning to “functional idols” instead of God. What or who have we placed above God in our hearts and lives? What things are you seeking from those idols? Why do you think you can get those things from them? How have you seen other people pursue those things? What have been the results? How have those

things given you some good things? How have they ultimately disappointed you? How can you see them as tools and resources but not your ultimate hope?

PRAY: Pray for your own life to be one of trust in the Lord. Ask the Lord to tear down any idols you may have created and help you focus on Him alone. Pray to break any negative patterns in your family and create new godly patterns for your children.

ACT: Break generational patterns of sin. Draw a family tree as many generations back as you can. Reflect on any ways you may have inherited unhealthy patterns from your family of origin. Commit with God's help to breaking those patterns of behavior and reflect on how to create healthier patterns for your family going forward.

¹ <https://www.cbssports.com/fantasy/football/news/fantasy-football-the-history-of-fantasy-football-the-biggest-seasons-and-the-future/>

² <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/fantasy/2023/12/15/fantasy-football-sports-economy/71870731007/>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6892060/2025/12/16/nfl-18-game-expansion-injuries-mahomes-parsons/>

⁴ James C. Wilhoit, Leland Ryken, Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Intervarsity Press Academic, 1998).

⁵ In the Gospels, there was a man who asked Jesus if he could bury his father first before following Him and Jesus said no (Luke 9:59–60). This is a different situation from Elisha asking to say goodbye to his parents. That man was delaying following Jesus. If his father were already dead, it could be up to a year before he would be finished with process of burying his father. But most scholars believe his father wasn't even dead yet, and he may not have even been close to death. So his timeline for when he would be free to follow Jesus was completely undefined. His request sounded nice, but it was really more of an excuse. Elisha's request was just one celebratory meal with his family, which wasn't just to say goodbye but also to honor his vow to the Lord.

The next person in the story of following Jesus in Luke 9 asked to first go say goodbye to those at their home, which at first glance sounds like asking the same thing Elisha did. Yet Jesus distinguished between what that person asked and what Elisha did. He answered, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." His choice of examples was a clear reference to Elisha, who did the opposite. He did not look back. He did not put his hand to the plow. He burned up his plow and followed God's call on his life. Jesus wasn't contradicting Elisha; he was invoking Elisha as a positive example of one who follows God and doesn't look back.

⁶ The New Testament uses the Greek "Beelezebub" to reference Satan, "prince of the demons," seven times. Some linguistic scholars believe this is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Baal-Zebub; others do not. Our text says he was just the local god of Ekron, nothing more, so it is unlikely it is referring to Satan himself.