

Week 17: *Elisha Dies, Yet Is Still Part of a Miracle: 2 Kings 13*

Hook



Main Point: Only God has power over life and death.

Q: If you haven't retired yet, how do you hope to spend your retirement? If you have retired, what activities have you found take most of your time?

Many of us dream of what retirement might be but what will it actually look like? According to a 2022 survey, here are the top five hobbies among American retirees¹:

5. Traveling
4. Gardening and maintaining plants
3. Pets
2. Reading
1. Cooking and baking

Most people don't picture retirement as simply sitting still – they picture freedom, purpose and enjoying the things they never had enough time for before. Some want to travel; some want to spend time with family; and others want to invest in hobbies or serve others. Retirement often feels like the season when your work is finished and your “story” is slowing down.

That's what makes Elisha's final chapter so surprising. In 2 Kings 13, Elisha is at the end of his life. After years of miracles, prophecy and calling Israel back to God, the great prophet is dying. It feels like the end of an era. Even King Jehoash comes to him grieving, wondering what Israel will do without him.

But Elisha's story doesn't end with retirement – it doesn't even end with death. Today's story is a powerful reminder that Elisha was never the true source of life or power. God was. While people may finish their work, God never stops working. Kings die; prophets pass away; but the Lord remains; He never ceases His work.

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 lessons 2–5, we saw the ups and downs of Elijah's ministry: Israel's idolatry and the covenant consequences for it, God's provision and care for the vulnerable, His sovereignty and superiority over false "gods," and His care for Elijah as he ran for his life. We saw that God not only works in big, miraculous shows of power but also speaks in the still, small whisper to comfort and encourage His people.

In lessons 6–7, Elijah called Elisha to succeed him, and Elisha left his old life behind. Elijah prophesied the deaths of Jezebel and Ahab and the end of Ahab's dynasty. Elijah was taken up to heaven in the whirlwind, and Elisha took over, expanding the ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In lesson 8, we learned exactly what it meant when Elisha asked Elijah for a "double portion" of his spirit. In lessons 9–10, God brought judgment on those who rejected His prophets and His message but brought life, healing and blessing to those who came to Him in faith. In lessons 11–12, God performed several miracles that pointed to His provision and sovereignty. In lessons 13–14, He supernaturally fought the battles of Israel with Aram. In lesson 15, we saw His care for the vulnerable again when He restored the land of the Shunammite woman. In lesson 16, we saw Elijah's prophesy come true – Jehu rose to power and destroyed the entire house of Ahab and Jezebel.

In this lesson, Elisha gives his final prophesy, which revealed God's compassion on Israel despite their disobedience, because of His covenant love and mercy. Then, Elisha dies. And yet, even after his death, God still performs a miracle through him.

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Main Point: Only God has power over life and death.

2 Kings 13:1–7 [Read]

Talking Point 1: God is slow to anger, compassionate and gracious.

Q: Whose son was Jehoahaz? In what way was he like his father?

Q: How did God respond to Jehoahaz's idolatry?

In the last lesson, we saw how Jehu fulfilled Elijah's prophecy about ending Ahab's dynasty and destroyed everything having to do with Baal worship. But he did not turn the people completely back to the Lord alone. He still allowed the worship of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel, the original idolatry that Jeroboam started when Israel (N) first split off from Judah (S) in 930 BC. So, when his son Jehoahaz took over, it was no surprise that he continued the worship of the golden calves. Not one king in the entire history of the Northern Kingdom ended that idolatry; the golden calves remained at Dan and Bethel throughout the nation's entire history until they were destroyed in the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC.

This means that for their entire 200-year history, Israel (N) broke God's covenant by worshipping golden calves as "your gods who brought you out of Egypt" instead of Yahweh. This shows God's incredible patience and longsuffering love for His people. It's not shocking that God disciplined them for their idolatry; it's shocking He waited so long to do it. God was pleased with Jehu's faithfulness in destroying Baal worship and promised his sons would reign for four generations. But He was disappointed that he didn't end the worship of the golden calves. As punishment, God began to reduce the size of Israel (N); He let Aram conquer more and more of their land until Assyria finally destroyed them. When his son continued to worship the golden calves, God's anger burned, and He allowed Aram to continue to oppress them.

The next part of the story (vv. 4–6) sounds exactly like the pattern found in Judges. The people committed idolatry; God allowed them to be oppressed by their enemies, a consequence of breaking the covenant. The people cried out to God, and He sent a deliverer (judge). They had peace as long as that judge continued to lead them in following God, but when that judge died, they started worshipping false gods, and the cycle began all over again. This pattern also continued through the monarchy. David established worship of God alone in Jerusalem, but his son, Solomon, started worshipping other gods. Then the kingdom split. Israel (N) worshipped the golden calves under every king, and Judah committed idolatry under every king except two, Hezekiah and Josiah. Only those two kings removed the high places and led the people to worship Yahweh alone the way David had done. This means not only was God patient with Israel

(N) for 200 years; He was patient with all of them for more than 800 years (1405–586 BC). God shows Himself to be just as He described Himself to Moses – “slow to anger” (Exodus 34:6–7).

It shouldn't be surprising that the Lord's anger burned against Israel (v. 3). They were breaking His covenant yet again, even after He sent His prophets to call them to repent and did miracle after miracle for them. The ancient world would have expected nothing less than punishment from a king whose vassal had broken their covenant time and again. What *would* have been surprising to an ancient reader is that when Jehoahaz sought the Lord's favor, He listened. The part that would have been surprising to an ancient reader was not God's wrath but His grace, His long-suffering love. Even though Israel had “cheated” on Him (to use the idolatry/adultery analogy of the Old Testament) time and time again, God never gave up on them. He never abandoned them. He was always there, listening to their prayers, waiting for them to call on Him (Isaiah 30:18). As He described Himself to Moses, God is “merciful and gracious ... abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6–7). As God promised them in the covenant, He is near to them when they pray; if they seek Him with all their heart, they will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:7, 29).

Like Jehu, Jehoahaz was another disappointing king. He cried out to the Lord for help and got it, but he didn't turn the people back to worshipping God alone. The term used for “sought the Lord's favor” indicates a sincere pleading, a moment of humility but not a lasting heart change. His repentance was situational, not transformational. That tension sits at the heart of this passage. God responded with compassion even to incomplete repentance, yet the deeper problem remained untouched. The oppression was relieved, but the idolatry continued. The symptoms were eased, but the disease was not cured. The cycle never broke.

What Israel needed was not just a better king but a different kind of king who could do what none of these could: truly turn hearts back to the Lord. These stories show us that human leadership isn't enough. Israel (N) would never turn completely back to God, no matter how many prophets God sent or how many miracles He did. One day God would send a Messiah who would be the king they really needed, but He would be from the line of David (Judah, not Israel). He would be successful because He is not only human, He is also divine – God Himself made flesh. The stories of Ahab, Jehu, Jehoahaz and all the other kings of Israel highlight how much we need Jesus, because no human king will ever be the savior we need.

Q: How have you experienced God's mercy and compassion?

Q: Give some specific examples of ways we can be slow to anger, merciful and compassionate in our daily lives.

Q: What does this passage teach us about the difference between temporary remorse and true repentance?

2 Kings 13:10–19 [Read]

Talking Point 2: God is compassionate and gracious.

Q: What does verse 11 focus on about Jehoash's reign? What does this tell us about Kings?

Q: Why would Jehoash call Elisha "father"? Why might he talk about the chariots and horsemen?

Q: In what ways can half-hearted faith show up in our lives today?

Kings summarizes the reign of Jehoash, the third-in-line from Jehu, very succinctly – he did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam. This phrase was the measure by which Kings evaluated the kings of Israel (N). Because our study is on Elijah and Elisha, who were prophets to Israel (N), we didn't look at many of the kings of Judah (S). When Kings talks about the kings of Judah (S), it evaluates them by whether they walked as their father David, not his moral failures (which were huge!) but his faithfulness in worshipping Yahweh alone. Jeroboam (idolatry) was the standard for the kings of Israel (N), while David (faithfulness) was the standard for the kings of Judah (S). Kings repeatedly tells us that other things about a king's reign are described in other history books, but Kings takes a theological focus. Israel's and Judah's kings were evaluated not by their military or economic success but by their faithfulness to Yahweh alone.

But after Kings summarizes Jehoash's reign in this way, it then tells a story about Elisha that happened during his reign. When Elisha was deathly ill with the sickness he would die from, Jehoash went to see him and wept over him, calling him "my father." It wasn't common in the ancient world for a king to call a prophet "my father." It was something a prophet disciple might call his mentor prophet (2 Kings 2:12) or a servant might call his master (2 Kings 5:13). For Jehoash to call Elisha "my father" demonstrated respect; it was deference to his authority. There was one other time a king called Elisha "my father" – when Jehoram asked Elisha if he should strike down the soldiers of Aram, whom God had supernaturally led inside the city walls (2 Kings 6:21). He deferred to Elisha's authority because it was clearly a God-led mission, but later he was upset that Elisha hadn't let him kill them when he had the chance. Ancient kings typically thought of the prophets as less than them, part of their advisory team. Though Jehoash did not turn the people away from worshipping the golden calves, he at least recognized Elisha's prophetic authority and power.

Not only did Jehoash call Elisha "my father," he said the same thing to Elisha on his deathbed that Elisha had said to Elijah just before he went to heaven in the whirlwind.

As Elisha lay dying, King Jehoash wept and called him “the chariots and horsemen of Israel,” the same title Elisha had used for Elijah when he was taken to heaven (2 Kings 2:12). By using this phrase, Jehoash acknowledged that Elisha—and ultimately the Lord working through him—had been Israel’s true source of strength and protection.² Whether the king fully grasped the spiritual significance of his words is uncertain, but the title reflects a profound truth: God’s power working through His prophet was a greater defense for Israel than any army, chariot, or military strategy.³

The king came to Elisha in humility and recognized the power of God through Elisha, even if he didn’t fully submit to God in worship. Elisha assured him he would have victory over Aram, using a symbolic gesture, like the prophets often did. When Elisha told Jehoash to strike the ground with the arrows, he only struck the ground three times, which meant he would only have victory three times instead of complete victory. At first glance, it may seem unfair for Elisha to have been angry at Jehoash; how could he have known he was supposed to strike more than three times? He didn’t know how many more times Aram would attack. But it’s less about the number of times than the fact that he stopped. This shows Jehoash’s hesitance and incomplete faith. He wasn’t expected to guess the right number; Elisha said he should have done it “five or six times,” not an exact number. It was that he didn’t show a wholehearted response. It was representative of his half-hearted faith in God. He came to Elisha because he knew Elisha had power; He recognized the power of the Lord. But he didn’t turn the people back to complete worship of God.

Jehoash had a half-hearted faith, a faith that wanted God to rescue him in battle but wasn’t willing to give himself completely to God as Lord of his life and of the nation. How many people in our world do this same thing? We want God to bless us, protect us, provide for us. But we’re not willing to give Him our whole hearts and our whole lives as a living sacrifice. We treat God like a magic genie, not our Lord and Savior. Because of Jehoash’s half-hearted attitude, God would give them three victories but not complete victory.

Q: Describe people you know who live for God in a wholehearted way.

Q: How can we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to God instead of half-heartedly?

2 Kings 13:20–25 [Read]

Talking Point 3: God is able to raise the dead to new life, no matter how dry the bones.

Q: What does it tell us about God that this dead man was resurrected? What might it tell us about the future of Israel?

This story brings up a different group of people attacking Israel, not a military group but a group of robbers from Moab who would sneak into Israel to see what they could steal. Moab was a nation on the east of the Jordan River (the Transjordan), east and south of

Israel (N), directly across the Dead Sea from Judah (S). They were the descendants of Moab, who was born from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his eldest daughter (Genesis 19:37). Lot was the nephew of Abraham, which makes the Moabites distant relatives of the Israelites. Though the Moabites fought often with Israel, the Moabitess, Ruth, joined the Israelites and became the great-grandmother of King David, in the direct line of Jesus (Ruth 1–4; Matthew 1).

The text doesn't tell us how long after Elisha's death this story occurred, but context clues tell us it would have been near the end of the first year. The burial process in ancient Israel had two parts: 1) the body was wrapped in linen and left in the tomb to decompose for one year, during which the flesh decayed. 2) After a year, they collected the bones and placed them in a small box called an *ossuary*. This incident was before they had put Elisha's bones in the ossuary, but long enough that the body had decayed, because the text says the man's body touched Elisha's bones. Almost a year after he had died, Elisha's bones were still able to raise a man from the dead! Of course, this was the power of God, not magic in Elisha's bones. This shows God's ability to raise the dead no matter the situation and points ahead to the new covenant when God would take what was dead and make it alive. God will do this in our physical bodies in the final Resurrection, but He does it for us spiritually in this life, making us a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

On a near-future level, this prophetic act pointed to the fact that God would "resurrect" His people from the "death" of their exile to Babylon. As the man was "thrown" into Elisha's grave, so God's people would be "thrown" into exile; the same Hebrew word is used.⁴ But it was Judah (S) God would resurrect, not Israel (N). The writer of Kings wrote that "to this day" God was unwilling to cast Israel from His presence; He was showing compassion on them because of His covenant to Abraham. Later, Israel (N) would be overthrown by Assyria and assimilated with other nations, becoming the "lost 10 tribes of Israel" (722 BC). The Israelites would cease to exist as a people; the Samaritans of Jesus' day were descended from them but had intermarried with many other pagan nations over many generations, and their faith mixed many different religions together. Judah (S) would also be overthrown and be taken into exile, but by Babylon instead of Assyria (586 BC). But Judah would not be lost. Their exile would only last for 70 years, and they would stay faithful to God while in exile. God would bring His remnant back to the land and rebuild His people, the Jews (Judah). It would be from this tribe, Judah, that Messiah would come and bring resurrection and eternal life.

In the big-picture story, Israel (N) was lost, but Judah (S) endured. This wasn't about their works but God's grace. Judah wasn't much better than Israel; they only had three reigns of faithfulness to God in their whole history (David, Hezekiah, Josiah). The fall of Israel and survival of Judah do not point to Judah's superiority; rather, they point to God's faithfulness and His commitment to His covenant promises to Abraham and to David, that Messiah would come from his line. Judah's story shows us God keeps His promises even to an unfaithful people. The Northern nation to whom Elijah and Elisha

preached would be lost, but through Judah, God was preserving His promise to David and preparing the way for the king His people truly needed.

Q: In what specific ways does your life reflect the new life God has given you in Christ? How are you different than you were before you came to know Jesus?

Q: What does it tell us about God that He continues to forgive and redeem His people, even after hundreds of years of cycles of unfaithfulness? What hope does this give us for ourselves? What hope does it give us for our friends who don't know Jesus?

Q: How does this miracle point forward to Jesus and His resurrection?

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Took

Main Point: Only God has power over life and death.

Throughout Elijah and Elisha's ministries, we've seen king after king and, often times, the same pattern repeats: inconsistency, partial obedience, and outright rebellion. You never really knew what they were going to do. But in the middle of all that uncertainty, one thing has been constant: **God has been faithful.**

That's exactly what we're reminded of in 2 Timothy 2:13: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself."

And that same faithfulness still applies to us today.

God is faithful to:

- **Forgive** when we repent (1 John 1:9)
- **Be present** with us (Matthew 28:20)
- **Provide** for our needs (Matthew 6:33)
- **Finish the work** He started in us (Philippians 1:6)

Because God is faithful – even when we are not – we can trust Him completely with our lives. That means we don't have to live with fear or doubt – we can live with confidence, surrender and hope, knowing the God who held His people through generations of failure is the same God holding us today.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about God's mercy and compassion, even to an unfaithful people. What does that tell us about God? What does it tell us about the hope we have in Christ? Our hope for the lost world around us? How can we be messengers of God's grace to the world around us? How can we show the grace of God to others in our life? How can we show His mercy and compassion? How might it impact the world if we did?

PRAY: Pray that those who do not yet know God's mercy will have an encounter with the living God that shows them just how much they are loved but also shows them they are sinners in need of grace. Pray that the Church can be a light to the world, showing God's mercy, grace and compassion. Pray for the Church to be a safe place for those who are hurting and need to *experience* grace and compassion, not just hear about it.

ACT: Show grace. This week think of one person who has annoyed you, disappointed you, or wronged you. Then choose one intentional act to show kindness to him or her even though he or she doesn't "deserve" it. Reach out with a note of encouragement, offer help without being asked, speak well of that person to someone else, etc.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/chart/29571/most-popular-hobbies-among-british-and-american-retirees/>

² Thomas L. Constable, "2 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563. 141 Beek, "The Meaning of the Expression 'The Chariots and the Horsemen of Israel' (II Kings 2:12)," *OTS* 17 (1972) 8.

³ Paul R. House, 1, 2 Kings, vol. 8, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 307–308.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).