

2 Kings 2:1-15

Aim of Lesson

To show that God's work is continued by a succession of faithful men.

Background study

See Deuteronomy 21:16-17 regarding the double portion; also references to the "Sons of the Prophets" in existence in the time of Samuel and again in the days of Elijah and Elisha (1 Samuel 19:20; 2 Kings 5:22; 9:1. A Bible Dictionary will give further information.

Suggested outline of lesson

Talk about growing old, from the point of view of coming to the end of one's work and the need for a younger person to take one's place. The children may know and understand a little of retirement, through grandparents or neighbours. Show how it is necessary for the younger person to be trained and prepared as a replacement, so that the wisdom, knowledge and experience of the older person are not lost. The children may be interested by the suggestion that they themselves may one day become Sunday School teachers, carrying on the work of teaching the next generation of children.

Remind the children that Elijah had worked long and hard in the Lord's service, travelling many hundreds of miles on foot, visiting and instructing younger prophets, teaching the people about God and giving them help and advice on how they should live. When he grew old, it was important that he should train a younger man to carry on the work. Remind them that it was God who had chosen Elijah's successor at just the right time. The two could get to know one another, so that Elijah would be encouraged to feel that he could hand over the work with confidence, and Elisha could learn much from Elijah by way of preparation for his task. Draw attention to the distinction between the two names, and endeavour to devise a means of differentiating (e.g. alphabetical order) between them.

When something sad is about to happen, people tend not to talk about it, and this seems to have been the case as the time approached for Elijah and Elisha to part. Elijah knew the time had come; Elisha was also aware of it, and the communities of prophets in the towns through which they travelled had also had the knowledge revealed to them. But the two men avoided discussing it. On the one hand Elijah sought to be alone, while Elisha was determined to be with Elijah to the last. Whenever the subject was raised by the prophets it was Elisha who, sensitive to Elijah's feelings, quickly silenced them. Clearly Elijah had received, and was following, directions from God. Steadfastly and without wavering, he finally approached the Jordan, watched from a distance by fifty of the prophets. Demonstrate the action of Elijah and describe the dramatic result. This day was a special one in the lives of both men. Only at the last minute did Elijah speak of the parting when he asked Elisha if he had a request. Elisha's response was unhesitating. He so valued the wisdom and holiness of his teacher that he could think of nothing greater than to be blessed with the same qualities. It needs to be understood that, in asking for a "double portion", he was not asking to be twice as wise, but was referring to the provision in the law whereby the eldest son received twice as much of the father's goods as did the other sons. Elisha felt that he was the "firstborn" amongst the sons of the prophets. He loved and respected Elijah as a father, and wished to be heir to his authority and duties.

Elijah knew that to grant such a petition was not within his power, and his answer left the decision to God. Convey the air of expectancy that pervaded the scene and then the dramatic manifestation of God's glory, which effected the parting. The old man was swept off his feet and into the air by a sudden fierce whirling wind, while the young man stood rooted to the spot, crying out in wonder and gazing upward until Elijah was lost to view and the vision of the chariots and horsemen disappeared. In Biblical times the tearing of clothes was often associated with bereavement and, on this occasion, probably expressed Elisha's sorrow. He was left to make the return journey alone. In taking up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah, Elisha was symbolically taking on Elijah's work. Refer back to the call of Elisha (1 Kings 19:19), when he had obviously understood the significance of the cloak that had been cast upon him.

Elisha was given immediate proof that he had indeed inherited the power of Elijah. The watching prophets witnessed the miracle and recognized that Elisha had taken Elijah's place.

Relevance to the children's lives

Why did God arrange for Elisha to spend time with Elijah when his work was coming to an end? Elisha had to learn what he should do, before he could do it. You are learning now from your teacher. Do you think that one day, when you are grown up, you could teach others about the Bible?

Worksheets

The letters from the boxes that add up to 6 read: 'Elisha said "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit".'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to learn well, so that we may grow up to work for you. Amen.

Memory verse

"Tell the next generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever" (Psalm 48:13-14).