

ELISHA

The Great Things That

others build the needed building. They would do it themselves. They didn't demand "the best" in college facilities. They would settle for a crude shelter.

One of the great prophets and miracle-workers of the Bible was Elisha. His ministry after the translation of his master Elijah covered over fifty years, and was marked by mighty evidences of the power of faith in God. Let us let our faith grow as we study what Elisha did.

Lesson #8:
The Miracle of the
Axe Head

Scripture:
II Kings 6:1-7

Key Verse:
II Kings 6:6
"And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim."

Hath Done

A "good problem" had arisen at the prophets' school (v. 1). The dormitory facilities had become too small. Apparently this was the school at Gilgal (since it was close to the Jordan River—v. 2) and perhaps the student population had grown because Gehazi had been fired! At least some of the time Elisha lived at the school, and unquestionably he was the administrator and leading spirit. This would mean that his personal servant would have an important role in the school's operation, too. We have seen in previous lessons, especially in Chapter 5, that Gehazi was a carnal, conniving, dishonest, and covetous man. Perhaps the space problem is recorded right after the punishment of Gehazi because more men came under Elisha's tutelage after this man's influence was gone. What was done to remedy the problem, and the miracle God performed in the construction project are the subjects of this week's lesson. Study this interesting story and notice 3 things.

I. The Character of the Prophets.

The stories of Elisha commend to us the idea of going off to college to get training under the teaching and superintendence of a man of God. Look at all of the references to the prophets' schools in II Kings 2, 4, 6, and 9! Notice all of the commentary in scripture on student life at the schools. Note that the great man of God Elisha was over these schools, and consider that his godliness, spiritual power, and wonderful reputation were probably important reasons why men left home to attend these schools. Often the best Christian colleges have been overseen by famous men of God. Moody led at Moody Bible Institute, Torrey superintended the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Bob Jones directed Bob Jones University, Lee Roberson was the leader of Tennessee Temple University. The idea of going off to a Christian college to prepare for a life of ministry has plenty of support in the stories of Elisha.

Notice several things about these "sons of the prophets."

- A. They were poor. Even the tools they used to build the new dormitory were "borrowed."
- B. They were humble. They weren't too "busy" or "important" to insist that

- C. They were loyal. They loved Elisha, and wanted him with them.
- D. They were honest. It would have been a terrible thing not to return an expensive iron axe head!

Bible college experiences are good for young adults. If qualities such as these can be developed through the college experience, much more than book-learning will take place. Honest, humble, loyal students who operate for a time under conditions of poverty can become great servants of God. Don't deny your kids a chance like this. One more element is also necessary, both for the student and his family. That key element is *faith*. In this incident the students' faith is again built up and demonstrated.

II. The Meaning of the Miracle.

"As one was felling a beam," the Bible records, "the ax head fell into the water" (v. 5). The loss of this borrowed axe head caused the young prophet serious concern and he went to Elisha about it. You know, you can't cut wood without an axe head. Neither can you uphold your good reputation if you lose something you borrow and cannot pay for it. In response to the young man's plea, Elisha performed a miracle (v. 6) and recovered the axe head. Isn't it interesting that God would do a miracle to solve such a mundane problem? This story encourages us to pray about every problem of life. It teaches us that God is interested in all areas of our life and that He will do extraordinary things to solve even little problems. Philippians 4:6 tells us to pray about "every thing" and we really ought to do it. But this account of a miracle also teaches us something about Christian service. You can't really accomplish anything when you have lost your axe head. In Luke 24:45-59, our Lord gives again His "Great Commission" to Christians: "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (v. 47). But then He admonishes the disciples to wait before setting out to obey this command.

". . . but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (v. 49)

You cannot do God's work without God's power. As you may know, the power they needed came upon them on the Jewish festival of Pentecost just a few weeks later (See Acts 1:4-8 and 2:1-21). They were empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness for

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Jesus Christ. This power caused their testimony to be effective in the hearts of those that heard them (Note Acts 2:36-37). But notice that the same group (plus many more) that was filled with the Spirit in Acts 2 was filled again in Acts 4 (vs. 31-33). Christians empowered for service will need to seek another filling and another enduement again and again. Spiritual people tend to become carnal and need to seek the power of the Spirit again. You can't do God's work without God's power, and so when the power is gone, you need to get it back. That's the meaning of the story of the lost axe head.

III. The Recovery of Power.

What Elisha did to retrieve the axe head pictures what we must do to regain the power of God. Do you realize why you need God's power? As we saw in the Book of Acts, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to make our witnessing effective. Witnessing for Christ is one of the most important things in the Christian life. We have been commissioned to take the Gospel to everybody, and we cannot do this without God's help. We also need the power of God to live the Christian life. Love, joy, and peace, for example, are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-24). When the power is gone, we are in real trouble! What shall we do to bring it back?

A. Determine where it was lost.

"The man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place." (II Kings 6:6a)

Think about it. Ask yourself the question, "When did I lose God's blessing and enabling?" Where did you lose the power of the Spirit? Can you think of a sin that was committed about the time that God's blessing seemed to leave? Does it seem that God's power has been missing since you began neglecting prayer or Bible study or church? *Where* did you lose God's power? If you can determine where you lost it, you can go back to that place and find it again.

"I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5)

This is what Jesus said about losing something in your Christian life.

"Remember. . .and repent." Confess the sin that robbed you of the blessing. Do the spiritual work that used to bring the

blessing. Find out where you lost the power of God, and go back to that place to find it.

B. Apply the cross.

“And he cut down a stick, and cast it in the river; and the iron did swim.” (II Kings 6:6b)

The Hebrew word for “*stick*” in this verse is used elsewhere to mean simply “wood” or even a “tree.” In some places, the Old Testament uses a stick, a tree, or some form of wood to symbolize the cross of Christ. Look at Leviticus 14:1-7 and see how wood was to be used in the ceremonial cleansing of a cured leper. The wood, scarlet, and hyssop together pictured the cross of Christ. The bird that was killed symbolized Christ’s death, and the bird that was released pictured His resurrection.

Scarlet in the temple worship always typified Christ’s sacrifice, and the hyssop was used to mean the application of His blood (Exodus 12:21-23, Psalm 51:7). The wood meant the cross, and was used with the live bird, the hyssop, and the scarlet to sprinkle the blood to cleanse the leper. The Hebrew word for “*wood*” in Leviticus 14 is the same as the one for “*stick*” in II Kings 6. When Elisha cast the stick into the water, the iron axe head floated (v. 6). This means that to restore God’s power to our lives, we must apply the message of the cross. The cross has a message both for the unsaved person and for the saved. After the full truth of His Messiahship was made clear to His disciples (Matthew 16:15-20), Jesus spoke plainly to them about His mission to die at Jerusalem and rise again (v. 21). When Peter objected to this, Jesus told him and the others that they too were to take up the cross (Matthew 16:22-25). Lost men are saved through the cross of Christ, and saved men live their lives by taking up their own crosses. When you have lost the power that once blessed your life, apply the message of the cross. Once again, deny yourself, take up the cross, and follow Jesus!

C. Exercise faith. In II Kings 6:7, we read that the distraught prophet was told to reach out and “*take*” the floating axe head out of the water. When you have gone back to where you lost God’s power and have applied the principle of the cross again to your life, then just claim the power of the Spirit by faith! Faith is always the secret to power. After dealing with your failure, and rededicating your life, you should claim your forgiveness and your fresh anointing by faith (Psalm 92:10). Get a new start for God today! Take the time you need to receive a new endowment of power from on high!