



"If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

**05-Feb-16**

## **Elisha and the Double Portion**

Most of us, when we begin a new job or a new project, want to know all we can about it. We want to be ready to take it on and complete it to the best of our abilities. Fulfilling this desire often means that we must take a class or a whole course of study. If it is a more hands-on type of job, say, repairing and refinishing an antique table, we have to learn the skills necessary, not only to work with the wood's density, grain, and finish, but perhaps also to know a thing or two about joinery, routing, lathing, adhesives, slides, latches, and a few things besides, depending on what needs to be fixed.

It is different when the job is spiritual rather than physical. We can study our Bibles from dawn 'til dusk, gathering all the knowledge that we can. We can converse with the wise among us to glean as much of their experiential intelligence as possible. We can read books on specific subjects—childrearing, counseling, marriage, interpersonal relations—in an attempt to have as much of the current thinking top of mind. We can listen to sermons, read articles, pump our friends for their insights, take a Bible course with one of the churches of [God](#), and obviously, pray, meditate, and fast. All of these pursuits are good and have their places.

The prophet Elisha did not have all of these options. From all indications, Elisha was a farmer. When Elijah found him after his encounter with God on Mount Horeb, the younger man "was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen" ([I Kings 19:19](#)). There is no indication that Elisha had an extensive education or access to biblical scrolls or experience as a teacher or preacher. Was he even one of "the sons of the prophets"? All Scripture tells us is that God charged Elijah, "And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place" ([I Kings 19:16](#)). How prepared was Elisha for the difficult work he had before him?

Even so, Elisha knew what it meant when Elijah "passed by him and threw his mantle on him" (verse 19): He was being chosen as the prophet's successor, first to follow and serve the older prophet (verse 21) and later to take his place as God's spokesman to the nation. He probably figured that he would get on-the-job training as he went here and there with Elijah, and he was undoubtedly right about that. But all indications are that his time with Elijah was short. It is difficult to know how long a time passed between I Kings 19 and II Kings 2, but it could not have been more than a handful of years.

In any case, no matter how long it was, Elisha likely thought his training period too short when the time came for Elijah to hand over the reins. From what is said in II Kings 2, everyone knew the day when the Lord would take Elijah away (see [II Kings 2:3](#), 5), and reminding Elisha about it only made him testy and angry. He was clearly nervous and distraught about losing his mentor and having the weight of the prophetic office crash upon his shoulders. Such stresses would be enough to unsettle anyone. It must have come as a relief when

Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." ([II Kings 2:9-10](#))

What was Elisha asking? The commentators are nearly unanimous in saying that he is using inheritance language, such as that in [Deuteronomy 21:17](#), to be considered as Elijah's "firstborn," that is, his successor. The firstborn son

was given a double portion of his father's estate, "for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." This sounds plausible until we recall that he had known for quite a while that he was to be Elijah's successor, ever since the prophet had thrown his mantle on him. So Elisha must be asking for something beyond mere affirmation of his position.

In his following of Elijah, Elisha must have seen the extent of the prophet's responsibilities, the long hours, the many miles of travel, the critical and sometimes unpopular decisions that had to be made, the management of those around him, the constant stress of seeking and responding to God's will, and perhaps the loneliness of the position. As a young man, having a prophet's life thrust upon him so soon, he wanted assurance that he could do the job, not merely adequately, but up to the level and beyond what Elijah had done.

Perhaps he was a humble man, unsure of himself and his abilities. Maybe he thought that, since he was only half the man Elijah was, he would need a double portion of his spirit to be anywhere near Elijah's equal. But if Elisha were an ambitious man, he may have asked for the double portion so that he could not only do what Elijah had done but even more—to be a greater servant of God than his master had been. This could have been requested righteously, with the pure desire to expand the work of God among the people and turn more of Israel to the Lord.

Why did Elijah reply that he had asked a hard or difficult thing? First, granting such a request was out of Elijah's hands, as only God can bestow the gift of His Holy Spirit on a person (see [John 3:34](#); [I John 4:13](#)). Second, Elijah did not know God's will on the extent of Elisha's future ministry, whether it would be short or long or good or bad or even if it would curtail, hold steady, or expand God's work. God had not put him in the position to know with any certainty if Elisha's request would be answered.

This explains the rest of Elijah's answer: "Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." In other words, if Elisha were granted the spiritual acumen to see, that is, understand or comprehend, the activity of God in the translation of Elijah, he would also be granted the double portion of God's Spirit. So when Elisha cries out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" ([II](#)

[Kings 2:12](#)), it is a confirmation to Elijah that Elisha was indeed seeing the miraculous. The double portion had been given.

Elisha's request should be instructive to us, especially in terms of God's response. He is always willing to give all the help that is needed for us to complete the job He has given us. If we feel we are not up to the task, He will gift us to the point that we are equal to it—and more. Should we fail in those tasks, we can be certain we are the ones who fell short, not God's gifts. So we should do as Paul says: "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the [peace](#) of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ [Jesus](#)" ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[The Wonderful, Powerful Gift of God's Holy Spirit](#)**

by John O. Reid

When we receive God's Holy Spirit, we cannot escape the responsibility of using it, being a light to the world in the correct way of living. God's Holy Spirit is the formative energy that brought all creation into existence. In the original manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the disciples found themselves with the ability of communicating in foreign languages. God's Holy Spirit is the power of God in action, enabling Samson to exercise remarkable feats of strength. The great miracles recorded in the scriptures include the parting of the Red Sea and the miraculous birth of Christ. God's Holy Spirit is multi-faceted, including serving as a teacher, impressing and amplifying the deep nuances of God's law and His marvelous plan of salvation deeply into our minds. God cannot create a spirit being by fiat. The individual being called must cooperate with God in the creative process, yielding to the convicting, shaping, and reforming properties of God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit leads His called-out ones into truth and the deep things of God or the mind of Christ. The spirit in man, no matter how brilliant and inventive, cannot understand the deep things of God. With God's Spirit, the foolish and unwise

(who have been called) can comprehend what the brilliant and wise have always desired to understand, but could not. God has dispensed spiritual gifts throughout the church for the purpose of edifying the entire body. We desperately need, equipped with the full armor of God, to guard against Satan, the lures of the world, and our own flesh to quench God's Holy Spirit. The power to overcome, to mortify our flesh, and to resist the wiles of Satan the Devil accrues to those who boldly use God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our prom

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

**[Elisha and the Shunammite Woman, Part I: Reviving God's Children](#)**  
by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Some Old Testament stories read like parables, and Elisha's miracles in II Kings 4 are good examples of this. Richard Ritenbaugh draws parallels between modern church history and the second of these miracles.

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