

JUNE 21

The time to celebrate is near. Not only are you almost halfway through the year, but you've also probably read half of the Bible by now. Starting July 3, you'll have finished The Psalms and will begin reading them through again.

Today you begin the 12th book of the Old Testament; you're almost halfway through Acts, and you get one of the greatest psalms written, Psalm 139.

2 Kings 1-2

Remember that these are not just disjointed events. The presence of Elijah and Elisha was a testimony of the reality of Yahweh's presence. The people could have turned to God at any moment. It seems that every time these guys sneezed, a miracle happened. They were walking witnesses of God's availability, but by the people not responding to them, they became walking testimonials of the nation's sin and the justness of God's coming punishment. The plan of redemption is going forward, but God is showing us through Israel that the sin of man is incurable. It became apparent to the apostles in Acts that salvation in Christ was the only way for God to forgive man and to break the power of sin. Reading all of this helps us as disciples to understand sin's power on people and to be amazed at the privilege of carrying the message of hope and redemption into the harvest. We are being used to make disciples who will go beyond us, sharing this message and making disciples, who make disciples for our Lord.

2 Kings 1

Vs. 1-8 Ahaziah was already going to die and had messed up by going to Baal-zebub (Jesus was accused of being possessed by this guy), the prince of demons. So this event was not for Ahaziah, but for the people to see that the real God was with Elijah. But of course, they already knew this. So why didn't they come to God? Just like in our world today, it is more fun to be lost and it requires less responsibility to worship the wrong God. The ultimate answer, however, is that the sin within us repulses us from God. Sin is not passive; it is passive-aggressive in its sickness and rebellion.

V. 3 The *angel of the Lord* was probably God the Son before He became a man. As we've seen, God had shown a lot of grace and many wonders to these people. Yet in this need, the king went to Baal.

V. 8 This is the same description given to John the Baptist. Apparently they both watched, "What Not to Wear" and wore it. The style of dress expressed distress and emergency in light of the coming judgment. This is something like what Jesus told His disciples when He said, *Blessed are you who are hungry now*. As disciples following Christ in the harvest, knowing that judgment is coming, it might be appropriate for us to put off some pleasures until the harvest is over and look the part of those laboring in the harvest.

Vs. 9-12 Obviously, these guys were going to kill Elijah as soon as they had him. The question here is, "Where was the respect for God?" I like Elijah's response. Stuff like this will probably happen in the Tribulation when the two witnesses are walking around for the first three and a half years. Notice that this must have been somewhat public and there must have been witnesses. Since there were no survivors, someone else must have run back to tell the king.

Vs. 13-16 This guy had the right idea, and in v. 15, the angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Jesus) told Elijah it was safe to go with him. Safety must have been the issue also with the first two groups of soldiers.

Vs. 17-18 Notice that there was no repentance. You can bet the people knew of this event.

Both of these kings had the same name and they were cousins, via Ahab and Jezebel. That won't turn out good.

2 Kings 2

Vs. 1-8 This story has a new interest for me. There is a spiritual side of life that we cannot see and really don't attempt to understand spiritually. We are almost completely visual and almost completely compelled by logic and by what we can understand. The spiritual dimension exists around us always. It isn't just the fact that we can't see it. I understand that. But we don't even remember it is there and live accordingly. Reading the Bible every day helps.

What was the real test to Elisha here? Was it an endurance test? A test against human opinion? A test against disappointment? A test against fear? Why did seeing Elijah being taken become the condition of receiving God's appointment and power?

In John 6 Jesus was in conflict with the people He had just fed. They followed Him to Capernaum, and in the synagogue they cornered Jesus and He gave them the Bread of Life talk. As a result of this talk, not only did the people and leaders turn away from Him, but many of His disciples left Him. Apparently they were "fed up" with His sayings. Notice what Jesus said to them.

John 6:60-69 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)⁶⁵ And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?"⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus challenged them that they were seeing and thinking only in the flesh. It is the Spirit that gives life and what He had just told them was Spirit and life. Notice then that one of the tests Jesus mentions to them is in v. 62. If they couldn't receive the spiritual reality of His words, what would they do if they were to see Him ascending where He was before? The twelve (actually, eleven) didn't understand what Jesus had said either, but they understood with the Spirit that Jesus was the Holy One of God, and so they stayed. Big ol' struggling Peter was learning to see and understand with something other than his eyes and head. We know that Peter and the boys were standing on the Mt. of Olives and saw when Jesus went into heaven and they were never the same.

Elisha saw Elijah ascend. This wasn't a test of his vision or his courage; it was a test of his spiritual understanding. This was something that God allowed him to see. Something happened there that we cannot comprehend by reading this. It might be similar to what Jesus said in challenging His murmuring disciples. The entire snipe-hunt with Elijah was a test of his spiritual understanding. And God's Spirit came upon Elisha with might and power to complete the judgment of God on the nation.

V. 1 Note that Elijah was to be taken in the whirlwind.

Elisha's response in vs. 3 and 5 have to do with the sorrow he was experiencing, knowing that Elijah was leaving. He was challenged in his faith, knowing too that he would continue Elijah's mission without Elijah's power.

It is interesting to note that these schools of prophets were out of hiding in the northern kingdom; and their task, apparently, was to teach the Word to the people. Since Elijah's confrontation with Ahab, it appears that they were no longer in danger.

V. 7 Apparently these 50 were witnesses of what was about to happen.

Vs. 9-12 Elisha's request was because he knew he was to continue God's work in bringing judgment on Israel. What a daunting responsibility. The issue of seeing Elijah taken was one of having faith to see and God allowing him to see.

Isn't it interesting that they were separated by chariots and horses of fire (more than one of each), but that Elijah wasn't taken by the chariots? Maybe God wanted Elisha to know that God's army was unseen, but it was always spiritually present. He would need to know that in the coming chapters. Notice that Elisha's exclamation had to do with the revealing of God's army. Elijah was actually taken in the whirlwind.

Vs. 13-14 This miracle not only confirmed that the power of Elijah was on him, but the miracle itself had some significance going back to Joshua and to Moses and God's plan and purpose for Israel.

Vs. 15-18 These men had seen Elijah go up in the whirlwind. They recognized the power of Elijah on Elisha, but they didn't yet recognize Elisha's authority.

Vs. 19-22 God was beginning to show His presence with Elisha through various miracles. The word would get out that God was still among the people of the northern kingdom through this unusual prophet.

Vs. 23-25 This appears to be 42 teenagers. Bethel was an important place for the calf and Baal worship of Israel, and there wouldn't have been a lot of respect for God in that area. Also, it sounds like the people knew that Elijah had been taken up, and the jeering of these teens reflects their understanding that the prophet they feared, Elijah, had been taken up into heaven. They were taunting Elisha to "go up," too. Also, 42 teens would represent a potentially dangerous situation for Elisha. That there were 42 of them suggests that they were coming from some kind of activity, possibly a "youth rally" up at the temple of Baal with temple prostitutes. Who knows? I doubt there was a soccer tournament. So, just as God taught the military to respect Elijah, word would get out that this bald-headed prophet was an ambassador of Yahweh and was due proper respect too.

Teens are usually kind of fast and scrappy. These bears were apparently faster and scrappier. I'll bet nobody stole his garbage can lids, or toilet-papered his house after this.

What I would mention regarding discipleship is that the continuation of Elijah's ministry was a very serious and important thing for Elisha. He loved his people and his God. Knowing Elijah was leaving was a crisis for him, and Elisha followed very seriously in faith. Following our Lord in the harvest is not only a privilege, but it is very important for the Lord and for a lot of people who have no clue what is being offered to them, nor what is on the horizon. We have the eyes of faith that see what is happening.

Acts 13:42-14:7

Acts 13:42-52

This doesn't sound like a "day in the life of a church planter," but in Acts, it is a day in the life of Paul. So much of what happens here mirrors Jesus' instructions to the Twelve when He sent them out in Matthew 10:14-23. Jesus told His disciples that they would know it was time to leave when the persecution pushed them to the next town. This is apparently how Paul and Barnabas set their agenda too.

Vs. 42-43 It appears that Paul began at the synagogues and found those who easily came to Christ. In this case they organized a city-wide outreach. The first part of this had gone well, and as they waited until the meeting on the following Sabbath, Paul and Barnabas did some intensive disciple making.

Vs. 44-47 Waiting that extra week allowed the opposition to get organized. It is interesting that Paul still felt obligated to reach out to the Jews first and then use their rejection to justify reaching the Gentiles, so as to make the Jews jealous.

V. 48 The Gentiles flocked to the Lord. Notice the part of the verse that points to election, or actually to what Jesus said in John 6, *no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father*. Adding God's foreknowledge to this, God the Father knew who would respond in genuine faith and drew them to this very time and place to give their lives to Christ.

V. 51 Because of the synagogue system, Paul and Barnabas were able to organize the church fairly quickly. Shaking the dust off of their feet was exactly what Jesus had said.

V. 52 Whatever Paul and Barnabas passed on to these disciples, they were full of the joy of their salvation and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 14:1-7

Vs. 1-2 Barnabas and Paul had a simple strategy of what towns to visit and how long to stay. Brilliant.

V. 3 Notice that as long as there was fruit available, in spite of the opposition, Paul and Barnabas stayed.

Vs. 5-6 When the death threats came that threatened them and the new church, they understood that this was the Lord's cue for them to move on to another part of the harvest.

Psalm 139

I heard a very tired Steve Farrar speak through this psalm several years ago and it was very good. He was tired and kept chastising *Christianity Today* and certain groups that toy with the "newness of God" baloney. That baloney says that God doesn't really know what will happen next, so He will change His mind depending on what we do. It's baloney. God's foreknowledge is absolute. Anyway, this psalm is a comfort in understanding that God knows us completely and loves us totally. And remember, His steadfast love endures forever.

This apparently was written in David's early days.

Vs. 1-6 David was amazed at God's intimate knowledge of him.

Vs. 7-12 This understanding of God's deep knowledge led David to understand that there was no place he or we could ever be hidden from God.

Vs. 13-16 David's thoughts returned to God's knowledge of him; and David understood that even in the womb, God had known him and even formed him.

Vs. 17-18 David was awestruck by all of these thoughts.

Vs. 19-22 In contrast with God's merciful greatness, David couldn't understand how anyone could reject God and make Him their enemy. David lived with that reality during the years he had run from Saul. David's hate for them is seen in contrast to the truth and greatness of God. David never hated King Saul, but he understood that Saul had made himself God's enemy by rejecting God's truth.

Vs. 23-24 This should be the prayer all disciples are praying as we follow the Lord in the harvest.

Proverbs 17:19-21

This is all pretty straightforward. The "high door" is referring to pride and showing off our stuff.