

# 2 KINGS 2

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## **2:1**

Gilgal is most famous in modern times for the ancient figs archaeologists discovered there, which led them to speculate that the fig was ancient humans' first cultivated crop. Jewish tradition also has the fig as the fruit of the tree of life. This speculation flows from Adam and Eve's using fig leaves after partaking of the fruit. Gilgal is also the location of a memorial built by Joshua to commemorate the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan River as they entered the promised land (see Joshua 4).

## **2:2**

Beth-el was the location of Jacob's vision of the ladder or stair to heaven. As Elijah was about to take a route into heaven, it might be significant that he visited Beth-el first.

## **2:3**

"From thy head" is an interesting phrase, but in Hebrew, like often in English, the leader of an organization is called a "head." Thus this phrase might be better translated as "the Lord will take away thy master as the head of your group today."

## **2:4-6**

Three times at three different places—Gilgal, Beth-el, and Jericho—Elijah told Elisha to stay, and Elisha responded with an oath that he would not leave Elijah. Whether the locations have any significance to the story is unknown.

**2:7–8**

“Wrapped it together” might be better translated as “rolled up,” but the original word is obscure; it only appears here and in Ezekiel 27:24. Like Joshua, Elijah also parted the Jordan.

**2:9**

In the Israelite tradition, when a man died his sons would divide his possessions into the number of sons he had plus one. The extra portion, or double portion, would go to the eldest son. This was the case when Joseph accepted the double portion from Jacob but passed a portion to his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, in Genesis 48. Elisha desired to be a true heir to Elijah and receive the double portion. Depending on how you count them, the number of miracles performed by Elisha doubled the number performed by Elijah.

**2:10–11**

Fire here might just be the heavenly association or glorious nature of the chariots and horses. The Hebrew word for “whirlwind” probably deserves some discussion since it is a rare word occurring only about two dozen times in the Old Testament. Most of the usage has reference to divine weather. It is worth noting that the word used here is not the word for “great and strong wind” used in 1 Kings 19:11, especially since that verse also tells us “the Lord was not in the wind.”

**2:12**

That Elisha had earlier expressed the desire to be Elijah’s heir and was part of the “sons of the prophets” might be why Elisha called Elijah “my father.” Elisha’s reference to the chariot of Israel could variously mean the nation or Jacob/Israel.

**2:13–14**

Elijah gave his mantle to Elisha in 1 Kings 19. Perhaps that was a symbolic action to declare Elisha his heir, and only now that Elijah was gone could Elisha take the mantle completely as his own.

**2:15–18**

The sons of the prophets wanted to search for Elijah or for his body, thinking that perhaps the wind blew him against some mountain or into some valley. The period of three days might be significant as matching the time Christ was in the tomb. Three days is the *Shemira*, the traditional three-day period Jews watch over the dead. They believe the spirit will stay near the body for three days. Therefore if someone is brought back to life before three days have passed, they might not be considered a resurrected being but are considered healed instead.

**2:19–22**

The act of healing waters is reminiscent of Moses in the desert with the children of Israel. Jericho was next to the Dead Sea, so water there would likely be too salty for humans or plants. That Elisha healed the water by adding more salt just adds more to the miracle.

**2:23–24**

This very interesting passage has puzzled many faithful readers since Elisha seemingly displays too much cruelty for a prophet of God. There are various theories and justifications for Elisha's actions, including that the Hebrew word translated as "mocking" in the King James Version might be interpreted as "stoning," meaning that the people attempted to kill Elisha. "Children" should be read as "young boys" or "juveniles." The number of juveniles, forty-two, matches the number of people slain by Jehu in 2 Kings 10:14. Rabbis have pointed out the extra miracles of this passage: that Beth-el is not an area frequented by bears and that, in fact, there are no nearby woods the bears could have come from. Finally, some have speculated that the insult "thou bald head" might refer to the mantle of Elijah, which may have been made of some kind of fur. Mocking Elisha as bald might have implied that the juveniles thought Elisha did not have the authority and power of Elijah.

**2:25**

Carmel is where Elijah confronted the priests of Baal. After Elisha received the prophetic mantle, he went to Jericho, Beth-el, and then Carmel, so in addition to reproducing some of Elijah's miracles Elisha was also visiting some of Elijah's old domains.

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