

In Second Kings chapter thirteen we are told that the Prophet Elisha had fallen ill with an illness of which he was to die. This has appeared to many Christians one of the more puzzling stories in the Old Testament.

Elisha was not only Elijah's successor, one of the most anointed Prophets in the Old Testament, he also had a double portion of his master's anointing and performed even more extraordinary miracles throughout his life than he did.

A testimony to this unusual power on Elisha is found in the incident of the dead man thrown in haste into his grave. As soon as the corpse touched his bones, he came back to life and stood up on his feet!

So how can we justify sickness and the presence of God coexisting like this? A variety of interesting explanations have been put forward.

Some commentators suggest the removal of Elisha in this way was a prophetic pointer to impending judgement on the nation of Israel that came about just shortly after.

Others consider the Prophet's death through suffering to be a reference to Christ, by whose death and burial in the grave believers receive new life.

It has also been suggested that Elisha had to learn to trust God in weakness, as well as in strength, like Job and the Apostle Paul, and be a sign for others like these two men were.

The lesson the writer of Kings interjects in his account of the visit by King Joash to Elisha upon hearing of his illness appears to confirm this interpretation.

His first words were, "My father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel," meaning, "you are worth more in Israel than all her military might combined."

However, the Prophet ordered the king to take a bow and arrows and to draw the bow. He then laid his hands upon his hands and told him to open the window eastward and shoot. But, unfortunately for Joash, he disregarded the symbolic significance of Elisha's feeble hands and lost the blessing!