

The Translation of Elijah

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(R. L. Allan)

2 Kings 1, 2.

We might read these two chapters in connection with this event, though it is only in the second of them we have it recorded.

Ahaziah, of the house of Omri, and the successor of his father Ahab on the throne of Israel, appears before us here, as in deep apostasy from the God of Israel. He was sick — and in his sickness he seeks to a god of the nations; and being withstood because of this by the servant of the God of Israel, he sends officers to take him.

This was a full expression of apostasy. And, accordingly, his death is to be read as condign, specific judgment. It was a *judicial death*, and so was that of his captains and their fifties, who had entered into the spirit of their master, and were the representatives and executors of his iniquity.*

*The third chapter may be received as a repentant remnant saved in the day of judgment.

This was all in righteousness. The king of Israel had perfected sin, and judgment was executed upon him.

In Luke 9 this is referred to. When the Lord Jesus was refused entrance into a Samaritan village, His disciples would fain have acted the part of Elijah upon Ahaziah's captains, but the Lord forbid them. They did not know what spirit they were of; that is, they did not discern the time; they did not understand the Lord and His business in this world. They mistook the dispensation, and would have treated it as a time of judgment. It was in *intelligence* — *in that* light which distinguishes things that differ — that they were wanting. Their affections were right; their purpose and design will be answered in due season, when the day of vengeance comes. So that it was not in affection that they erred, but in dispensational knowledge; and thus, in true holiness, or in the holiness of the truth. Their Lord had come to save, not to kill. He was here among men to bless them, not to judge them.

This is important, for it tells us, as many other witnesses do, that true holiness is *conduct according to light or truth*, according to the way and place of God at the given time. "Everything is beautiful in its season," That which is holy in divine seasonableness, is unholy when found elsewhere.

This may surely instruct us; but the scene in 2 Kings 1 has but little relief in it. We are in the next Place, however, introduced to a very different thing. (2 Kings 2)

We are encouraged to enter upon it with the brightest expectations, being set on the eve of the translation of Elijah: for the time, we are told, had come "when the Lord, would take up Elijah to heaven by a whirlwind." But there is much incidental instruction here.

At an earlier moment Elisha had forfeited, as I may express it, the mantle of his master. He had not proved himself to be fully up to the possession of it; his heart had not been thoroughly single, and from that moment to the time of this chapter we had not seen him in company with his master. (See 1 Kings 19: 19-21) This subjects him to a fresh proof; and Elijah himself, and the sons of the prophets, are made the instruments for conducting the process under the hand of God.

Elijah tells him again and again to go back, as he himself was pursuing the stages of his journey from Gilgal to the eastern side of the Jordan. And the sons of the prophets, whether at Bethel or at Jericho, come forth again and again to exercise his spirit, and try the earnestness and stability of his faith, by casting a shadow across his path, and thus bring his soul into perplexity and doubt.

This is a common case. The Lord, at times, with some of His choicest servants, will enter upon severe processes of purifying. He purges the vessels of His house, that they may be fitted for the Master's use. And in doing this He will use different instruments, as He pleases, in His wisdom. It may be the direct action of His own word and Spirit; it may be more immediately through His saints, or through the people of the world. Here He exercises Elisha by the word of Elijah — His own word, I may say, expressed through His prophet. He will prove, after this manner, by the patient, successive stages of a long journey, whether Elisha's heart were indeed now freed (as once it had not been), from the entanglements of mere human influences, from the honey of home and kindred associations. And He also allows him to be exercised by the ways of those who were not in his elevation, a generation of saints who were not standing in the light and certainty of his own spirit, and who, therefore, by their communications, were well fitted to cast a shadow across his path, or introduce some perplexity into his soul. But he stands these tests, and pursues his way, in full and close company with his master, the prophet of God, who was about to be translated to heaven. He has his answers ready, whether for Elijah or for the sons of the prophets; and we find him calm, decided, patient, undistracted all along the way from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, from Jericho to Jordan, and then across the river, to wherever, in short (for he knew not the way any more than Abraham of old), Elijah, that is, the hand of God, the God of glory, might be pleased to call him or to draw him.

Surely this was recovery. There was no longer a going back to kiss father or mother, but a single heart that made the Lord and His presence its place, the Lord and His pleasure its business.

The sons of the prophets at length retire. They stand to view afar off, while Elijah, with a stroke of his mantle, divides the waters of Jordan, making a passage for himself (and for Elisha, too, if he should have courage to follow on in such a wondrous, perilous path) to cross the river. And he does so. Then Elijah himself also closes the severe and heated trial through which he had been putting his friend and minister. For when they together reach the opposite side of the river, he says to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." For every testing time shall end — every process for purging shall have its measure. Men's iniquities against the Lord shall close in the judgment of righteousness; God's discipline of His saints shall close in the possession of glory. Elijah yields; and Elisha has to write his own story for the future. "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee."

This reminds me of Solomon in 2 Chr. 1; for after he had approved himself as taking his throne in right spirit, God appears to him and says to him, "Ask what I, shall give thee." And Elisha's answer to Elijah, is as Solomon's answer to God. Solomon does not ask for the life of his enemies, nor for riches and honours for himself, but, for wisdom to execute the service appointed him over the Lord's people. So Elisha here simply replies to Elijah, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

This was beautiful. This was aiming high; this was proposing great things; this was asking as for the right hand and the left hand place in the kingdom. "Are ye able to drink of my cup and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized," we might say, would be the spirit of the answer. And Elijah accordingly says to him, "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless if thou see me, when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."

The single eye is the secret of pure spiritual energy. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall

be full of light." These were the terms then, and these are the terms now.* It is not a question of life, but of strength in the Spirit. Elisha must stand it — and through grace he does. They still go on together, he and Elijah; and as they walk, they talk. But all the time the eyes of Elisha were open. His heart was upon the word of his master. He had hid the promise there; and though he may be still passing on, there is no distraction, and so with us it ought to be. We may take up one circumstance after another, and converse with them too, like Elisha here; but what is the heart affecting, where is the eye directed? Is it like this dear man's, in the right place? The walk and the talk, the circumstances of the journey, had not disturbed his spirit, nor diverted his eye; so that at the moment when the horses and chariot appeared, and Elijah was about to be carried up to heaven, Elisha's eye was upon them. He saw his ascending master, and got the mantle.

This is certainly beautiful — to be walking and talking still, still occupied with the circumstances around us, but all the time the eye kept towards the object which God had proposed to it. It is like Abraham again, whose ear was so attuned to the voice of the Lord, that the moment that voice called him, he had only to say, "Here am I."

Elisha at once used what he so prized. He took up the mantle of his master, and with it, after the manner of his master, divided the waters of the Jordan, and returned to Jericho. Here, however, I would pause to notice a matter. It is in the name of the Lord God of his ascended master, and not in that master's own name, that Elisha does this. This is so; but this is not so in the case of the apostles and their ascended master. Peter preaches that it was his ascended Lord who had sent down the Spirit; that it was His name which carried salvation with it; that it was in His name in which sinners were to be baptized for the remission of sins; that it was His name which had made the lame man to walk. (Acts 2 - 5) The name of Jesus of Nazareth is to them what the name, not of Elijah, but of the Lord God of Elijah, was to Elisha.

And further. The ascending Lord needed not a convoy, as did the prophet. He who had, afore His death, said of Himself and of His body, "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," now, after His resurrection, "not needing (as another has expressed it) the cleansing of that fiery baptism, nor requiring a commissioned chariot to bear Him up, did, in the far sublimer calmness of His own indwelling power, rise from the earth, and with His human body pass into the heavenly places."

This is so; and this way of distinguishing the Lord Jesus is to be seen elsewhere. As when Joshua commands the sun and the moon to stand still, much is made of it, and that day is declared to have had none like it; but when the Lord Jesus did like things, things which showed His sovereignty over the forces and the course of nature, it is treated as no wonder at all. (Joshua 10) But then, as to the great fact of this chapter (the translation of Elijah), it has, I believe, its own place character. In my sight (may I so speak?) it stands in company with the translation of Enoch in *patriarchal* days, and with the death and burial of Moses on Mount Pisgah, in the stricter days of Israel and *the law*. It took place in the later times of *the prophets*, as we know.

In the progress of other ages or dispensations, earlier times and seasons, times of the fathers, of Moses and the prophets, it has been the way of the wisdom of God to give forth certain notices of His future purposes. The coming kingdom, when the Son of man shall take His lordship, and the Son of David His throne, has been the subject not only of prophecy, but of types and shadows. There have been historic pledges of it, and the faint foreshadowing of it in certain distinguished eras in the course of; Old Testament times. But so also as to the deeper mysteries of the call of the Gentiles and of the heavenly calling, yea, indeed, of the mystery of the Church. And so, too, of the glorified "children of the resurrection." And I read the story of Enoch in the days of Genesis; the story of Moses with the

Lord on Mount Pisgah; and this story of the translation of Elijah in the later days of the prophets, as witnessing that mystery in three distinct successive eras in the Old Testament times. Moses and Elijah, as we know, appear in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. The shadowy pledges which God gave by them of old were then, in the days of the gospel, redeemed and substantiated. Moses represents the dead and risen portion of the glorified saints; Enoch and Elijah those who shall still be alive, and those translated in the day of 1 Cor. 15, or at "the coming of Christ." This has its deep interest for us.

Soon after this, the sons of the prophets betray the low, uncertain state of their souls. They are saints, but not in Elisha's elevation; and they propose to search for his master, though they reverently acknowledge him. They, as it were, go to the empty sepulchre, and have to return rebuked and confounded. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Why search on the mountain or in the valleys for one that has gone to heaven? But the grace that is to be seen (and some of us have good reason to appreciate it) in thus delineating various measures and different elevations among the people of God, may be deeply and thankfully owned by us. "Some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold."

The lessons of this scripture are surely various, and each of them healthful for the soul. "Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."