

II Kings 2:1-18: Elijah Goes to Heaven TORC 05/01/2011

Beloved in the Lord,

We come now to the final day in the life of Elijah. It was in some ways a rather unremarkable day. If Elijah had family we do not read that he went to say good bye to them nor do we read that Elijah sought to do something special for himself or others on his last day on earth. Rather, obedient he set off to Bethel and then Jericho to touch base it seems with the sons of prophets in those two places. The sons of the prophets and Elisha too knew that this was to be a special day and that something special was going to happen. God had told them as he had told Elijah and I suppose they had to spend some time pondering what this all meant.

It was a time of transition. It was the end and the beginning of an era. The LORD was still working out the fulfillment of His promise to destroy Satan and save the His people through the seed of the woman. Sadly Israel had turned her back on God. He had been gracious to King Ahab and Ahaziah but these two office bearers had refused the grace offered to them. Elijah had been courageous in his work. Elijah though, as James wrote, was a man just like we are and to be sure he had his time doubt and despair. But God had shown him the future. Elisha had been chosen to continue the work. To the Jordan then. There another had crossed over. Then Joshua took over from Moses because the work had to continue. Now as well the work would continue the cloak was now passed and Elijah as the Word bearer was glorified, Elisha as the new Word bearer was confirmed that all would know that the LORD he is God in Israel. I bring to you the Word of the Lord under the theme:

The LORD Glorifies His Prophet: 1. the Word of Glorification 2. The Vehicle of Glorification 3. After the Glorification

The Word of Glorification It was to be a special day in the history of the world and too for Elijah. Elijah was going to go home to be with God! Yes the work had taken its toll on Elijah.

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There had been that time that he wished earlier that God would take his life. Frustrated and scared, his hope was that God would end his life right then and there. But that was not the will of the Lord for the Lord's work was not finished and the Lord's desire for Elijah was to be fulfilled. Now the Word came to Elijah that he would go up to heaven in a whirlwind! The writers leave no suspense. Right off we know what is going to happen by the Word of the Lord. It is just a matter now to see how that would be accomplished.

Elijah as mentioned spent the day in a rather ordinary way. He and Elisha headed out from Gilgal. Elijah asked Elisha to stay at Gilgal. Elijah's motives are puzzling in that we are not exactly sure why he wants Elisha to remain. One theory is that Elijah was still unhappy that he was still alive and was to carry out the work and therefore simply wanted to be by himself. But that does not seem to fit the situation. Others think that Elijah, humbled by his circumstances did not want a lot of sentiment and simply wanted to go to be the Lord quietly with no fanfare. There is likely something to this. But perhaps more to the point was that the Lord was on the one hand testing Elisha and on the other confirming for Elijah that Elisha was the one. For the reader there is a confirmation for us of the office of both Elijah and Elisha that is not humanly derived but derived of God. Elisha was not going to leave his "father" and on oath commits himself to stay with Elijah to the end.

When they came to Bethel the sons of the prophets took Elisha aside. They knew that the Lord was going to Elijah away. Elisha of course knew but told the men to keep silent about it. Again there are some questions about Elisha's call for silence. Elisha understood that Elijah was not discussing it. It may have been that Elisha was distressed himself that Elijah would be leaving him. It may be as we have mentioned that Elijah did not want any fanfare. We do get the

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sense that Elijah did not know that the others knew. Whatever the case, Elisha's words were heeded.

He in turn kept his vow and though asked did not stay in Bethel but continued on to Jericho. There much of the same thing happened. Certainly the Lord had ensured that his prophets knew that He the LORD was going to glorify himself that day. The Word spoken would be fulfilled! We can only imagine the questions and the pondering. Elijah, Elisha and the sons of the prophets were left to their own thoughts. Nonetheless it was going to be a special day!

By the way these sons of the prophets were schools or a group of men who had received the prophetic gift and calling who were associated with a more prominent prophet. We read about them in the days of Samuel and now here as well which leads many to surmise that Elijah had established these schools. We cannot be sure but these men seemed to respect and were very aware of Elijah's special service to God.

Elijah and Elisha headed off for the Jordan while 50 sons of the prophets followed at a distance. We cannot help notice the difference of respect for the office of these 50 men when we compare them with the first two groups of 50 men of Ahaziah. These men believed the Word of the Lord and wanted to witness what the Lord would do.

It was a time for change to be sure. We have referred to those days there by the Jordan when Joshua took the staff of leadership from Moses. We look back and think of 12 men on a mountain watching Jesus go up from this earth to heaven and then to Jerusalem. It was a day of varied emotions of sorrow for they would not live with Jesus in the same way again and yet excitement and anticipation for the coming of the Spirit of God and the days when they would do even greater things than their master as Jesus had promised. Yes God through the Word, our Jesus, is gathering and defending the church then and now and into the future when Jesus will

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come again. Then God will be glorified and we in Christ Jesus will be glorified. But the work continues, one era to another, one generation to another, one group of office bearers to the next.

The Vehicle of Glory The two men walked to the Jordan. We can imagine that both were quiet now, left with their own thoughts. If there was conversation we do not read about it. What do you speak about when something special is going to happen? The time was very near to say good bye.

There was an obstacle yet. The Jordan was flowing at full height. Elijah had to leave Canaan now to go to glory and Elisha had to leave Canaan now to receive his commission. Elijah did a Moses like thing then. He took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water. The waters parted to the right and the left and the two servants of God walked right on through to the other side on dry ground. There is a symbolic difference though for the symbol of Moses was the shepherd's staff. That was very much a symbol of his prophetic office. He was of course the shepherd tending the flocks of Jethro till he was 80 years old and called into service. He struck the Red Sea with that staff and they parted. Now the symbol of Elijah's office was used. This was the cloak laid across the shoulders of Elisha. This was the cloak that anticipated John the Baptist too. As we read in Malachi 4:5: ***See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.*** Elijah and Elisha are doing the work of the forerunner. They anticipated the coming of the one greater whose sandal they were unworthy to untie. But He was coming and they crossed the river Jordan, one in the hope of his salvation and the other in the conviction that work that he is called to must continue!

It is by that faith, the faith that we are called to that these men live and work. We too are called to that same faith in Christ Jesus the one who has come and is coming. The work has been passed to the church. The body of Christ with the prophet, priests and kings and her called men

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work in this wonderful era of the Spirit and we as the body live in the hope of our special day when we will go to be with the Lord forever.

After they crossed the Jordan, Elijah asked his servant if there was anything he could do or grant. Elisha now sees himself as the son of Elijah. Elisha is convinced of his call to be a son of this prophet, but not just a son but the oldest son. That is why he asks for a double portion. Elisha is not asking to be greater. Some will point out that Elisha did more and greater miracles but such is to miss the point that Elijah is the one who will leave this earth in a glorious way and that it is Elijah who will return to earth in the day that Jesus is transfigured. Nor is it simply a matter of Elisha in his humility saying I will have twice of what you have Elijah so that I can become what you are. No, Elisha is aware that the dead Elijah can give nothing. He is asking for the inheritance of the Spirit in light of the word of the Spirit as we find it Deuteronomy 21:17 that the double portion belongs to the first son. Elisha asks in faith. Elisha asks in wisdom. Apart from God he can do nothing. He needs the Spirit of God!

Elijah understands that it is not for him to give. Jesus could say to His disciples that He and the Father would send the Spirit. Jesus the Son of Man was greater than Elijah was but mere man. But Elijah does leave hope. If Elisha can see Elijah being taken up it will be so.

And then it happened. Suddenly, in a moment and in the twinkling of an eye! Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind. The army of God, the angels of fire, fiery horses and chariot separated the two men. Elijah ascended into heaven. He did go up with fear but in the conviction that his sins were covered. Like Enoch he was no more.

Elisha saw it. He was filled with wonder. He cried out, "My father, my father!" He tore his clothes and took up the cloak of Elijah and headed back to Jericho! Elijah was in heaven. Another was left to carry on and 50 witnesses to ready to take up the work.

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Two now were in heaven. This is a sign that our flesh and blood changed by God is prepared so that man can live with God. Yet it would take more. For all of us who believe in Christ Jesus will also be saved. We will go to be with God. Our bodies will be renewed and we will live with him forever. But Enoch and Elijah like us must be cleansed in Christ's blood and our lives must be laid to rest with Christ's body in the tomb so that we can die to this world and live again in the resurrected and ascended one. Truly this is remarkable. Jesus in his glorified humanity is the pledge of glorious resurrection that waits for us and the ascension that waits for all the children of God.

And do not miss that once more the LORD shows Israel that Baal who supposedly rides in the clouds and the thunderstorms and fiery chariots is nowhere to be found. No, it is Elijah the servant of the Lord who goes up beyond the clouds and the fiery chariot protects and escorts him **After The Glorification** When the Spirit came on Pentecost he came with the sign of wind and fire too. Jesus now works through His body here on earth by the power of the Spirit. The body takes up the cross and brings the good news into all the world. Elisha had seen the fire and the wind and saw his father ascend into the heavenly realms. But like Joshua before him the work had to continue. Then Joshua was confirmed by all the people. He led Israel through the Jordan. Now Elisha commissioned on the other side of the Jordan crosses through the Jordan to pick up the work. He tore his clothes in two a symbol of his leaving the life he once in totality now he clothes himself with the office so to speak. Coming to the river which was now flowing again he rolled up the cloak and called out to heaven. "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah!?" And before 50 witnesses the waters parted and Elisha heads back to the 50 sons of the prophets to do the work of Christ in the Promised Land.

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The sons of the prophets had seen and of course had heard before hand but they did not understand. Where was Elijah? Perhaps the Spirit of the LORD had thrown him somewhere? Recall how Obadiah was worried when Elijah asked him to fetch Ahab? Obadiah thought Elijah would not appear. There was this sense about Elijah that he just appeared and disappeared. The sons of the prophets were working with this kind of thought. If the body of Elijah was cast on some mountain they were not going to leave the body to be dishonored. They acknowledged Elisha by asking him for permission to go and look. Elisha told them they did not have to. "Do not send!" But they persisted until Elisha was worn down. For three days 50 men found nothing. And of course we know that would be the case for Elijah was with God now in heaven.

There would come a day when he and Moses would come to attest to the glory of Jesus. Then Peter, James and John would meet them. Revelation 11 alludes to the two witnesses- one who calls fire for destruction like Elijah and one who turns water into blood like Moses. One day all of you who confess the death and resurrection of Christ and confess that Jesus is Lord; you too will someday meet them. What joy that will be. But for now the work must continue...

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.