

2 Kings 2:1-25

Elijah is Taken up into Heaven

2 Kings 2:1 - "And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal."

Apparently, Elijah knew he was going to be "taken." Elisha knew too, and the other prophets too, either by revelation or because Elijah told them.

2 Kings 2:2 - "And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel."

This is like Naomi's three rebukes of her daughters-in-law, and Ruth's response:

- **Ruth 1:16** - "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: "

Elisha is essentially saying the same thing to Elijah.

There were still "schools of the prophets" i.e. communities of committed and dedicated believers who the Spirit had touched or spoken through, and who followed as disciples Elijah or other powerful prophets.

Elijah was visiting these groups before he was to be taken up.

At each place, they told Elisha that Elijah was supposed to be taken up that day, and he answered "Yes, I know. Hold your peace."

Finally they end up at the Jordan River.

2 Kings 2:7-8 - "And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground."

This was a tremendous miracle, which pointed back to Moses parting of the Red Sea, and a repeat of Israel's crossing of the Jordan led by Joshua when the waters supernaturally heaped up to allow them to pass on dry ground.

- **Joshua 3:17** - "And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."

This also pointed forward, because this was the place where John the Baptist, who

came in the power and spirit of Elijah, baptized Jesus (**Matthew 3:13-17**).

A Double Portion of the Spirit

2 Kings 2:9 - "And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

Elisha had already been designated as Elijah's successor. Now he wanted the spiritual ability to fulfill that calling.

According to the rabbis, this wasn't to be twice as much of the Spirit as Elijah had. Elisha considered himself as spiritually Elijah's first born son, who traditionally received a double portion of blessing, more than the other children (**Deuteronomy 21:17**). Like Jacob and Esau - Esau gave away this double portion to Jacob

2 Kings 2:10 - "And he said, 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."

This really wasn't Elijah's to give, but only God. If God granted Elisha a view of Elijah's ascension, then that was a sign that he would be granted the double portion of the Spirit also.

A Chariot of Fire

2 Kings 2:11 - "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

These possibly were angelic beings, who appeared as chariots and horses engulfed in flames, who gathered up Elijah and pulled him out of this world into heaven by what then appeared to be a whirlwind.

In fact, later Elisha would reveal the Lord's army to a young servant, using similar language:

- **2 Kings 6:16-17** - "And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Enoch was the only other human to ascend in this way.

- **Genesis 5:24** - "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." (see also **Hebrews 11:5**)

Moses also had an unusual death and burial:

- **Jude 9-10** - "But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively."

As described in **Deuteronomy 34:5-6** - "no one knows the place of his burial to this day."

And of course, Jesus' burial led to His resurrection and later ascension into heaven.

At Jesus' transfiguration, Moses and Elijah both appear:

- **Matthew 17:3** - "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him."

Elijah's ascension can also be compared with Jesus'.

- **Acts 1:9-12** - "...while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

The disciples witnessed the ascension of Christ and then like Elisha received an outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, as well as spiritual gifts and power to work miracles.

Rabbinical Traditions

Some of the rabbis said Elijah became part angel and part human (Talmud Brachot 4b). But they say he flies more slowly than other angels.

They explain that the "chariot of fire" represented that Elijah's body (in its original physical state) was consumed, and he thus assumed angelic form when he ascended to Heaven (Radak to **II Kings 2:11**). Alternatively, the fire separated the spiritual and physical sides of Elijah into two separate parts. He could thus ascend to Heaven as a spiritual being, while his body remaining separate – as a "garment" he could put back on whenever he would need to assume physical form.

As a result, they say, Elijah is alive today, living as an angel in heaven yet regularly visiting Earth in human form to meet with people - usually great rabbis - and to carry out his missions.

The Sages have a common expression that an item whose status cannot be resolved (such as a lost item whose owner cannot be located) "shall rest until Elijah comes" (e.g. Mishna Bava Metziah 1:8, 2:8).

Malachi, in the final prophecy of all the books of the Prophets, states (**Malachi 3:23-24**):

“Behold I will send to you Elijah the Prophet, before the coming the great and awesome day of the Lord. And he will bring back the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the hearts of the sons to their fathers...”

A chair for Elijah is set during every circumcision, as a witness to the ritual determining the covenant and Jewish identity. Elijah was expected to come and precede the coming of Messiah. At the Passover Seder, the “cup of Elijah” is poured and the door opened in expectation of this final redemption.

In the New Testament

Jesus said of John the Baptist: “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (**Matthew 11:14**).

John denied he was the Messiah, and also denied he was Elijah (**John 1:21**). This could have been out of his humility.

The Angel Gabriel, prophesying John's birth, said "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (A paraphrase of **Malachi 3**).

Jesus in **Matthew 17:10-12** - "And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist."

The Elijah seen at Jesus' Transfiguration was a different person than John the Baptist. Yet John walked in the "spirit and power" of Elijah, serving as the forerunner of the Messiah.

Lastly, there is one stumbling block to this story of Elijah's ascent.

- **John 3:11,13** - “We speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen...No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.”

- **John 1:18** - "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

But scholars take this in the context of Jesus defining His authority to teach. (Of course Old Testament believers went to Paradise or "the bosom of Abraham," (**Luke 16:22**) awaiting the resurrection. And Enoch and Elijah were said to have been taken up).

And Paul even says He "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" (**Ephesians 2:6-7**)

“Who shall go up for us to heaven” -

Jesus was talking in the context of **Deuteronomy 30:11-14** - "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

Paul expands on this:

- **Romans 10:4-8** - "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;"

Jesus, whose home is in heaven, was born into this world, where He fulfilled and completed the Law. When we have Jesus within us, He through the Spirit interprets the scriptures for us, and works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure.

2 Kings 212 - "And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces."

Because Elisha saw Elijah's ascent, he knew that God would grant him that double portion.

"the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" - The Targum says Elisha was crying out, "he (Elijah) was better to Israel by his prayers than chariots and horsemen." i.e. seeing the fiery chariot, he was inspired to make that comparison with earthly chariots.

Testing the Mantle

2 Kings 2:13-14 - "He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over."

Elisha had to *decide* to pick up the mantle, accepting both the power and also the

weight of his new role stepping into Elijah's shoes. He knew it would probably mean persecution and adversity.

"Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" - He was challenging God to meet him at this point of testing and to show Elisha that he would be there for him as he had always come through for Elijah.

Rashi - Elisha's splitting [the Jordan] was doubly as great as Elijah's, for in the beginning there was the merit of them both, while here was his merit alone.

Confused Disciples

2 Kings 2:15-16 - "And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send."

The rabbis interpreted the apparent confusion of the sons of the prophets, who had just the day before assuredly confirmed that Elijah was going to be taken up, as meaning that "since the day when Elijah was hidden, the Holy Spirit departed from the prophets, and the Holy Spirit was no longer widespread throughout Israel."

They urge Elisha to send a group to go look for Elijah. Previously (**1 Kings 18:12**) God had picked up Elijah and deposited him elsewhere. Maybe that's what happened this time. Elisha finally relents, possibly because he might be seen as not caring about whether Elijah was safe or not. But they find nothing.

Healing the Waters

2 Kings 2:18-19 - "And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not? And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren."

Jericho had been rebuilt despite a curse upon it (**Joshua 6:26**). In **1 Kings 16:34** it was rebuilt with King Ahab's blessing. Perhaps this barrenness was a lingering result of the curse.

Not only trees cast their fruit, but women became abortive that drank of it, according to Josephus (De Bello Jud. I. 4. c. 8. sect. 3.),

2 Kings 2:20-21 - "And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land."

Casting salt into the water is seemingly the opposite of making it healed. But this was like Elijah pouring water on the altar while expecting God to ignite it with fire from heaven. It increases the wonder and power of the miracle.

But salt also is emblematic of eternity because of its preservative powers. Salt was always included in every sacrifice.

Elisha Mocked

2 Kings 2:23-25 - "And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria."

Elisha wasn't upset about his bald head. He had to rebuke an affront to God. Bethel was the chief center of worship of the golden calf.

These were not little children, because they were out away from the city. This term "children" was applied to Joseph when he was 39 (**Genesis 41:12**). The rabbis say these young men had "shaken off the yoke of the commandments" and were called "little" here because of their lack of faith. They were probably raised by idolators and knowing Elisha was a prophet of Yahweh, they chose to come out to mock him as he approached.

Rashi explains that these young men were yelling for him to leave "for you have made the place bald for us, for until now we would hire ourselves out to bring sweet water from a distance (to Jericho), and we would earn our livelihood thereby." And when the water became sweet, they lost their livelihood. Thus it is explained in Sotah (46b).

Rashi - He saw that neither in them nor in their descendants would there be any 'sap' of good deeds.

2 Kings 2:24 - "And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them."

This mob could have numbered as many as 100. If these had been small children, Elisha would probably have looked on them like Jesus did and said "come unto me." Instead this was a continuation of the clash between idolators and believers in Yahweh that had been going on since Jeroboam's day.

And in fact, the Hebrew word translated "tare" or 'mauled' might indicate less serious, non-fatal injuries.

Elisha would carry on Elijah's powerful ministry, even performing miracles that exceeded Elijah's. Jesus - as the prophet "like unto Moses" - would perform miracles that repeated and exceeded those of all of these prophets.