

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

Home James,
And Don't Spare the Horses



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HOME JAMES, AND DON'T SPARE THE HORSES

In Scripture you find chariots used quite frequently. Mainly they were used for armored forces by the Egyptians in the Exodus, and by the Romans also.

Recently there was an academy award movie called "Chariots of Fire," in which there was portrayed a missionary. He was an athlete and a runner. In it he quoted many passages of Scripture, some correctly and some incorrectly. But the title "Chariots of Fire" was probably taken from passages of Scripture, and rightfully so, mainly the book of Isaiah.

Before the days of our current automobiles, the mode of transportation was horse and buggy. In some places of the country you can still see them. You can find them in New Orleans and in St. Augustine, Florida, and other places. You can even take a ride around the park in New York City in what is called a Hanson. When horse and buggies were the mode of transportation, as seen in

some old westerns, the taxi was a horse and buggy, and some people owned them as their own means of transportation. When a gentleman was at work or at some amusement, and his carriage was waiting, or he picked up some young lady, he would get into the carriage and say to his driver, "*Home James, and don't spare the horses.*"

I am using this incident in life to show a wonderful, gracious principle of how Enoch and Elijah, and maybe even you may be taken home to be with the Lord, and this time it won't be "*Home James, and don't spare the horses,*" but maybe Jesus will come and personally take us home.

"The Lord shall descend with a shout, and we, which are alive, shall be caught up to meet Him in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Home James, and don't spare the horses."

HOME JAMES, AND DON'T SPARE THE HORSES

Chariots of Fire

2 Kings 2:1-11, "And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into Heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha, from Gilgal. 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. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

"And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. 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.

"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 from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but is not, it shall not be so. 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."

Elijah's end is in keeping with his career. He died as he lived. From his first abrupt appearance it had been fitly symbolized by the stormy wind, and the flaming fire which he heard and saw at Horeb. Now these were to be the vehicles which should sweep him into Heaven. The Lord sent a chariot for him. He came like a whirlwind, he burned like a fire, and in fire, and in whirlwind he disappeared.

The story of Elijah is wonderful in pathos and simplicity. Surely was never such a miracle told so quietly. The actual ascension is narrated in a sentence. Its preliminaries take up the rest of this narrative. "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven."

First of all notice the journey from Gilgal to the eastern side of Jordan is minutely described in its stages. Elijah was not on an aimless round of farewell visits, but on the direct road to his destination.

Note that he and Elisha and all "the sons of the prophets" knew that he was near his departure. How they knew we are not told. There is no need to speculate. Though all knew, none seem to have known that the others knew. Elisha does not explain to Elijah why he wished him to stay behind, "tarry," nor does Elisha tell Elijah why he was so resolved not to leave him. "As the Lord liveth and thy soul liveth, I will not depart from you."

The knowledge and the silence would give peculiar solemnity and sweet bitterness to these last hours. How often a similar combination weighs on the hearts of a household, who all know that a dear one is soon to be taken up, and yet can only be silent about what is uppermost in their thoughts.

Why did Elijah wish Elisha to stay behind? Apparently to spare him the pain of seeing his master depart. So with loving concealment, he tried to make Elisha suppose that his errand to Bethel, and then to Jericho, was but a common one, to be soon dispatched. It was a little touch of tenderness in the strong, rough man.

Note, too, the gradual disclosure to Elijah of the places to which he was to go. He is only told to go to Bethel, and not till he gets there is he further sent on to Jericho, and presumably only when there, is he directed to cross the Jordan. **God does not show all the road at once.** Even if it lead to glory, but step by step, and a second stage only when we gave obediently traversed the first.

We get light as we go. "Being in the way, the Lord lead me." Elisha's clinging to his master till the very last is but too intelligible to many of us who have gone through the same sorrow, and continued each moment of companionship with some dear one about to leave this Earth, as priceless gain to be treasured on the sacred recesses of memory for evermore.

It has been thought that the object of the visits to Bethel and Jericho was to give parting directions to the schools of the prophets at each place, but that is read into the narrative, which gives no hint that Elijah had any communication with these. Rather the contrary is implied, both in the fact that the "sons of the prophets" came to the travelers, not the travelers to them, and in their addressing Elisha, as if some awe of the master kept them from speaking to him.

Elijah marching to his chariot of fire was not a man for raw youths to approach lightly. Their question of his departure is met by Elisha with curtness and scant courtesy which indicates that it was asked in no sympathetic spirit, but from mere love of telling bad news, and of vulgar excitement. Even the gentle Elisha is stirred to rebuke the gossiping chatterers, **who intrude their curiosity into that sacred hour of departure.** There are an abundance of such busy bodies,

and sorrow has often to be stern in order to be unmolested.

The second stage is the passage of Jericho.

The repetition of the same dialogue at Bethel increases the impression of prolonged loving struggle between the two prophets. At last they stand on the western bank of the Jordan, at their feet the spot where the hurrying river had been stayed by the ark till the tribes had passed over. Before them the mountains bordering Elijah's homeland of Gilead on the left, and away on the right the lone peak where Moses had died, by "the mouth of the Lord."

The soil was redolent of the miracles of the Mosaic age, and the dividing of the waters by Elijah is meant to bring the present into vital connection with the past, and to designate him as parallel with the former leader.

Note the vigor with which he twists his characteristic mantle into a kind of rod, and strikes the waters strongly. The repetition of the former miracle is a sign that the unexhausted power which wrought it is with Elijah. **The God of yesterday is the God of today,** and what was done in the past can be repeated in essence, if not in form, in the present. "As we have heard, so have we seen."

The former miracle was done for a nation. This one is performed for two men. It teaches us the preciousness of His individual servants in God's view, His eyes. The former had been done through the ark. This by the prophet's mantle. Power is lodged in the faithful messenger, be it ark or mantle. **God's strength dwells in those who love Him.** The former miracle had been the close of the desert wanderings and the gateway to Canaan.

Though Elijah's face is turned in the opposite direction, does not its repetition suggest that for him, too? The impending translation was to be the end of wilderness, weariness and toil, and the entrance in rest.

Thirdly, Elisha's request is the next stage in the story.

How far they two "went on" is not told. The Bible does not foster the craving to know the exact situation where sacred things happened, the gratification of which might feed superstition, but could not increase reverence.

Possibly they had drawn near the eastern hills, and were out of sight of the 50 curious gazers on the other bank. **Elijah at least spoke the truth which they both knew.**

How true to nature is that reticence kept up till the last moment, and then broken so tenderly. "Ask what I shall to for thee, before, before..." "Before I be taken from thee."

Probably he didn't mean any supernatural gift, but simply some parting token of love, for he is startled at the response of Elisha. **A true disciple can desire nothing more than a portion of his master's spirit.**

"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master." They cover wisely and with a noble covetousness, who most desire spiritual gifts to fit them for their vocation. It was an unworldly soul which asked but for such a legacy. "A double portion of thy spirit be upon me." **Desire the best gifts, the gift of spirituality.**

The double portion does not mean twice as much as Elijah's portion had been, but twice as much as other, "sons of the prophets" would receive. Elisha reckoned himself Elijah's first born spiritual son, and asked for that elder brother's share because he had been designated as successor, and would require more than others for his work. It's a spiritual gift of leadership.

The new sense is coming upon him and teaching him his need. He is GRACE oriented, not contented with just a portion, but needing a double portion. "By the GRACE of God, I am what I am." Well for us if higher positions make us lowlier, and in the consciousness of our own unfitness without Divine help, without measure.

Elijah knows that his spirit was not his to give. "Thou hast asked a hard thing" and Elijah can only refer his successor to the fountain from which he had drawn. For the sign which he gives is obviously not within his power to distribute. The Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows as He wills.

If the Lord shows the ascending master to him who is left, he will give the servant his desire. Christ went up and the Holy Spirit came without measure. A portion of their "spirit" is the very thing which teachers and prophets cannot give. They may give their systems and their methods, their favorite ideas of cut and dry maxims, and principles, and so leave a race of pygmies who give themselves airs as being their disciples. But their spirit they cannot impart.

Contrast with this limitation of power confessed by Elijah, his conscience as breathed on 11 poor men, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." No man could say that without absurdity of blasphemy. The gifts impossible to man is the very character of the gift of Jesus Christ who "has power over the Spirit of holiness." Must He not thereby be declared to be the Son of God?

Fourthly, the climax of this lesson is that stupendous scene of the translation.

Note how the "behold" suggests the suddenness of the appearance of the fiery chariot, which came flaming between the two men eagerly talking and drove them apart, separated them. "And it came to pass as they still went on, and talked, 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."

The description of the departure, in its brevity and incompleteness, sounds like the report of the only eye witness, who had the fiery chariot between him and Elijah, and was too bewildered to see precisely what happened. All he knew was that suddenly, and apparently swiftly, a rushing mighty wind swept away the chariot and prophet into the heavens. He saw it, as the next verse after this passage tells us, only long enough

to break into one rapturous and yet lamenting cry, and then all vanished, and he stood alone with an apparently empty Heaven above him. The whirlwind sunk to calm and Elijah's mantle remained at his feet.

Verses 12-13, "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. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan."

One goes home and the other stays. One's ministry is over, the other just begins. One has reached a full age, the other still has a purpose and plan for his life. The living go on living. One is present with the Lord, the other is absent from the Lord. One is sight, the other is faith living.

The teaching of this event in history is plain. As for the pre-mosaic ages, the translation of Enoch, and for the earlier Mosaic epoch, there is the mysterious death of Moses. So for the prophetic period, the carrying to Heaven of Elijah witnessed of a life beyond death, and of death as the wages of sin, which God could remit, if He willed in the case of faithful service.

Enoch and Elijah were led round the head of the valley on the heights, and reached the other side without having to go down into the cold waters flowing in the bottom. And though we cannot tread their path, the joy of their experience has not ceased to be a joy to us, if we walk with the Lord. Death is still the coming of the chariot.

The chariot and the horse driven chariot take the believer home. "*Home James and don't spare the horses.*"

The same exclamation which fell from Elisha's lips, as he saw the chariot sweep up into the sky was spoken over him as he lay sick of the sickness "whereof he should die."

But the most instructive view of Elijah's translation is its parallel and contrast with Christ's ascension. The one was by outward means, the other by inward energy. Storm and fire bore Elijah up into a region strange to him. Christ ascended up where He was before, returning by the propriety of His nature to His eternal dwelling place. The one is accomplished with significant disturbance, of whirlwind and flame; and the other is gentle like the life which it closed, and the last sight of Christ was with extended hands of blessing. Each life closed in a manner corresponding to its character. The one swift and sudden, the other was a slow, solemn motion vividly described as "borne upwards" and as "going into Heaven."

The one bore a mortal into Heaven. In the other, the Son of God, our High Priest, has passed through the heavens, and now, far above all them, He is "Head over all things."

Also there is the rapture of the Church, where the body of Christ will become the bride of Christ and believers will be taken away apart from dying, "and be changed in a twinkling of an eye." "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "*Home James and don't spare the horses.*"

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

PART 2

Home James and Don't Spare the Horses

The translation of Elijah and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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."

Luke 24:51, "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven."

These two events, the translation of Elijah, and the ascension of our Lord, have sometimes been put side by side in order to show that the latter narrative is nothing but a "variant of the former." See, it is said, the source of your New Testament story is only the old legend shaped anew by the wistful regrets of the early disciples. But to me it seems that the simple comparison of the two narratives is sufficient to bring out such fundamental differences in the ideas which they respectively embody as amount to opposition and make any such theory of the origin of the latter absurdly improbable.

The comparison brings out contrasts at every step. There is not a better way of throwing into strong relief the meaning and purpose of the former than holding up beside it the story of the latter. The real parallel makes the divergences the more remarkable, for likeness sharpens out perception of unlikeness, and no contrast is so forcible as the contrast of things that correspond. We will find almost every truth of importance with our Lord's ascension emphasized for us by the comparison to which we now proceed.

The first point which may be mentioned is the contrast between the manner of Eli-

jah's translation and that of the Lord's ascension. It is perhaps not without significance that the place of the one event was on the uplands, or in some of the rocky gorges beyond Jordan, and that of the other, the slopes of Olivet above Bethany.

The lonely prophet who had burst like a meteor on Israel from the solitudes of Gilead, whose fervor had ever and again been rekindled by return to the wilderness, whose whole career had isolated him from men, found the fitting place for that last wonder amidst the stern silence where he had so often sought asylum and inspiration.

He was close to the scenes of mighty events of the past. There, on that overhanging peak, the lawgiver, whose work he was continuing, and with whom he was to be so strangely associated on the Mount of Transfiguration, **had made himself ready for his lonely grave.**

Here at his feet the river had parted for the victorious march of Israel. Away down on his horizon, the sunshine gleamed on the waters of the Dead Sea. And thus, on his native soil, surrounded by memorials of the law which he labored to restore, and of the victories which he would fain have brought back, and of the judgments which he saw against impending over Israel, the stern, solitary ascetic, the prophet of righteousness, whose single arm stayed the downward course of a nation, **passed from his toil and his warfare.**

What a different set of associations cluster around the place of Christ's ascension. "Bethany," or as it is more particularly specified in the Acts, "Olivet." In the very heart of the land, close by and yet out of sight of the great city, in no wild solitude, but per-

haps in some dimple of the hill, neither shunning nor courting spectators, with the quiet home where He had rested so often in the little village at their feet there. And Gethsemane, a few furlongs off, in such scenes did the Christ, "whose delight was with the sons of men," and His life lived in closest companionship with His brethren, chose the place whence He should "ascend to their Father and His Father."

Nor perhaps was it without a meaning that the mount which received the last print of His ascending footsteps was that which a mysterious prophecy designated as destined to receive the first print of the footstep of the Lord coming at a future day to end the long warfare with evil.

But more important than the localities is the contrasted manner of the two ascents. The prophet's end was like the man. It was fitting that he should be swept up into the skies with tempest and fire. The impetuosity of his nature, and the stormy energy of his career, had already been symbolized in the mighty and strong wind which rent the rocks, and in the fire that followed the earthquake. And similarly nothing could be more appropriate than that sudden rapture in storm and whirlwind, escorted by the flaming chivalry of Heaven. Nor is it only as appropriate to the character of the prophet and his work that this tempestuous translation is noteworthy.

It also suggests very plainly that Elijah was lifted to the skies by power acting from without. **He was taken up. He did not ascend.** He was raptured, as it were. He was carried up. **The earthly frame and the human nature had no power to rise.** "No man hath ascended into Heaven." The two men of whom the Old Testament speaks were alike in this, that "God took them."

The tempest and the fiery chariot tell us how great was the exercise of Divine power, omnipotence, which bore the gross mortality thither, and how unfamiliar was the sphere into which it passed.

How full of the very Spirit of Christ's whole life is the contrasted manner of

Christ's ascension. The silent gentleness, which did not strive, not cry, not cause His voice to be heard in the streets, marks Christ even in that hour of lofty and transcendent triumph. There is no outward sign to accompany His slow upward movement through the quiet air. **No blaze of fiery chariots, nor agitation of tempest, is needed to bear Him heavenward.**

The outstretched hands drop the dew of His benediction on the little company and so He floats upward. His own will and indwelling power are the royal chariot which bears Him, and calmly He "leaves the world and goes unto the Father." He is His own chariot.

The slow continuous movement of ascent is emphatically made prominent in the brief narrative, both by the phrase in Luke, "He was carried up," which expresses continuous, leisurely motion, and by the picture in the Acts of the disciples gazing into Heaven.

"As He went up" in which the latter word is brought out, not only the slowness of the movement, but His origin in His own will, and His execution by His own power. Nor is this absence of any vehicle of external agency destroyed by the fact that "a cloud received Him" out of their sight. For its purpose was not to take or raise Him heavenward, but to hide Him from the gazers' eyes, that He might not seem to them to dwindle into distance, but that their last look and memory might be of His clearly discerned and loving face. Possibly too, it may be intended to remind us of the cloud which guided Israel, the glory which dwelt between the cherubim, the cloud which overshadowed the Mount of Transfiguration, and to set forth a symbol of the Divine presence welcoming to Itself, His battle fought, the Son of His love.

Be that as it may, the memory of our Lord's ascension by His own inherent power is brought into boldest relief when contrasted with Elijah's rapture, and is evidently the fitting expression, as it is the consequence, of His sole and singular Divine nature. It occurs with His one mode of refer-

ence to the ascension. While He was on Earth, which ever represents Him not as being taken, but as "going." "I leave the world and go to the Father." "I ascend to My Father and your Father." His departure, His return, His dismissing His Spirit. The highest hope of devoutest souls since Him has been "We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

But this Man ever speaks of Himself as able when He will, by His own power to rise where no man hath ascended. His Divine nature and pre-existence shine clearly forth, and as we stand gazing at Him blessing the world, and He rises into the heavens, we know that we are looking on no mere mysterious elevation of a mortal to the skies, but are beholding the return of the incarnate Lord, who willed to tarry among our earthly tabernacles for a time to the glory where He was before, His own calm home, His habitation from eternity.

Secondly, another striking point of contrast embraces the relation which these two events respectively bear to the life's work which had preceded them. The falling mantle of Elijah has become a symbol known to all the world for the transference of unfinished tasks and the appointment of successors to departed greatness. Elisha asked that he might have a double portion of his master's spirit, not meaning a double portion of his master's spirit, like twice as much as he had, but the elder son's share of the father's possessions, the double of the other children's portion. Though his master had no power to bestow the gift, and had to reply as one who has nothing that he has not received, and cannot dispose of the GRACE that dwells in him, the prayer was answered and the feeble nature of Elisha was fitted for the continuance of the work which Elijah left undone.

The mantle that passed from one to the other was the symbol of office and authority transferred. The functions were the same, while the holders had changed. The sons of the prophets bow before the new master. "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha," is what they said. So the world goes on. Man

after man serves his generation by the will of God, and is finally gathered to his fathers. A new arm grasps the mantle to smite Jordan, and a new voice speaks from his empty place, and men recognize the successor, and forget the predecessor.

We turn to Christ's ascension, and there we meet with nothing analogous in this transference of office. No mantle falling from His shoulders lights on any of that group. **None are hailed as His successors.** What He has done bears and needs no repetition while time shall roll, while eternity shall last, His work is unique, "the help that is done on Earth, He doeth it all Himself." His ascension completed the witness of Heaven, began at His resurrection, that He has offered one sacrifice for sins, forever.

He has left no unfinished work which another may perfect. He has done no work which another may do again for new generations. He has spoken all Truth, and none may add to His Words. He has fulfilled all righteousness and none may better His pattern. He has borne all the world's sin, and no time can waste the power of that sacrifice, nor any man add to its absolute sufficiency. This King of men wears a crown to which there is no heir.

This Priest has a priesthood which passes to no other. This Prophet does live for ever. The world sees all other guides and helpers pass away, and every man's work is caught up by other hands and carried on after he drops it. The short memories and shorter gratitudes of men turn to the rising sun, but one Name remains undimmed by distance, and one work remains unapproached and unapproachable. One Man remains whose office none can hold, whose bow none but He can bend, whose mantle none can wear.

Christ has ascended up on high and left a finished work for all men to trust, for no man to continue. Men leave, and they are gone. He left, and He is still with us. Men leave, and we have our memories. He left, and we have our memories, but we also still have Him among us.

Thirdly, while our Lord's ascension is thus marked as the seal of a work in which He has no successor, it is also emphatically set forth, by contrast with Elijah's translation, as the translation to a continuous energy for and in the world.

Clearly, the narrative derives all its pathos from the thought that Elisha's work is done, his task is over, and nothing more is to be hoped for from him. But, the same absence from the history of Christ's ascension, of any hint of successor, to which we have referred in the previous principle, has an obvious bearing on His present relation to the world as well as on the completeness of His unique past work. He has left the world, but He hasn't left the world. When Christ ascended up on high, He relinquished nothing of His activity for us, but only cast it into a new form, which in some sense is higher than that which it took on Earth.

His work for the world is in one aspect completed on the cross. In another, it will never be completed until all the blessings which the cross has lodged in the midst of humanity have reached their widest possible diffusion, and their highest possible development.

Long ages ago He cried, "It is finished." We may be far yet from the time when He shall say, "It is done." For all the slow years between His own Word gives us the law of His activity. "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." Christ's ascension is no withdrawal of the Captain of our salvation from the field where we are left to fight. Nor has He gone up to the mountains, leaving us alone to tug at the war, and shiver in the cold night air.

True, there may seem strange contrasts between the present condition of the Lord who "was received up into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God," and that of the servants wandering through the world on His business. But the contrast is harmonized by the next words, "The Lord also working with them."

Yes, He has gone up to sit at the right hand of God. That session at God's right

hand to which the ascension is chiefly of importance as the transition, means the repose of a perfected redemption, the communion of the Son with the Father, the exercise of all the omnipotence of God, the administration of the world's history.

He has ascended that He might fill all things, that He might pour out His Spirit upon us, that the path to do may be trodden by our lame feet, that the whole resources of the Divine nature may be wielded by the hands that were nailed to the cross, that the mighty purpose of salvation may be fulfilled. Elijah knew not whether his spirit could descend upon his follower. **Christ left no legacy of falling mantle to any, but left His Spirit to His people.**

What Elisha gained, Elijah lost. What Elisha desired, Elijah could not give nor guarantee. How firm and assured, beside Elijah's dubious, "Thou hast asked a hard thing," and his, "If thou see me, it shall be so," is Christ's "It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I go not away the Comforter will not come, but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

Manifold are the forms of that new and continuous activity of Christ into which He passed when He left the Earth. As we contrast these with the utter helplessness any longer to counsel, rebuke or save, to which death reduces those who live us best, and to which even His glorious rapture into the heavens brought the strong prophet of fire, we can take up, with a new depth of meaning, the ancient Words that tell of Christ's exclusive prerogative of succoring and inspiring from within the veil.

"Thou hast ascended on high. Thou hast led captivity captive. Thou received gifts for men."

Fourthly, the ascension of Christ is still further set forth in its very circumstances, by contrast with Elijah's translation, as bearing on the hopes of humanity for the future. The prophet is caught up to the glory, and for himself alone, and the sole share which the gazing follower of the sons of the prophets straining their eyes there at Jericho, and in

his triumph, was a deepened conviction of his prophetic mission, and perhaps some clearer faith in a future life.

Their wonder and sorrow, Elisha's immediate exercise of his new power, the prophet's immediate transference of their allegiance to the new hand, show that on both sides it was felt that they had no part in the event beyond that of awe struck beholders. No light streamed from it on their own future. The path they had to tread was still the common road into the great darkness. As solitary and unknown as before, the chariot of fire parted their master from the common experience of humanity as from their fellowship, making his an exception to the sad rule of death, which frowned the grimmer and more inexorable by contrast with his radiant translation.

The very reverse is true of Christ's ascension. **In Him our nature is taken up to the throne of God.** His resurrection assures us that, "them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." His passage to the heavens assures us of that.

"They who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them, in the air" and that all of both companies shall with Him live and reign, sharing His dominion, and molded to His image. If we would know of what our manhood is capable, if we would rise to the height of the hopes which God means that we should cherish, if we would gain a living grasp of the power that fulfills them, we have to stand there, gazing on the piled cloud that sails slowly upwards, the pure floor for our brother's feet.

As we watch it rising with a motion which is rest, we have the right to think, "thither the Forerunner is for us entered." We see there what man is meant for, what men who love Him attain. True, the world is still full of death, and sorrow. Man's dominion seems a futile dream and a hope that mocks. "But we see Jesus ascended up on high, and in Him we too are made to sit together in heavenly places." The Breaker is gone up before them. Their King shall pass

before them, and the Lord at the head of them.

There is yet another aspect in which our Lord's ascension bears on our hopes for the future, namely, as connected with His coming again. In that respect, too, the contrast of Elijah's translation may serve to emphasize the Truth. Prophecy, indeed, in its latest voice, spoke of sending Elijah the prophet before the coming of the day of the Lord. Rabbinical legends have delighted to tell how he had been carried to the Garden of Eden, whence he would come again, in Israel's sorest need. But, the prophecy had no thought of a personal reappearance, and the dreams are only dreams such as we find in the legendary history of many nations.

As Elisha recrossed the Jordan, he bore with him only a mantle and a memory, not a hope. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up onto the heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into Heaven." How grand is the use of these mighty words of the name Jesus.

The name that speaks of His true humanity, with all its weaknesses, limitations and sorrow, with all its tenderness, and brotherhood. The Man who died and rose again, has gone up on high. He will so come as He has gone. "So", that is to say, personally, corporeally, visible, on clouds, perhaps in that very spot, "His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives."

Thus Scripture teaches us ever to associate together the departure and the coming of the Lord, and always when we meditate on His ascension to prepare a place for us, to think of His real presence with us through the ages, and of His coming again to receive us to Himself.

"Do this in remembrance of Him to shew His death till He come again." That parting on Olivet cannot be the end. Such a leave taking is the prophecy of happy greetings, and an inseparable reunion. The King has gone to receive a kingdom, and to return. Memory and hope coalesce as we think of Him who is passed into the heavens. The

heart of the Church has to cherish at once the glad thought that its Head and Helper has entered within the veil, and the still more joyous none, which lightens the days of separation and widowhood, that the Lord will come again.

So let us take our share in the "great joy" with which the disciples returned to Jerusalem, left like sheep in the midst of wolves as they were, and "Let us set our affections on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God the Father." "Even so come."

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

PART THREE

Home James and Don't Spare the Horses

Elijah's translation and Elisha's death bed. 2 Kings 2:12.

"And Elisha saw it and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

2 Kings 13:14, "And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

The scenes are different and the speakers are different in these two historical incidents. The one scene is the mysterious translation on the further bank of the Jordan, where a mortal man was swept up to Heaven in a fiery whirlwind; and the other is an ordinary sick chamber where an old man was lying with the life slowly ebbing out of him.

The one speaker is the successor of the great prophet, on whom his spirit in a large measure fell. The other, an idolatrous king, young, headstrong, who despised the latter prophet's teaching while he lived, but was

now for the moment awed into something like seriousness and reverence by his death.

The remarkable thing is that this unworthy monarch should have come to the dying prophet, and should have strengthened and cheered him by the quotation of his own words, spoken as long ago, as if he would say to him, "All that thou didst mean when thou didst stand there in rapturous adoration, watching the ascending Elijah, is as true about thee, lying dying here, of a common and lingering sickness." "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horseman thereof."

Seen or unseen, these were present. The reality was the same, though the appearances were so different. First we have here the first case where the chariot and the horsemen were seen. To feel the force of the exclamation on the lips of Joash, we must try to make clear to ourselves what its original meaning was.

What did Elisha intend when he stood beyond Jordan and in wonder and awe exclaimed, "The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof?" It does not seem to me that

the interpretation of the words now in favor, is at all satisfactory. It tells us that the expression is to be taken as in apposition with the exclamation, "My father, my father," and that both the one phrase, and the other mean "Elijah."

Yet what a preposterous and strange metaphor it would be to call a man a chariot and pair, or a chariot and cavalry. It seems to me that the very statement of the explanation in plain English condemns it as untenable. It is surely less probable that Elisha, in that exclamation, was describing Elijah, than that he was speaking of that wondrous chariot of fire, and horses of fire that had come between him and his master, and that his exclamation was one of surprised adoration.

He gazed with wide opened eyes on the burning angel-hosts, and saw his master mysteriously able to bear that fire, fringed round by these flaming squadrons, possibly standing unscathed on the floor of the chariot, and swept with it and all the celestial pomp, by the whirlwind into Heaven. But why should he say, "the chariot of Israel?"

I think we take for granted too readily that Israel here means the nation. You will remember that the name was not originally that of the nation but of its progenitor and founder, given to Jacob as the consequence and record of that mysterious wrestling by the brook. I think we get a nobler signification for the words before us, if, instead of applying the name to the nation, we apply it here to the individual. **The believers in that nation, or any nation, are a royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy nation of believers.**

When Elijah and Elisha crossed Jordan they were not far from the spot where the name was given to Jacob, the supplanter, chiseler, whom discipline and communion with the Lord had elevated into the name Israel, "Prince with God." They were near another of the sites consecrated by his history, the place where, just before the change of his name, the angels of God met him.

"The name of the place is Mahanaim," the meaning is "the two camps," the one Ja-

cob's defenseless company of women and children, and the other, their Lord, of His angels, their celestial guards.

It seems reasonable to suppose that in all probability, a reminiscence of that old story of the manifestation of the armed angels of God as the defenders and servants of His children broke from Elisha's lips. As he looks upon the strange appearance of the chariot and horses of fire that parted him and his friend, he sees once more the "chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." The reappearance of thinning armies whose presence had of old declared that "the Angel of the Lord encamping round about them that fear Him, and delivered them." Now the same hosts in their immortal youth, unweakened by the ages which had brought earthly warriors to dust, and their swords to rust, are flaming and flashing there in the midday sun.

What was their errand? And why did they appear? They came as God's messengers, to bear His servant to His presence. "He will give His angels charge over the and bear thee up." They attested the commission and devotion of the prophet. Their agency was needful to lift a mortal to skies not native to him. Strange that a body of flesh should be able to endure that fiery splendor. Somewhere in the course of that upward movement must this man, who was caught up to meet the Lord in the air, have "been changed." His guards of honor were not only for tokens of the prophetic world, but for witnesses of the unseen world and in some sort of pledge, suited to the stage of revelation of life and immortality. The angelic conflict.

How striking is the contrast between the translation of Elijah and the ascension of Christ! He who ascended up where He was before needed no whirlwind, nor chariot of fire, nor extraneous power to elevate Him to His home. Calmly, slowly, as borne upwards by indwelling affinity with Heaven, He floated there with outstretched hands of blessing.

He could have called on 10,000 angels, but the servant angels did not need to surround Him, but clad no longer in fiery armor by in "white apparel," the emblem of purity and peace, they stood by the disciples and comforted them with hope.

Elijah was carried to Heaven. Christ went to Heaven.

The angels disappeared with the prophet, and left Elisha to grieve alone. They lingered here after Christ had gone, and turned tears into rainbows flashing with the hues of hope.

Secondly, we have in our second verse, the chariot and horsemen present though unseen.

We are not in a position to appreciate the meaning of Joash's repetition to Elisha of his own words, spoken under such different circumstances. Elisha was by no means so great a prophet as Elijah. His work had not been so conscious. His character was not so strong, though perhaps more gentle. No such lofty and large influence had been granted to him as had been given to the fiery Tishbite to wield, nor did he leave his mark so deep upon the history of the times or upon the memory of succeeding generations.

But, such as it has been given to him to be, he had been. He was a continuer, not an originator. There had been a long period during which he appears to have lived in absolute retirement, exercising no prophetic functions. We never hear of him during the interval between the anointing of Jehu to the Israelite monarch, and the time of his own death. That period must have extended over nearly fifty years. After all these years of eclipse and seclusion he was lying, dying, impressible.

Although, on the whole, not reliable nor good, came down to the prophet's home, and there standing by the pallet of the dying man, repeated the word, so strangely reminiscent of a very different event. "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horseman thereof." What does that exclamation mean? Two things, one is this, that the

angels of the Divine presence are with us as truly in life, when unseen as if seen. Secondly, so far as we know, it was only to Elisha that the vision had been granted of that chariot of fire and horses of fire.

We read that of Elijah's translation of the other side of Jordan and consequently at no great distance off, there stood a company of the sons of the prophets from Jericho to see what would happen, but we do not read what they did see. On the contrary, they were inclined to believe that Elijah had been caught up and flung away somewhere on the mountains, and that it was worth while to organize search parties to go after him.

2 Kings 2:16, "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." It was therefore only Elisha that saw, and Elijah did not know whether he would see or not, for he said to him, "If thou shalt see me when I am taken from thee, then, thy desire shall be granted."

The angels of God are visible to the eyes that are fit to see them, and those eyes can always see them. It does not matter whether in a miracle or in a common event, it does not matter whether on the stones by the banks of Jordan, or in the close sick chamber, they are visible for those who, by pure hearts and holy desire, have had their vision purged from the intrusive vulgarities and dazzling brightness of this poor, petty present, and can therefore see beneath all the apparent, the real that blazes behind it.

The scenes of Jordan and in the death chamber **are not the only times in Elisha's life when we read of these chariots and horses of fire.** There was another incident in his career in which the same phrase occurs. Once his servant was terrified at the sight of a host compassing the little city where Elisha and he were, with horses and chariots, and came to his master with alarm and despair saying, "Alas, my master, How shall we

do?" The prophet answered with superb calmness, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

"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." They had always been there, though not one saw them. They were there when no one but Elisha saw them. They were no more there when the young man saw them than they had been before. They did not cease to be there when the film came over his eyes again, and the common round took him back to the trivialities of daily life. Unseen angels, messengers, guardians. And so from the mouth of this not very devout king, the prophet was reminded of his own ancient experiences and invited to feel that, unseen or seen, the solemn forms stood "bright harnessed" and "strong," "in order serviceable," ranged about him for his defense and blessing. **Are they not round about us?**

If a man can but look into the realities of things, will he see only the work of men and of the forces of nature? Will there not be far more visible as they are far more real than any of these, the forces of the eternal presence and ever operative will of our Father in Heaven?

We need not discuss the personality of angels. **An angel is the embodiment of the will and energy of God.** We have the will and energy working for us, whether there are any angel persons about us or not. Scripture declares that there are, and that they serve us. We may be sure that if only we will honestly try to purge our eyes from the illusions and temptations of "things seen and temporal," the mountain of the sick bed will be to us equally full of the angel forms of our defenders and companions and guardians. Do we see them for ourselves?

And not less important, do we, like Elisha, lying there on his deathbed, help those blind to see them, and make every one

that comes beside us, even if he be as little impressible and so little devout as this king Joash was, recognize that in our chamber they sit, and round our lives they flutter and sing, sweet and strong angel wings and voices? **Will anybody looking at you, be constrained to feel that with, and around you are the angels of God?**

Still further, another cognate application of these great words is that one which is more directly suggested by their quotation of Joash.

It does not matter in what way the end of life comes. The reality of the same is the same to all believers. Though one be swept to Heaven in a whirlwind, and another fade slowly away in old age, full age, or fall sick of the sickness wherewith he should die. **Each one of us is taken, to God in a chariot of fire.** The means are of little moment. The fact remains the same, however diverse may be the methods of its accomplishment. The road is the same. The companions, the same. The impelling, I was going to say, the locomotion, the same. Power, the same. And the goal is the same.

Of Enoch we read, "He was not, for God took him." Of Elijah we read, "He went up on a whirlwind to Heaven." Of Elisha we read, "He died, and they buried him." Of all three, the two who were translated that they should not see death, and the one who died like the rest of us, it is equally true that "God took them."

So for ourselves and for our dear ones we may look forward or backward to deathbeds of weariness, of lingering sickness, of long pain and suffering, or of swift dissolution, and piercing beneath the surface may see the blessed central reality, and thankfully feel that death also, is God's angel who "does his commandments, hearkening to the voice of God, when in his dark hearse he carries us home, absent from the body face to face with the Lord."

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

Home James, and Don't Spare the Horses

PART FOUR

PRODUCING GRACE

2 KINGS 2:13-22

“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.

“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. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. 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. 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. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.”

The independent activity of Elisha begins with verse 13. The gap is short between these two prophets, and how easily it is filled. **Not even the greatest are indispensable.**

God lays aside one tool, but only to take up another. He has inexhaustible stores. The work goes on though the workers change, and there is little time for mere mourning, and none for idle sorrow. Elisha's first miracle is almost an experiment. The mantle which lay at his feet had been thrown over him by Elijah when he was called to his service, and it was now a token of that office and power had devolved on him.

His first steps tread closely in Elijah's track, as those of wise and humble men who are called to higher work will mostly do. The repetition of the miracle by the same means and the invocation of the Lord as the “God of Elijah,” a new name to be set by the side of the “God of Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob,” expresses the humility which seeks to shelter itself behind the example of its mighty predecessor. The form of the invocation as a question indicates that Elisha had not yet attained certainty as to his power, as not yet having proved it.

“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” This is not a question of unbelief, but neither is it a voice of full confidence, which asks no question, because it knows that the Lord is with him. It is the cry, “Oh that thou mayest be here, even with unworthy men” and “Art Thou not here?” The faith was real, though dim and clouded with some film of doubt. But being real, it was answered, and it was because of Elisha's trust, not Elijah's mantle, that the waters parted.

God will listen to a man pleading that ancient deeds may be repeated today, and by answering the cry addressed to Him as the God of believers and martyrs of old, will embolden us to cry to Him as our very own God.

We may learn from that half-tentative miracle the spirit in which men should take up the work of those that are gone, the lowliness fitting for beginners, and the wisdom of seeking to graft new work on the old stock, the encouragement from remembering the Divine wonders through His servants in the past, and the true way to assure ourselves of our God-given power, namely, by attempting great things for Him, in dependence on His promise.

The miracle was wrought partly for Elisha, and partly for others who were to acknowledge his authority. These sons of the prophets who stood on the eastern bank of Jordan, had probably not been witnesses of the translation, even if their position commanded a view of the spot. Purer eyes, and more kindred spirits than theirs were needed for that.

But they saw Elisha returning alone, and the waters parting before him, and no doubt, as he came nearer, would recognize that he bore in his hand Elisha's well-known mantle. They hasten to recognize him as the head of the prophets, and their acknowledgement accurately expresses his place and his work.

Elijah's spirit rests on him, even though the two men and their careers are very different, and in some respects opposite. Elisha is distinctly secondary to Elijah. He is in some sense an originator, either of fresh revelations or of new impulses to obedience. He but carries on what Elijah had begun, inherits a work and is Elijah's "Timothy and son in the faith."

The same Spirit was on him, though the form of his character and gifts were in strong contrast to the stormier genius of his mightier predecessor. Elisha had no such work as Elijah, no foot to foot and hand to hand duels with murderous kings and/or

queens, no single-handed efforts to stop a nation from rushing down a steep place into the sea, no fiery energy, no bursts of despair.

He moved among kings and courts as an honored guest and treated counselor. He did not dwell apart, like Elijah, the strong son of the desert, but born in the fertile valley of the Jordan. He lived a life, "kindly with his mind," and his delights were with the sons of men. His miracles are mostly works of mercy and gentleness, relieving wants and sickness, crying tears, and giving back dear ones to mourners. He is as complete a contrast to his stern, solitary forceful predecessor as the "still small voice" was to the roar of the wind or the crackling hiss of the flames.

But nevertheless "Here are diversities of operations, but the same God."

It is well to remember that one type of excellence does not exhaust the possibilities of goodness, nor the resources of the inspiring Holy Spirit. The comparative merits of strength and gentleness will always be variously estimated, but God's work needs them both, and both may join hands as serving the same Lord in diverse ways, which are all needed. The body fitly joined together with all the several parts.

We should seek to widen our discernment to the extent of the rich variety of forms of good and of service which God gives. Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, are all his servants.

Well, is it when the strong can recognize the power of the gentle, and the gentle can discern the tenderness of the strong, and when each is forward to say to the other, "He worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do."

The search after Elijah, insisted on by the sons of the prophets, is of importance only as showing their low thoughts and Elisha's gentle spirit. He is their head, but he holds the reins loosely.

Fancy anybody "Urging Elijah, until he was ashamed." The shame would very soon mantle the cheek of Elijah's urgers. But though, no doubt, Elisha would tell what

had happened, these prophets only think that Elijah has been miraculously borne somewhither, as he had been before, and seem to have no notion of what has really happened. How hard it is to heave heavy men up to an height of spiritual vision. **How vulgar minds always take refuge in the most commonplace explanations that they can find of high truths.**

"Gone up to Heaven." No not he. He is lying, living or dead, in some gorge or on some hillside. Let us go and look for him.

There is nothing on which some people pride themselves more than upon being practical, which generally means prosaic, and often means blind to God's greatest GRACE. To go scouring a wadi and mountain for a man who had been taken up into Heaven was practical common sense indeed. But Elisha's gentleness is to be noted. He let them have their own way.

Often that is the only plan for convincing people of their errors. When the 50 strong men, scouts, come back empty handed, all he says is a quiet, "Did I not say unto you, Go not?"

"The servant of the Lord must not strive, but in meekness instruct, those that oppose themselves." **The effectual instruction is often to let them take their own course.**

Their search and lack of finding proved that Elijah was taken up (i. e., empty tomb). The miracle of healing the waters is of the beneficent kind usual with Elisha. It inaugurates his course with blessing, and typifies the healing power which God, through him, would exert on men.

Jericho had been recently rebuilt in spite of the curse against its builders. The bitterness of the spring seems to have been part of the malediction, for men would not be so foolish as to rebuild a city which had only impure water to depend on.

However, that may be, the main lesson of the miracle, beyond its revelation of the spirit of gentle compassion and GRACE in Elisha, is the symbolical one. The new curse and the salt are emblems of purification. Its

emblematic meaning prevails here over its natural properties, for the last thing to cure a brackish spring was to put salt into it. The very inadequacy, as well as inappropriateness, of the remedy points out the miraculous and symbolical character of the whole. A jar full of salt could do little to a gushing fountain.

But it figured the cleansing power which God will bring to bear on us, if we will, and it taught the great truth that the sin must be cleansed at the fountain head, in the soul, not a half mile down the stream in the deeds, the mental attitude. Put the salt in the spring, and the outflow will be sweet.

We are the salt of the Earth. We are the Elisha's that remain, after the Elijah's have been taken home. Men come and go, but the message goes on. Christ left, and left us the Holy Spirit, and we can function in own spiritual gifts as believers in full time Christian service, and fulfill our personal ministry in the spirit-filled life. The mantle of the Spirit of GRACE is upon all who have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. We must pick up the mantle of our departed loved ones.

When the first martyr, Stephen, was departing, he said, "They cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down THEIR CLOTHES AT A YOUNG MAN'S FEET, WHOSE NAME WAS SAUL. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Christ died for him, so then as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must sleep in Christ, and God will bring back those who sleep in Christ.

Who is afraid to go home?...

Home James, and don't spare the horses.

"Home Jesus, and don't spare the horses."

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