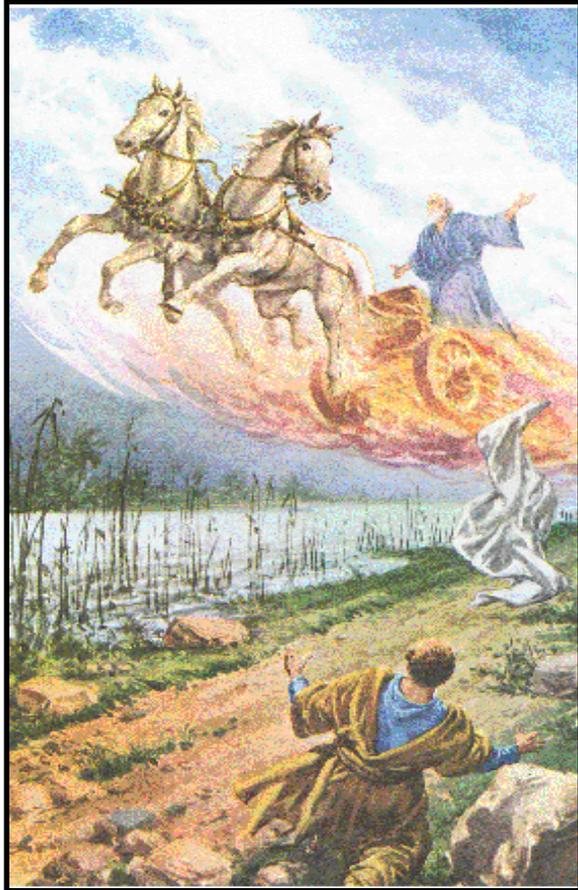


Our Identification

with



Christ Jesus

2 Kings 2:1-15

Colossians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 4:6-11

Adapted from Hamilton Smith

In his strange eventful life Elijah passes from wonder to wonder, and this closing scene is the greatest wonder of all. There is no journey more remarkable than his last day's pilgrimage from **Gilgal** to **Jordan**.

Led by the Spirit of God he visits places which speak in a striking way of Jehovah's dealings with Israel and also with the Christian in Christ.

We may first notice that the prophet is accompanied by Elisha, who had been anointed in his room; **1 Kings 19:19-21** and the time had now come for Elijah to ascend to heaven, leaving Elisha behind to represent on earth the heavenly man. *The starting point of Elisha's ministry is an ascended man* and he is to be the witness on earth of the power and grace that can righteously put a man in heaven in spite of sin, death, and all the power of the enemy.

Next we may notice that if the man on earth is to fitly represent the man in heaven he, too, must travel the road that leads by **Gilgal**, **Bethel** and **Jericho** to the banks of **Jordan**, there to have his vision filled with **the glory of the ascension**.

If for a while we are left on earth it is that we may represent the Man who has gone to heaven — Christ Jesus, the Man in the glory. What high honour has been put upon us to remain awhile, as witnesses for Christ, in the world from which He has been rejected! We may fill but a lowly and obscure position in this world, but we are here for a high purpose — nothing less than to represent Christ in the common round of life. This indeed will brighten the dullest life, and sustain in the saddest life!

Now, in order to be adequate witnesses, we must, in the experience of our souls, know something of the great truths shadowed forth on this last day's journey. We too must travel from **Gilgal to Jordan** and catch the vision of the ascended and glorified Man, before we can in any measure set forth His graces and excellencies in a world from which He has been cast out.

Gilgal was the starting place on this memorable day. At Gilgal Israel was separated unto God by *circumcision*, and there, when circumcised, God could say to the people, *"This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you"* (**Josh. 5: 9**). There the flesh was cut off, and there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. At the Red Sea they were delivered from Egypt, but not until they were circumcised on the banks of Jordan was the reproach of Egypt rolled away.

We know from the Epistle to the Colossians; **Col. 3:1-10**, that circumcision is typical of the *"putting off the body of the flesh."* We have been delivered by death from that evil thing which the Word of God calls the flesh. But that deliverance is in the death of Christ, and faith accepts that we have died with Christ. Based upon this great fact we have the exhortation, *"Put to death therefore your members which are upon earth"* (**Col. 3:5** see also **2 Cor. 4:6-12** and **Phi. 3:1-3**).

The Apostle at once tells us what these members are: *"fornication, uncleanness, vile passions, evil lusts, and covetousness which is idolatry."* Then too, we are to put off *"anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications and lying."*

It is important to remember that these are not the members of the body, but the members of the flesh. The members of the body we are to yield to God (**Rom. 6: 13**); the members of the flesh we are to put to death.

Also, it is not the flesh that we are exhorted to mortify, but *the members of the flesh*. The flesh has been dealt with at the cross.

This faith accepts, but in our daily walk we are to cut off every evidence of the flesh — those ugly and evil things in which we lived when we were in the world. In the measure in which these things are still seen in us, to that extent the reproach of Egypt still clings to us. For all these things proclaim, not only that we have been in the world, but the

manner of life we lived in the world, and therefore become a reproach to us.

But if these evidences of the flesh are cut off and no longer seen, then the reproach of Egypt is rolled away, for if these things are gone, no man can tell what manner of men we were when living in the world. This putting to death of the members of the flesh is the Christian's Gilgal, and just as Joshua, in the course of his victories, returned again and again to Gilgal, so the Christian, after every fresh victory, must beware of the manifestation of the flesh and unhesitatingly refuse it. (**2 Cor. 4:10**)

This is the first stage of the journey and its importance cannot be overestimated. If we are to represent the Man who has gone to heaven, how necessary that every manifestation of the flesh should be absolutely judged and refused.

Bethel is the next stage. The deep significance of this famous place is supplied by the history of Jacob. On his journey from Beersheba to Haran, he lighted on a certain place where he tarried all night. With the earth for his bed and the stones for his pillow, he lay down to sleep. The Lord appeared to him in a dream giving three unconditional promises to this wanderer. (**Gen. 28:10-15**)

1. **As to the Land.** It would be given to Jacob and his seed. Israel took possession of the land, and lost the land, on the ground of responsibility. They have never yet possessed it according to this promise on the ground of sovereign grace.
2. **As to Israel** — the seed of Jacob. They will increase like the dust of the earth and spread abroad to the West and to the East, to the North and to the South, and through Israel all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

3. **As to Jacob himself.** For twenty years he will be a wanderer facing hardships and dangers, but he is assured by the Lord that He will be with him, and keep him, and bring him again into the land. *"I will not leave thee,"* says the Lord, *"until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."*

Thus Bethel testifies to **God's unchangeable faithfulness** to His people in securing a place for them, in securing them for the place, and in so keeping and caring for each one that none shall perish, however rough and however long the journey may be.

As we Christians take our pilgrim journey through this world, how blessed to have the assurance that the home to which we are going is secured to us by the same unchanging faithfulness of God. The Apostle can remind us we are going *"to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for you."* Israel has a land secured on earth, and the Christian a home reserved in heaven. But more, just as Israel is kept for the land, so, too, the Christian is *"kept, guarded, by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* **1 Peter 1:3-5**

And when at last we are gathered home it will be found that not one of His own will be missing. The journey may be long, the way may be rough, the opposition great, the conflict fierce — we may often stumble and fall — but the Lord's words to Jacob are applied by the Apostle to ourselves : *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*

If Gilgal tells of the unchanging evil of the flesh, every activity of which is to be refused, Bethel speaks of the unchanging faithfulness of God in which our souls can rest in perfect confidence.

But in the prophet's day the witness of Gilgal and Bethel to Jehovah's relationship with Israel was but a memory only recalled by faith.

To sight, Gilgal and Bethel had become the witness of the people's sin. In **Amos 4:4**, the herdsman, charges the people with transgression at

Bethel and multiplying transgression at Gilgal. Bethel, as the seat of one of the golden calves, was a centre of idolatry; and while the transgression with idols was universal, at Gilgal it was multiplied. The faith of Elijah looks beyond the awful sin of the nation and recognizes that it is God's purpose to have a people set apart for Himself and brought into blessing on the sole ground of His unchanging faithfulness and unconditional grace.

Similarly in the last days of the Christian dispensation, the cross, which on God's side is the witness of the judgment of the flesh, has become in man's hand an object of universal idolatry, and thus the witness of his sin. How many worship the cross who reject with loathing all that the cross signifies, and hate the Christ who suffered on the cross. Bethel, too, — meaning '*the house of God*' — the place of blessing for the display of all that God is in His unchangeable faithfulness, has been degraded into a building of wood and stones to display the pride and glory of man (**2 Tim. 2:20**). Nothing either in Elijah's day or our own, so conclusively proves the utter ruin of that which professes the name of God as the corruption of that which is divine. For such there is no hope, and nothing remains but judgment.

This is brought before us in the next stage of Elijah's journey. The prophet is sent to **Jericho**, the city against which God had pronounced the curse. In defiance of God man had rebuilt the city, only to bring judgment upon himself. ***Thus Jericho becomes the witness of the judgment of God*** against those who oppose His people and rebel against Himself. The faith of Elijah foresaw that the rebellious nation was going on to judgment, just as faith today discerns that professing Christendom fast hastens to its doom.

From Jericho Elijah takes his journey to **Jordan**. As a type Jordan is the river of death. Through it Israel had passed dry shod into the land, and now once again Elijah and Elisha pass over on dry ground, but for them it is a way of escape from the land that was under judgment. This

passage through Jordan becomes the witness that all links are severed between God and Israel on the ground of their responsibility. Judgment is upon them, and faith recognizes that death is the only way of escape from the coming judgment.

Thus **Gilgal** tells us that the flesh must be refused and the reproach of Egypt rolled away if Israel is to inherit the land while **Bethel** speaks of the sovereign purpose of God to bless His people on the ground of His unconditional grace and faithfulness.

Jericho witnesses that on the ground of failed responsibility the nation/world is under judgment and **Jordan**, that the only way of escape from judgment is by death.

In this mystic journey can we not see the foreshadowing of the perfect path of the Lord Jesus in the midst of Israel? No reproach of Egypt was seen in Him. He walked and lived in the light of the unchanging faithfulness of God to His promises. He warned the nation of coming judgment, and took the way of death which broke all links with Israel after the flesh, and opened a door of escape for His disciples from the judgment that was coming upon the nation.

But if, in Elijah, we see shadowed forth the path of the Lord Jesus through this world to heavenly glory, and that by way of death, we see also in Elisha, a picture of the believer who wholeheartedly identifies himself with Christ; who in spirit takes the journey which leads outside this world and who, having seen Christ ascend through the opened heavens into that new place in glory, comes back into a world that is under judgment to witness in grace for the Man that has gone to glory. That is why there is a stern rebuke in **Luke 9:51-56** as it was the time of grace and not judgment.

In Elijah's day there were many sons of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho, but only one man took the journey with the prophet. The sons of the prophets were exceedingly intelligent, they could tell Elisha what

was about to happen, but they had no heart to follow Elijah. And many today know a great deal about Christ, are well instructed in Scripture, but they are not prepared to accept the outside place with Christ and they know little of their place with Christ in heaven.

By what power then, we may well ask, is a soul enabled to take this journey?

The story of Elisha discovers to us this secret.

First he was *attracted* to Elijah. There came a day in his history when Elijah "*passed by him*" and cast his mantle over him. And was it not a great day in our history when the Lord Jesus drew near to us and we came under the power of His grace and with delight we "*ran after*" Him? But like Elisha, though we were attracted to Christ, there were natural links that held us. Our need and His grace made Christ very attractive but He did not have the first place with us. However, in Elisha's history there came a time when the natural links were broken and then we read, "*He arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him*" **1 Kings 19:21**. It is one thing to be saved by Christ — as it were to be under the shelter of His mantle — but it is another stage in our history when we definitely go forth to serve Him — to minister unto Him.

Does this mean that we give up our callings to follow Him, that we turn our backs on home and wife and children? Not necessarily. But it does mean that whereas once we pursued our callings simply with some selfish object, now ***Christ becomes our object***. Whereas an unconverted child might obey the parents because it is right to do so and out of natural affection, the converted child will obey because it is pleasing to Christ. And when Christ thus becomes the object it can be truly said we have gone after Him and minister unto Him.

But as we follow Christ we grow in the knowledge of Christ, and this leads to a further stage in the history of our souls, we become ***attached*** to Him. This is touchingly illustrated in the history of Elisha. Three times

on this last day's journey, he can say to Elijah, "*I will not leave thee.*" This is the language of a heart that is held by affection. And love is put to the test. At Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, Elisha is tested by the words of Elijah, "*Tarry thee here, I pray thee,*" only to be met by the thrice-repeated response, "*I will not leave thee.*"

Though Elijah's journey leads to Bethel, the city of the golden calf, to Jericho, the city of the curse, and to Jordan, the river of death, yet Elisha will follow in the power of love. So Ruth could say in an earlier day, "*whither thou goest, I will go*"; and the twelve could say in a later day, when many turned back and walked no more with Him, "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*" Grace had drawn them after Christ, and love held them to Christ.

Moreover, attachment of heart leads to full **identification** with Elijah. Three times on this last day's journey the Spirit of God uses the words "*They two,*" speaking of identification. At Jericho "*They two went on.*" At the river "*They two stood by Jordan,*" and when the waters were smitten, "*they two went over on dry ground.*"

Love delights to accept the fact that we have been identified with Christ in the place of judgment and at the waters of death.

But more, if we have been identified with Christ in death it is in order that we may hold sweet **communion** with Him in resurrection, and this too is shadowed forth in this lovely story, for having passed on to new ground through the river of death we read, "*They still went on and talked.*"

We may have been converted long years ago, but do we still walk with Christ and talk with Christ as we pass along our way?

How blessedly Elisha points the way by which the believer is led to follow Christ outside this judgment-doomed world into His new place of resurrection glory. **Attracted to Him** in grace, exercised to **minister to**

Him, attached to Him in love, **identified with Him** in death and **enjoying fellowship with Him** in resurrection. What a position is ours brethren!

Arrived on the other side of Jordan, outside the land, all is at once changed. Not until then does Elijah say, *"Ask what I shall do for thee."* Grace puts all the power of a risen man at the disposal of Elisha. Death has opened the way for the outflow of sovereign grace.

Alas how little we realize the profound fact that all the grace and power of the risen Christ are at our disposal! What an opportunity for Elisha; he has only to ask to obtain. Does he ask for long life, or wealth, or power, or wisdom? Ah no; his faith rising above all that the natural heart might covet, at once asks for a **double portion** of Elijah's spirit. He realizes that if he is to remain on earth in the place of Elijah, he will need the spirit of Elijah. We have a Man in the glory and are indwelt with the Holy Spirit!

Does not this scene carry our thoughts to the Upper Room of **John 14**? The Lord was about to leave His disciples and ascend to glory, and though He does not say, *"Ask what I shall do for thee,"* yet He says, as it were, *"I will make a request for you." "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter that He may abide with you forever."*

How slow we are to realize that a divine Person has gone up to heaven and a divine Person has come down from heaven to dwell in believers. And the Person who has come down is as great as the Person who has gone up. If we are left on this earth to be descriptive of Christ as the exalted Man, we shall need, as one has said, "a power commensurate with Himself."

Elisha had asked a hard thing, nevertheless it shall be granted if, says Elijah, *"thou see me when I am taken from thee."* *"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, and Elisha saw it."*

He sees Elijah ascend into glory, but on earth he sees him *"no more."* *"Yea,"* says the Apostle, *"though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more"*. And what is the result for the Apostle of seeing Christ in the glory? He answers, *"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new"* **2 Cor. 5:16, 17.**

And this, too, is told out in this wonderful story, for we read that Elisha *"took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces."*

But further, not only does he part with the *"old things,"* but he makes them useless. He did not carefully fold and lay them aside, ready to be taken up again at some future time, but *"he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces."*

He has done with them forever. Henceforth he is clothed in the mantle of Elijah. But it is the mantle of the man who has gone to heaven by way of Jericho and Jordan.

In figure he has gone through judgment and death, and as a result God is free to send back Elisha with a message of grace to a nation that is under judgment. But for this witness to have any power, he must be a true representative of the man in heaven. How blessedly this was so in Elisha's case, for on his return to Jericho from the scene of the rapture, the sons of the prophets at once exclaim, *"The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."*

In like manner, having seen Christ on high, and our vision being filled with new creation glories, it is our privilege to part company with the *"old things,"* and in the power of *"the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"* so to represent the Man that has gone to heaven, that the very world is constrained to note that we have been *"with Jesus,"* even as in Elisha's day they said, *"The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha."*

