

ELIJAH'S FIERY CHARIOT

– *OCTOBER 10.* – *2 KINGS 2:1-12.* –

ELIJAH, ELISHA AND SCHOOLS OF PROPHETS – ELIJAH'S CHARIOT AND ASCENT TYPICAL – ELIJAH AND ALL THE PROPHETS STILL SLEEP – THEY CANNOT RECEIVE THEIR REWARD UNTIL AFTER THE CHURCH HAS BEEN GLORIFIED IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION – THE TRANSFIGURATION SCENE – THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ELIJAH'S JOURNEY AND FOUR STOPS – THE TYPICAL LESSON INTERESTING, PROFITABLE.

"In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." – Psalm 16:11.

SINCE Bible students have recognized that Elijah's life was a prophecy – that he typed, or represented, the entire Church in his earthly experiences – his history has become the more interesting and the more intelligible. He was a faithful servant of God; but his greatest prophecy, that of his life, was not understood, even though the Lord declared, subsequently, "I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord." (Malachi 4:5.) This antitypical Elijah, beginning with Jesus in the flesh, has been coming and giving his message to the world for now more than eighteen centuries. We believe that the taking away of Elijah in the chariot of fire, narrated in today's lesson, is about to be fulfilled as respects the Church of Christ in the flesh. Soon they shall be no more in the flesh; for the Lord will take them, will glorify them with Himself. As the Apostle explains, they will meet the Lord in the air, in the realm of spiritual control of the earth – in Kingdom power and great glory. – 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Elisha had the opportunity of becoming Elijah's successor, and appears to have been guided by a proper spirit of zeal in his desire to accompany Elijah and to serve him. When Elijah was taken in the fiery chariot, his mantle bequeathed to Elisha represented that the latter had become Elijah's successor, to receive a special blessing of the Elijah spirit. While we are certain that Elijah typed the Church of God in the flesh, we may not be quite so positive that Elisha was also a type and represented [R5772 : page 285] a secondary class of God's people, referred to in the Bible sometimes as the "foolish virgin" class, sometimes as the servants of the Bride class who will follow her, sometimes as a Great Company whose number no man knows, who will come through great tribulation and attain a place before the Throne, failing to attain with the Elijah class a place in the Throne as joint-heirs of Christ. – Matthew 25:1-13; Psalm 45:14,15; Revelation 7:9-17.

The sons of the prophets may also be types. If so, they would seem to represent a third class, acquainted with Elijah and Elisha, yet not particularly associated with them. The fact that the sons of the prophets discussed with Elisha the going of Elijah does not necessarily signify that they believed the matter. They knew that Elijah expected to go, but their own doubts on the subject are intimated by the fact that they subsequently made a search of the land to see if Elijah had not really fallen somewhere, dropped by the whirlwind. Their search and final conviction represent that for some time certain classes of Christian people may doubt that the Church has really gone to glory, but that afterwards they are thoroughly convinced. Possibly the three days of search may be symbolic, representing three years.

ELIJAH NOT IN HEAVEN

Much of the Bible study of the past has been superficial. Certain teaching and creeds of the past being accepted as true, the

Bible has been studied with a view to confirming the traditions of the past rather than to challenging their accuracy. Careful study now brings to light the fact that throughout the entire Old Testament not a word is said about anybody going to Heaven – except in this case of Elijah and in the statement that "Enoch walked with God, and was not for God took him" – somewhere. The Bible indicates distinctly that no offer of Heavenly life was possible until after Jesus had died as man's Redeemer. Thus the Scriptures assure us that life and immortality were brought to light through Jesus' Message – nothing clear or definite was known on these subjects previously. – 2 Timothy 1:10.

Jesus Himself was the first to pass from earthly condition to Heavenly condition by His resurrection change – "put to death in flesh, He was made alive in spirit." (1 Peter 3:18.) The Church has the promise of a similar glorious change, awaiting all the faithful who walk in the Master's footsteps. Their change is to come at Jesus' Second Advent. They as the wise virgins, as the Elijah class, will pass beyond the veil from earthly conditions to Heavenly conditions. The change will be necessary to their entrance into the Kingdom, for "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 15:50.) A little later, tribulations will develop the Great Company class, represented by Elisha. Later still, the blessing of the Lord will come upon all the human family through Messiah's Kingdom. **[R5772 : page 286]**

While the Old Testament says nothing about any invitation for anybody to go to Heaven, the New Testament does assure the Church of a "High Calling," a "Heavenly Calling." (Philippians 3:14; Hebrews 3:1.) St. Paul points out that a different blessing has been provided by the Lord for the Gospel Church than for others. Even the Ancient Worthies, including Abraham, the Prophet David, Elijah, Elisha, Moses, etc., cannot be of the Church class, even as they could not follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Their loyalty to God and to righteousness is to be

abundantly rewarded, but theirs is to be an earthly blessing in the Paradise to be established by Messiah's Kingdom throughout the entire earth.

St. Paul, after enumerating the worthy characters of the past, declares, "All these died in faith, not having received the things promised them, God having provided some better thing for us, that they apart from us should not be made perfect." (Heb. 11:38-40.) In other words, the Church must receive her Heavenly inheritance first; for she, as St. James declares, is the First-fruits unto God of His creatures. – James 1:18.

Jesus very positively declares that Elijah did not go to Heaven when he said, "No man hath ascended unto Heaven." (John 3:13.) St. Peter corroborates this, declaring that the Prophet David had not gone to Heaven, but was still in his sepulchre at Jerusalem. St. Peter thus implied that none of the Prophets had gone to Heaven. (Acts 2:34.) Our great interest, therefore, in Elijah's experiences, lies in the fact that his literal ascent into the skies was a part of his general typical career as a prefigure of the Church in the flesh.*

*For a detailed explanation of the Bible proofs that Elijah was a type of the Church, address "Bible Students' Monthly, Brooklyn, N.Y."

ON MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Jesus gave to three of His Apostles, Peter, James and John, a special vision of His coming glory. What they saw was not actuality, but a vision, as Jesus subsequently declared. (Matthew 17:9.) The persons in glory were no more actual than the glories and voices and persons seen by John the Revelator. St. Peter, one of the three, declares that what they saw was a representation of Christ's coming glory. Nevertheless, he declares that the word of

prophecy was still more sure than the vision. (2 Peter 1:16-21.) In the vision Jesus was the central figure, Moses representing the Law Dispensation, which ended with Christ, and Elijah representing the Gospel Dispensation, which began with Christ.

GILGAL, BETHEL, JERICHO, JORDAN

Elisha knew of Elijah's expectation of translation; and, with that in view, they had traveled to Gilgal. But the Lord did not take Elijah there, but sent him on to Bethel. Elijah's suggestion that Elisha should tarry at Gilgal implied that Elisha was discouraged and had lost faith in the journey. But no! he went on. The same thing occurred at Bethel, and they went on to Jericho. The same thing occurred at Jericho, and they went on to Jordan. Crossing the Jordan they still went on, but thereafter with no definite place in view. However, from the time they came to Jordan a multitude of the sons of the prophets, deeply interested, watched them.

Let us apply these matters antitypically to the Church. Gilgal would seem to represent the beginning of the Harvest time – October, 1874. That date, prominently marked in the Bible (Daniel 12:12) was looked forward to by many Bible students with deep interest as the possible time when the Church would be completed – although nothing in the Bible so declares. The inference was clearly deducible, but there was no positive statement as to the Church's change being accomplished then. Some measure of disappointment was felt when expectations were not realized. Nevertheless, the Elijah class started to the next point, accompanied by so many others as were worthy of being accounted of the antitypical Elisha class.

The experiences at Bethel were very similar. The Spring of 1878 corresponded to Bethel. It was clearly seen to be the time parallel to the Lord's assuming His kingly office in the end of the Jewish Age and saying to the Jewish nation, "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Luke 13:34,35.) It was not unreasonable to

think of that Scripturally-marked date as the time for the Church's glorification, although the Lord did not directly promise this. Nevertheless, a blessing came to all those who received their disappointment in a proper spirit.

On they went to the next date, which corresponded to Jericho; namely, 1881. Considerable interest attached to that date on the part of many Bible students because it was the parallel date to the time when the door was thrown open to the Gentiles, and Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, was received into the family of God. We assumed that this might mean a change of dispensation here, and that the glorification of the Church was typed. We were mistaken in that supposition, but received great blessing and went on.

The next point of time Scripturally marked was October, 1914 – the close of the Times of the Gentiles, corresponding to Jordan. Many Bible students are thoroughly convinced that the 2520 years from Zedekiah's day to October, 1914, ended there – that that date marked the end of God's lease of world power to the Gentile nations. They are convinced that the present war is the result, and that its ultimate conclusion will be the complete overthrow of all the kingdoms of the world and the full establishment of Messiah's Kingdom in the control of earth.

The Lord did not say that the Church would be glorified before the conclusion of the Gentile Times; yet such a thought was not an unreasonable one, in view of many Scriptures. Not disconcerted, Bible students are going on, even as Elijah and Elisha went on after crossing the Jordan. They are not, however, headed for any particular date, even as Elijah was not directed to go to any other place. Simply they went on, waiting for the Lord to fulfil His promise of taking Elijah in His own time and in His own way.

CHARIOT OF FIRE AND WHIRLWIND

It was while the two went on, with no knowledge of how far they would go, that Elijah said to Elisha, "What would you like as a reward for your faithfulness in journeying with me?" Elisha responded that he would most prefer a large measure of the Spirit of the Lord, which so notably was manifest in Elijah. The reply was that he could get this great blessing only under special conditions; namely, that he would continue faithful in cooperation until the last – until Elijah would be taken. This would be a hard matter; for, if Elisha's attention were permitted to wander, he would not get so rich a blessing.

As they two went on, behold, a chariot of fire parted them asunder! In symbolic language, this seems to signify that the Elijah class will be involved in very fiery trouble, persecutions, and will thus be separated from their fellows. The next symbol of a whirlwind taking Elijah to Heaven also implies further trouble. Prophecies are generally understood after their fulfilment – and only vaguely before. It was thus at our Lord's First Advent in respect to the prophecies then being fulfilled.

We may not hope to clearly understand in advance the **[R5773 : page 287]** full import of the fiery chariot nor of the whirlwind. To some the thought of being taken away from the present life suddenly, violently, in fiery troubles, etc., would be a terrible prospect; not so will it be with the members of the Elijah class. Waiting for their change, and living in daily readiness of heart, therefore, they go on without trepidation. On the contrary, in whatever way they shall be taken, it will be the culmination of their hopes for which they so long have waited and prayed – their deliverance.

