

“Elijah’s Ascent to Heaven”  
2 Kings 2:1-14  
(Preached at Trinity, November 21, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verse 1** clearly tells us the subject of the following verses. Elijah was about to be taken to heaven in a whirlwind. It was no secret. Everyone knew about it – Elijah, Elisha, and the sons of the prophets. Everyone knew it, but no one was talking openly about it. Elisha in **Verse 3** - "Yes, I know; be still." – “Keep silent”
2. Elijah is about to be miraculously taken up into heaven, not by death. He was about to be surrounded by Chariots of Fire and taken up visibly into heaven in a whirlwind. A tornado came down and took him away. This was a miraculous event. We’ve already seen many miracles from the hand of Elijah, and they will only increase in the coming chapters by the hand of Elisha.
  - A. This was an important epoch in God’s redemptive purpose. Israel has fallen into apostasy and God was warning and announcing judgment. God was speaking through His prophets and using miracles to validate their prophetic office. This has often been a source of trouble for liberal theologians who reject the miracles of the Bible.
  - B. For example, in the 1970 edition of the Broadman Commentary we read a description of the floating axe head in **Chapter 8**:  
“Gray suggests that the historical event of factual basis resting behind the miracle of the floating axe head ‘may be that Elisha with a long pole or stick probed about the spot indicated until he succeeded either in inserting the stick into the socket, or, having located the hard object on the muddy bottom, moved it until the man was able to recover it.’ This proposed reconstruction is helpful not only for understanding this single event, but as an example of the manner in which historical events were elaborated across successive generations until the narrative becomes a combination of saga and legend, inextricably interwoven.”<sup>1</sup>
  - C. Another commentator writes:  
“One helpful way in which to think about many of these texts is in terms of symbolic narrative. . . This means that the reader should not interpret in an overly literal way the wondrous events that are narrated . . .”<sup>2</sup>
3. To deny the miracles of Scripture is to deny Scripture.  
It would be best for us to interpret 1-2 Kings as historic narrative and the miracles as historic events, amazing as they are. They are indeed contrary to nature, but that is what defines a miracle.

---

<sup>1</sup> Roy Honeycutt, *The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol.3, 1 Samuel-Nehemiah* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 242.

<sup>2</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 140.

4. Some more needs to be said regarding miracles. While some deny miracles altogether, others insist that miracles will be used for the entire history of the church, that God validates the Gospel through signs, wonders, and mighty deeds.
  - A. God used miracles for specific purposes at specific times. They were used very seldom. Miracles were not used until the Exodus when God worked miracles to validate Moses.
  - B. After the passing of over 500 years God validated the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha with miracles. When their ministries were over miracles would cease for another 850 years.
  - C. Miracles were again used during the ministry of Christ and of His Apostles, and then they again ceased. Today God speaks through the preaching and teaching His Word. His Word is self-validating.
5. I'd like to point out several observations from this passage.
  - I. God is not limited in His power
    - A. God is not limited by the passing of time
      1. Many presume that the God of the OT is different from the God of the NT God is the same, unchanging
      2. The same God that divided the Jordan during the days of Joshua is the same God that divided the Jordan in Elijah's day. He is the same God who is able to work powerfully in our day. God is able to transform lives through the Gospel. He is able to use His Word powerfully in the lives of His people. He is able to work His purpose according to His good pleasure.
    - B. God is also not limited by the men He chooses to serve Him. He delights to use frail human beings in powerful ways.
      1. Moses trembled at God's call upon his life
      2. Gideon exclaimed:  
**Judges 6:15 NAU** - "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."
      3. Jeremiah's response to God's call:  
**Jeremiah 1:6 NAU** - "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth."
      4. David was the youngest among the sons of Jesse.
      5. God is able to work through whomever He wills, be it Elijah, Elisha or you or me.
        - a. Elijah was God's prophet. He was recognized by the other prophets as being the chief.
        - b. Elisha was a lowly farmer. He was Elijah's protégé. Would Elisha be able to be Elijah's successor? When he divided the Jordan they knew he was the one.  
**2 Kings 2:15 NAU** - "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

- C. God is not limited in preserving His own people
1. Elijah lived in a wicked day.  
**1 Kings 19:10 NAU** - "He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."  
    - a. He presumed he was the last of God's faithful – but he was not.
    - b. He presumed that his ministry had been a failure, that Jezebel had won – but it wasn't true.
    - c. God protected and secured him, and then safely brought him to heaven.
    - d. He was one of only two men who did not taste death.
  2. Enoch also lived in a wicked day. He lived just prior to the great flood. The whole world had fallen into moral corruption.  
**Genesis 6:5 NAU** - "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."  
    - a. In the midst of the moral decay the Bible tells us that Enoch walked with God. He is only one of two that the Bible records as pleasing God. The other is Christ.  
**Hebrews 11:5-6 KJV** – "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. <sup>6</sup> But without faith *it is impossible to please him. . .*"
  3. Both Elijah and Enoch bear the same distinction of being taken alive into heaven.  
    - a. In the midst of great corruption God preserved his own. They walked faithfully before God.
    - b. They are both described as having walked with God. The Psalmist describes those who walk with God.  
**Psalms 119:2-3 NAU** - "How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all *their* heart. <sup>3</sup> They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways."  
      - c. They both spoke powerfully against the sins of their day
  4. We too live in a wicked and rebellious generation. We are surrounded by corruption. God is able to preserve us until the end.  
**Philippians 1:6 NAU** - "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

- II. God demands simple faithfulness in His people their whole lives
- A. Elisha was called of God, yet humbly served Elijah before finally becoming his successor.
1. When Elijah was about to be taken away he changed locations three times. He went to Bethel which was a location of the school of the prophets. Then, God sent Him to Jericho where again he was approached by the sons of the prophets. Finally, he went to the Jordan River where he struck the waters and they parted.
    - a. It is clear that he understood he was about to be taken away.
    - b. The prophets also knew.  
**2 Kings 2:3 NAU** - "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?"
    - c. And Elisha knew – "Yes, I know; be still."
  2. All of those who knew of Elijah's soon departure responded differently. Note the first part of **Chapter 2** occurred in a single day.
    - a. Elijah knew he was about to leave this world and yet he continued his duties as normal, following God's direction. What would you do if you knew this was your last day upon the earth?
    - b. Elisha knew Elijah was about to depart but continued in faithful service, He insisted, I will not leave your side.
    - c. The prophets knew and watched.
  4. Each time Elijah moved he told Elisha to stay behind. And each time Elisha affirmed his faithfulness to Elijah. Elisha would not leave the side of his master.  
**2 Kings 2:2 NAU** - "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."
  5. Elisha's words when Elijah departed are stirring. They were the words of a loyal, faithful servant.  
**2 Kings 2:12 NAU** - "Elisha saw *it* and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces."
  6. Elisha saw Elijah not only as his spiritual father but also the protector of Israel—"the chariots of Israel and its horsemen." With Elijah's departure he was prepared to assume his new role.
    - a. We should note the powerful impact Elijah made upon his generation. With his departure Israel lost the powerful protection of this man of God. His prayers, his teaching, his reproofs all served as a powerful preserving protection.
    - b. Israel would also enjoy the same benefit from Elisha as Elijah's successor.  
**2 Kings 13:14 NAU** - "When Elisha became sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"

- c. The world has always enjoyed the benefit and protection of God's people dwelling among them. Sodom had no idea the powerful benefit of having Lot dwell among them.
  - d. What impact does your life have upon this generation. God continues to use His righteous ones to preserve the world. Jesus referred to us as the salt of the earth.
- B. We can also see this humility with Joshua, who was the servant Moses.
- 1. While Moses was alive mighty Joshua served as a humble servant.  
**Exodus 24:13 NAU** - "So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God."  
**Joshua 11:15 NAU** - "Just as the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses."
  - 2. Only after Moses was taken away was Joshua prepared to assume his role as Israel's leader.
  - 3. It is tragic when ambition and pride leads a man to seek to usurp the authority of the one God has placed over him. We saw this with Absalom who sought the throne of David.
- C. We can find in Elisha the importance of mentorship in the service of Christ's Kingdom.
- 1. Too many are too proud to spend time learning under those more mature.
  - 2. Timothy faithfully served under the leadership of Paul.

#### Conclusion:

- 1. What should we glean from this passage for today?
  - A. First of all, we are reminded that our life on earth is finite and will soon be over. We have a duty to remain faithful until the end.
  - B. Second, God doesn't need to validate His Word today. It is self-validating – a sharp two-edged sword that is able to build and equip God's people.
  - C. Third, although we shouldn't expect the Gospel to be validated through signs and wonders, God works wondrously, none the less. The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness continues to shine upon the darkened souls of men.
  - D. Fourth, we shouldn't be too proud to place ourselves in service to others. It is always good to have a mentor and to be willing to submit to his or her leadership. We should be willing to wait until God is ready to raise us up to a position of leadership.
- 2. And finally, we shouldn't forget that although Enoch and Elijah are the only two human beings to leave this earth without tasting death, there will be an entire generation of Christians who will experience this ascension when Christ returns.  
**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NAU** - "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."
- 3. This could occur at any moment. Are we living with expectation, and are we maintaining faithfulness as we live?