

9980

ELISHA, THE MAN OF GOD

Speaker: Bro. John Martin

Study #3 The Departure of Elijah

Reading: Matthew 3

My dear brethren and sisters and young people.

We have before us this morning, b&s, an exciting section of the story of Elisha, and one which contains enormous principles and it's a particular section of this study which I found most intensely interesting, and I know you will too!

Well, the big question now is, who is going to succeed Elijah? The mighty Elijah is going to be taken, b&s and young people, from the scene of activity, and there's going to be an enormous gap left in the ranks. And as I said before in an earlier study, everybody knew about it, it was on everybody's lips that he was going. The sons of the prophets both at Beth-el and at Gilgal were all talking about it, it was the only subject of discussion, 'haven't you heard that today's the day when he's going?' And as that awesome figure moved down from Gilgal to Beth-el to Jericho and then to the banks of the Jordan, doubtless b&s, he was watched keenly by all that saw him, and they were all wondering as to who was going to succeed him? For who could succeed him, such an enormous figure as this? A man who walked above all others, who stuck terror into the hearts of his enemies, respect into the hearts of his friends, who could take this man's position? And yet Elisha was determined, b&s, that he would do it; not because he wished at all to be a leader among men, as I'll prove beyond all doubt this morning, that it was not in his mind. But that he knew in all humility that God had endowed him with these abilities, and he knew that there had to be in Israel, the continuance of the still small voice, and he had it. And therefore, he was determined that whilst there may not be others that could fulfill this man's mission, he would! And that determination was seen by the sons of the prophets, and it is my conviction that they somewhat resented it; and as the exchanges went between him and the sons of the prophets, as to the removal of Elijah, you will notice in the very terse words that are used by Elisha and by the sons of the prophets, that there was a good deal of feeling about this, as to who should be the successor of this enormous figure, and b&s, we're going to learn this morning, the basic principle which qualifies a man for leadership! in a manner that you're never going to forget because it's so wonderfully dramatized in the manner in which Elisha came back into that nation, after Elijah was taken.

And as we run through the scriptures this morning on this principle, let us absorb this lesson from the word 'go' and see it reinforced everywhere we go, that leadership, b&s,

can only be given to men when they give themselves wholly and totally to God, and when they repudiate utterly themselves, that's the basis for leadership! And any that would aspire to it on any other basis, is doomed to frustration, bitterness and failure. And it was the spirit of humility, therefore, that gained for Elisha, this privilege and responsibility of leading the sons of the prophets as did his wonderful, illustrious lord, his adon, his master, Elijah. And this morning, b&s, we watch the two of them, two of them go to the banks of the river Jordan, you can't help but think of two other men that went to the banks of the river Jordan, and we've just read about them. And the connection between Elisha and Elijah on the banks of the river Jordan, and John and Jesus on the banks of the river Jordan, is wonderful, and this morning we're going to see upon what principles the Lord came back from the river Jordan to lead His people with the still, small voice, and to become the greater than Elijah, not the salvation of El, not merely the salvation of the power of God, but the salvation of Yahweh, Jehoshua, Jesus, He will save His people from their sins into the covenant name that we might live together to be constituent members of the Yahweh name, to rule this earth in peace, righteousness and justice. And He came out of that water, and became a leader among men, upon what principle? Well, let us see, b&s, what constituted Him, 'My beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased'! We know what it was, but as we see it enacted in the life of Elisha, it's going to be reinforced in our minds.

Now we've got the two of them, haven't we? in 2 Kings 2, moving down from Gilgal, in the hills of Judaea, and you'll remember that we pointed out that this must have been a different Gilgal than that which Joshua came to, which was of course, down in the plains of Jericho; this one was up in the hills of Judaea, and having moved from Gilgal, the name of which at least, spoke of the principles of the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt, they came to Beth-el, the house of God, where God spake to Jacob, and they moved from there, b&s, down to Jericho the city of palm trees, of which we cannot now speak particularly, but we will tonight. And now we come, b&s, to the river Jordan where Elijah was going to be taken up by a whirlwind into heaven. And this word 'taking up' b&s, 'he's going to be taken up' says verse 1, the Hebrew word you know is the word 'alah' quite a common word in the Old Testament which simply means 'to go up or to ascend'. But whilst it is a common word there is a related word which is used for the sacrifices, the word 'olah' which also means to 'cause to ascend' and that word, b&s, is only used of sacrifices which were burnt on the altar, and which when they were, consumed by the flames and turned into vapour, they went up as a sweet-smelling savour as our bro. chairman said in his opening prayer, they went up as a sweet-smelling savour into the nostrils of the Deity. And that word 'olah' was only used of sacrifices which were made on the altar, and that word, b&s, was never found for any other burnings of sacrifice away from that altar. And when the children of Israel destroyed outside the camp, the portions of offerings which were not acceptable to God, the flame which consumed those portions was called 'the flame of the serah' which destroyed them, utterly destroyed them, but that which was upon the altar was not destroyed, b&s, it was transferred into vapour, and it went up 'olah' into the nostrils of God, and search the scriptures and you will never, ever, ever, find that anything negative was ever consumed upon the altar of God, it never was! You'll never find it from Genesis to Malachi that there was anything negative ever consumed upon the altar

of God, because only that which was acceptable to God was taken upon the altar, and the unacceptable was destroyed outside the camp. And that's why, b&s, when Jesus Himself repudiated the flesh, He went outside the gate and told His Father in effect, 'the flesh profits nothing'. But that which was wafted up to God was a dedicated sacrifice, a life of holiness, and now the great Elijah is going to go up, because God was going to accept him, b&s. And for all his lack of understanding, for all his depression because he felt like God had forsaken him, for all his failings, for all the facts of him running away from Jezebel and called God in question at Horeb; the grand things in his life, the faith, the power, the courage, the way he lived for God and God alone, and forsook society and everything that society stood for, and he was prepared to wear only leather girdles. For those things, b&s, God accepted him and took him, and took him from the scene of activity, and as the two of them continued together, these were the principles that were going to be enacted.

But you know, the sons of the prophets didn't understand that! Later on when Elisha came back, they wanted to go and search for Elijah, they wanted to go and search for him, and in verse 16 they said unto Elisha, '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 Yahweh hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain', and the Septuagint translation adds to that 'or in the river Jordan', which showed, b&s, an utter lack of understanding on the part of the sons of the prophets, that they felt that God had taken Elijah, what for? to bounce him on a mountain somewhere or to fling him back into the river Jordan! You see! the lack of understanding on the part of the sons of the prophets and Elisha got impatient with them, utterly impatient and said, 'Ah, a waste of time, a waste of time looking for him'. He knew it was a waste of time, he knew the principles that were enacted, he knew they wouldn't find him, b&s, he knew what had gone on; but they didn't understand, and for those people who even suggest that God would throw him back in the river Jordan was incredible, because they failed to see the lesson of the river Jordan. And so as the two went off and they talked about the coming translation, and their upcoming parting, these things must have been discussed by them, until they came finally to the river Jordan.

And in verse 6 we read, 'And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for Yahweh hath sent me to Jordan', and for the third time, 'the LORD hath sent me to Jordan', divinely directed in every direction that he moved until finally, b&s, as the great prophet going out of the nation, he comes to the river Jordan, the boundary between the land of Edom and Moab, the land of Gilead and the Promised Land, that river which stood between the two. And they came there, and stood there at the river Jordan; look at verse 7. 'And 50 men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off' and the word 'afar off' by the way, doesn't mean afar off in that sense, but as the margin says, 'in sight'. They followed them so that they could see what was going on at the river Jordan, and as these two men went down and down and down, deeper and deeper into the depression of Jordan until they stood there somewhere 100 feet below sea level. Down, down, down they went till they came to that border of Jordan and filing in behind them, 50 men of the sons of the prophets, who were going to be witnesses of the great drama that was going to be enacted there, and there the two of them it says in that 7th

verse, in language that is eloquent, 'and they two stood by Jordan'. You wouldn't get more eloquent language than that as it tells us the principle, two men standing there by Jordan, and of course, our minds are taken straight into Matthew chapter 3, two men standing by the river Jordan. And 50 witnesses as to what was going to go on, because God was going to reveal, b&s, not only the fact that Elisha was going to be the leader, but why he's going to be the leader, which was far more important than mere leadership itself, the reasons why!

And in order to understand the reasons why, we've got to understand what Jordan stood for; and we can't move another inch in this study, unless we understand what Jordan stood for, because Jordan in this story features prominently, very prominently. And we've got to understand what that river stood for in Israel and we're not left in any shadow of a doubt what Jordan stood for when we go through the scriptures of truth. What does Jordan conjure up in your mind? have a look at it, the river Jordan on this map. What does Jordan conjure up in your mind when you think about the river Jordan? You go, say to some book shop, the evangelical society, and you see in there magazines which are not worth a cracker, all the photographs of the Holy Land embellished with their holiness, and they picture Jordan as a beautiful stream with sparkling, crystal clear waters with a green sward (grasslands) on either side, lovely trees, delightful shade, when Jordan was a stinking, dirty, muddy, rotten stream. And you know, my dear b&s and young people, Jordan is never presented in the Word of God, (I would qualify that) I would the Jordan, apart from one reference, is never in the Word of God depicted as a beautiful place. Only in one place which we'll have a look at in a moment, but apart from that one place Jordan is depicted mostly as a border; and a border it was when you consider the hills of Edom and Moab coming across at 3,000 feet, the hills of Judaea the other side, 3000 feet; the Jordan valley roaring 1292 feet below sea level, what else could it be considered as but a border. And as you look up from the hills of Judaea you can see straight across from you, another range of mountains of comparable height, and between you a great wide gulf fixed. And it stood as a border between Israel and the Gentiles, between Israel and death, and it's never, never ever as I said before, apart from the one reference we'll look at in a moment, presented as anything else but a border or as a dangerous place, a very dangerous place, b&s. Because you see, taking an exaggerated view of the Jordan valley, as this is an exaggerated view, as most views are, but you see, the Jordan valley comes in like this, in a series of drops, and when you get a series of drops like that and you've got a river running down them, and when it starts up here, say coming from the bottom of the Sea of Galilee it's 623 feet below sea level and it drops in 60 miles to 1292 feet below sea level, you've got a river that's running swiftly downhill, going downhill all the time, and because it's got this terrace effect, when it floods it's banks, it does so very quickly and recedes very quickly. Have you ever seen a river flood its banks quickly and recede quickly? and you know what's left behind on the banks don't you? All the muddy silt and the rotting vegetation, this thick squelchy, oozy mud, out of which this bracken grows; looks very beautiful on top with the greenery, but underneath full of that rotting vegetation. It smells; oozy black mud and that was Jordan.

Now b&s, the principles that river stands for in the Word of God are outstanding. Now

then, let's have a look at the first reference of the river Jordan in the Word of God. Genesis chapter 13, and here's the reference I was telling you, that's an exception in the Word as far as Jordan is concerned, and it's necessary, b&s, don't think it isn't, it's absolutely necessary that we go through the scriptures on the river of Jordan to understand the story of Elisha. Genesis 13 and verse 10, 'And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah', and the record says that 'it was like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comes unto Zoar', and so the first view we have of the river Jordan in scriptures is that it was like what? the garden of Eden! It was well watered like the garden of Eden, why? because there was a beautiful river, and there was verdure and there was fertility; Lot desired it and so it was an idyllic picture that is presented in Genesis 13, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But you see, God made a hole in the ground of Sodom and Gormorrah, and into that hole, b&s, went all the fertility of Jordan too, and from that point on, it no longer becomes like the garden of the LORD. But isn't that interesting that the first look at the river Jordan as Lot saw it, was like the garden of the LORD; now look, if any of you have been privileged to see the river Jordan (and we haven't been privileged to see it for a great deal; we saw it coming out of the end of the Lake of Galilee) but if we could be on the mountains of Nebo where Moses was, and looked from the direction that Moses saw the river Jordan, do you know what he would have seen? He would have seen, b&s, on his left hand side as he looked off from Mt. Nebo, he would have seen the Dead Sea, and then stretching his eye up to the Lake of Galilee he would have seen almost to Galilee. And between those two seas he would have seen the river Jordan; and from Galilee to the Dead Sea is 60 miles, but the river Jordan travels in that distance 200 miles, because it swings so much. And it was laying in the garden of Eden like that, (like a snake) isn't that suggestive? and that's when it was beautiful before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gormorrah.

But it didn't remain like that, b&s, and in the 12th chapter of Jeremiah, after the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gormorrah, look what Jeremiah says about it; I want you to notice the contrast that Jeremiah has in this place at verse 5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee', well he says, 'how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?' Now the word 'swelling' literally means 'pride' because you see, when a man's proud he swells, you know, and that's the idea of the Hebrew word, it's the word 'pride'. He says, 'look, if you've run with footmen and panted how are you going to keep up with horses?' and that's a great contrast! And he said, 'look, if in the land of peace you've never been able to settle down, how on earth would you settle down in the pride of Jordan?' Why was it called the pride of Jordan? Zechariah calls it the same, Jeremiah does, as we'll see in a moment, calls it the same; well, when you look at Jordan from a distance, you look at this bracken type of brushwood that grew there, it's very green on top and from a distance you see a great band of green, winding it's way up the Jordan valley, it looks beautiful! but oh, you've got to meet that green! and there's vipers, death, adders, scorpions, and in the days of the prophets, filled with lions.

So there was the pride of Jordan but it wasn't a land of peace, b&s, there was war down there, a war of nature! and John the Baptist was down there, and he was saying, 'You generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' and he's referring to a custom when they would light that bracken to clear the area of all the vipers, and they'd come shooting out to miss the fire; he says, 'who's warning you of the wrath to come?' and he was right in that region, b&s. He knew the principles of the river Jordan; look at the 49th chapter of Jeremiah and read this one carefully, you're going to appreciate this one when we go back to Elisha, in the 49th chapter of Jeremiah and here speaking about the invasion of Israel by the great northern confederacy, Jeremiah says in verse 19, 'Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the pride of Jordan' and that was a scene that was familiar to all Israelites, the lions coming out of the brushwood of the pride of Jordan, making they're way up into the hills to prey upon the animals, to make their way back again and hide in the land of desolation. And so he says, 'he shall come up like a lion from the pride of Jordan against the habitation of the strong' (Israel are going to be overcome by the enemies which dwelt at Jordan). But says God, 'I will suddenly make him run away from her', how's God going to do that? 'Well, says God, 'who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like Me? and who is that Shepherd that will stand before Me?' And there's wonderful principles, b&s, the enemy of the strong is in Jordan and it's out of Jordan that destruction comes, but God's going to deal with it, because He's going to bring forth One who is called the Shepherd, and He's like God, and He's going to handle that problem, that problem that resided in the river Jordan; He'll handle that! and God brought a Shepherd out of Jordan, b&s, from the very region that bred those enemies of Israel, the enemies of nature itself. He brought a Shepherd out of that river and handled the problem in a most remarkable fashion; but look what Jeremiah is telling us about the river Jordan! This is so important to understand the life of Elisha; let's see the principles involved in this river!

What does it stand for? That awful thing flesh; the river Jordan means the 'descender' because it comes from the Sea of Galilee and it descends very quickly into the Dead Sea. Into the Dead Sea, you know, one of the unclean birds of the children of Israel that they couldn't touch, the cormorant, had it's habitat at the end of the river Jordan, where it waited on the branches of dead trees which the river Jordan washed down, and when the muddy waters of the river Jordan entered into the Dead Sea, and the salt content of the Dead Sea being so strong, it would kill all the fish and they would float to the surface and it would pick them up and eat them, stupefied fish; and that bird was unclean and they're a prey upon those fish at the river Jordan, and all these things underlining the principle for what that river stood. But there is one passage of scripture, b&s, which is eloquent as to the meaning of the river Jordan, and that's back in the 4th chapter of the book of Joshua, which is going to be very much related to the story of Elisha, and here we have the principles of Jordan demonstrated to us, and you won't find any better demonstration than the one here. We're going to take the 3rd chapter of Joshua and we're going to have a brief look at this because I want to get your minds firmly fixed on this point so that when we go back to Elisha we can understand what was going on there. Now then, here's the occasion when the children of Israel crossed the river Jordan. Now let's read a few verses of this and see what happened; in verse 1 of chapter 3 we read, 'And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from

Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host', you know, in the Hebrew scriptures, b&s, the proper structure of that reads this way, 'that they came with a three day journey to the banks of the river Jordan, after Joshua had risen very early in the morning after three days'. So they came after three days to the river Jordan, that Joshua rose up early after a three day journey and they came to the banks of the river Jordan'. So here you have Jehoshua, Jesus, rising very early in the morning after three days and coming to the banks of the river Jordan, how's that? and then they take the ark which was in the middle of the marching tribes of Israel (6 this way, and 6 that way) they take the ark and they move it around to the front. And Joshua commands that ark to be put, as it says in verse 4, 'about 2000 cubits ahead of the children of Israel', and that ark is going to go into the river of Jordan first, about 2000 cubits before the children of Israel; it had been marching in the middle of them for 40 years veiled with the blue veil of the temple or the tabernacle, which Paul says 'was His flesh'. So marching in flesh in the middle of Israel was the manifestation of God which they didn't recognize, but now they saw Him 2000 cubits in front, because there's a problem in front of them, and the problem is Jordan! and He alone can handle that problem.

There's a problem with Jordan; they've got to get across, and that One has got to go ahead, 'for says God, you haven't passed this way before'. You know, b&s, the place where they crossed had fords there; they could have got across. There was really no physical problem except for the size of the people; it would have taken them a considerable amount of time but they could have crossed. Where Elisha and Elijah went across the river Jordan, he had no need to strike his mantle on the river because there were fords there. It was one of the best places to cross Jordan but there was another problem associated with that river, a spiritual problem. For it stood for a certain principle and Israel had never passed that way before! And so Joshua came there, and he came to that river; you know the story and you've known it since Sunday School, the priests go in and we read in chapter 4 and verse 3, 'Command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night'. So when the children of Israel had crossed over, b&s, they had to pick up out of the bed of the water, 12 stones and they had to make an memorial of those 12 stones, that they might remember what happened! And what happened? Well, look what the record says happened, they picked up those stones in the place where the priests' feet stood firm. Now that's what happened, and whenever a child of Abraham, son of Israel, saw those stones he remembered this point, that he wouldn't be in the Promised Land unless the priests' feet stood firm. And who's your priest? and who's my priest? And that river, the Descender, b&s, coming into the Dead Sea of death, carrying with it all the debris and it was coming, says Joshua, from Adam, a city called 'Adam' into the Dead Sea! and washing all the life we had into death, and a priest got in there, and He stood firm, and He drove that water back, and He made all the people pass by Him. When they picked up those 12 stones they put them on that bank; they were there for all time, to remind the children of Israel, that had it not been for a priest who got in the middle of that stream and who stood against it , and stood

against Adam, they would never have been in the Promised Land. And when the Pharisees and Sadducees came down, with all their glorious clothing and stood a little bit back and said, 'well, we won't get muddy with the river Jordan'. And John the Baptist was saying, 'come on down here', dressed in a leather girdle like Elijah, never mind about this fleshly visage, come down here and get in. Oh, no! they wouldn't do that! Well, he said, 'think not to say within yourselves that you're Abrahams' children; for God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.'

And how are you a son or daughter of Abraham? because, b&s, you've gone passed your High Priest, who's standing firm on your account and my account and holding it back, the tide of death, and enabling us in this wilderness of life, to get past Him into the Promised Land and to go with Him into glory. And if it wasn't for the fact that He's standing firm and stood firm in the river Jordan, we'd never be there! And never would we make it! and we mustn't think to ourselves that there's any value in ourselves at all, but God is able of these stones, and where do those stones come from? right out of the middle of the stream. And we're one time covered with the water, but now they're on the ground, they're above the water. And if ever the principle of the river Jordan was seen, there it was! Verse 7 of that 4th chapter of Joshua says, 'Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh; when it passed over Jordan'. The waters of Jordan were cut off and these stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever'. Is there any doubt about the story or the lesson of Jordan? do we have to go any further? so we will if you like!

Just take briefly a look at this point! You all heard it last year. Where was Elijah sent? the brook Cherith which we are told in the record of scripture was before Jordan and the word 'Jordan' means 'emptying itself into' Jordan, and there was Elijah wondering why on earth he's over there in the land of Gilead by the brook Cherith which is emptying itself into Jordan. He didn't have to wonder very long, b&s, because the word 'Cherith' itself doesn't mean 'separated' as some translators give it, it means literally 'cut off' and here was somebody cut off who was emptying themselves into Jordan, right into the Dead Sea. And while Elijah's thinking about this, ravens come to him feeding him, why? because Job says 'who feedeth the ravens? who wandereth for the lack of meat; when her young ones cry for food, he says, God feeds that raven'. He says 'Go to Zarephath, Elijah, and there was one over there that was cut off, emptying herself into the river Jordan and Elijah found her wandering outside the city, looking for something to keep her son alive! And he had the tremendous lesson brought home to him, b&s, that he had the power to get into that stream and to stand against the stream of life, in order that people like the widow of Zarephath might get life.

'And the two of them', says the record of Kings, 'came and stood at the bank of Jordan', now isn't that eloquent? And let's go back to the 2nd book of Kings now and just have a look at this. In that 2nd chapter we read in that 7th verse, 'and they two stood by Jordan', you know, only one of them really came back from that river, and we read concerning him, Elisha, in verse 15, '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'. Isn't that interesting, b&s?

it says the spirit of Elijah did rest on Elisha', do you know what that word 'rest' means? You can almost guess it, can't you? it means 'to alight as a bird'. Does that mean anything to you? It means 'to alight as a bird' and what happened when Jesus came out of Jordan? straightway after he came out of that water, the Spirit of the LORD descended upon Him like a dove, and the dove was a symbol of peace; it was a sacrificial animal, which was a bird, which spoke of that which is peaceful and tranquil, that which brings life. It was the spirit of Elisha, and when Isaiah 11 speaks about the same thing and says, 'the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him' it's the same word; the spirit of the LORD shall alight upon Him. And whereas Elijah, b&s, was wreathed in flames, Elisha carried upon his head, the symbol of the peaceful, profitable power of God, the gentle spirit of God as embodied in His Word.

But you see, when John and Jesus, as we read this morning, went down to that water, John said, 'that He would thoroughly purge His floor, He would gather His wheat into the garner but He'd burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire'; and between Elisha and Elijah that's what happened except it happened in reverse. And Elisha was there gathering the wheat of the garner, you know, blowing away the chaff (whoow, there goes brother so-in-so, there goes sister so-in-so, they had too much to do with this world), but left there, b&s, was the grain (people who wouldn't be blown away because of their value) and Elisha was gathering them up. Elijah took care of all the chaff; and that's the principle. John said that Jesus would do both things and in effect, Elisha did too, because whilst his name means 'the salvation of God', he had a father whose name meant 'judgment', so you see the spirit of Elijah descended upon him and in the combination of the spirit of Elijah and the spirit which he himself bore, we have embodied in the two men I believe, not only John and Jesus but in both men in effect, we have the Lord Jesus Christ, who will gather His wheat into the garner (and we pray that we'll all be that, but you can rest assured, b&s, He will not overlook the chaff). That day will come and He'll burn them as an oven. And these wonderful principles were enacted as the two went down towards that river Jordan.

You know, the sons of the prophets were all witnesses to this. And in verse 3 of this chapter, as they were making their way down there, we read concerning the sons of the prophets at Beth-el that they came forth to Elisha and said unto him, 'Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?' And his answer was, 'I also know' (that's what yea or nay means, that's how it's couched in the Hebrew); and then he says, 'hold your peace', which in the Hebrew is one word, so as Elisha comes down to Beth-el and he's marching alongside of his master, two very solemn men because it's a solemn occasion, the sons of the prophets are all milling around. And they're a bit resentful of this, they know the purpose of Elijah, there's no doubt about that, b&s, the very context of this chapter proves that, because they went down there to witness this, and when they saw him come back and perform the miracle, they still doubted him and wanted to go and search for that body because they thought if they found it, they could disprove his claims. But his claims stood because no one found the body. You think of that! But at the moment they are resentful of this, and they said, 'do you know they're going to come and take your master from over your head today?' What do they mean by that? Well, you see, the custom was for the people to sit at the feet of the master, so

that Moses said in Deuteronomy, 'yea, He loves the people, and he shall sit them at His feet and teach them out of His law', so they said, 'Look, your master is going to be taken from over your head today', the clear inference in their words was, 'you don't think for a moment that we're going to sit at your feet!' But they did! and as a matter of fact, not only did they do that, but almost immediately that they do it, and straight up from the river Jordan, we find them sitting at the feet of Elisha. His answer to this was, 'I know this also' and then he says, 'hush, shhh', because the words 'hold your peace' is one Hebrew word which means 'shhh'. You can imagine the feeling that was there, 'shhh' and on he went.

And he got the same response at Jericho, same answer, 'quiet!' Shhh, not concerned with it; his concentration was on his master, his concentration, b&s, was on the principles that would be involved in leadership, he knew the responsibilities, and he wasn't going to enter into any controversy with light-headed people who couldn't understand these things even if they were sons of the prophets. And there were 50 of them; I don't know if there is any connection, but you know, Obadiah in the scourge of Jezebel, hid 50 prophets in a cave; or he hid them by 50's, and perhaps it was a band of this 50 who felt that, well, because they had remained faithful in the days of Jezebel, that they should share the leadership, I don't know, but there were 50 of them, and this is the attitude of mind, of course, which they wanted to adopt, but Elisha, as far as he was concerned was for them to 'be quiet'. And so as they came to the river Jordan in verse 8, we read this verse here, 'And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together'. Now as I expressed to you before, this is the only occurrence of the Hebrew word here, one word which is translated 'wrapped it together'; it really has the significance of being rolled right up tight, the only word which comes anywhere near close to this in the Old Testament is one which is found in Psalm 139 when David speaks of an unborn baby as 'his substance yet unformed', his substance yet being unperfect' that which is wrapped up. And it would seem, b&s, that Elijah took off his cloak in a symbolic action and he wrapped it up really tight. What was the cloak? it was the symbol of his prophetic office, and it would seem to me that Elijah was symbolically expressing his mind at the moment, that if he was going to be taken, whilst he had a certain amount of confidence in Elisha, I feel b&s, that he expressed in that fact of rolling it up tight, well, perhaps this was the end. And he smote the river Jordan, it parted and Elijah went backwards out of the river Jordan, and he went back in the opposite direction where Israel came from, and he was taken, and back came Elisha with that cloak.

And you know, it was providential I believe, that that cloak fell from Elijah as he was taken up. It was providential that that cloak fell, and I can imagine, b&s, and I'm saying this as purely imaginative, I should imagine as that cloak fell it would have unfolded itself perhaps, which would have been a natural thing for that cloak to unfold itself as it came waffling down, and Elisha would pick it up, and there he would see that God was giving him a token; that it was not finished, and I'm going to show you in a moment that that's how Elisha saw it. He saw that cloak as a token that God was telling him that it was not finished, there was more work to be done, and was giving him encouragement to go ahead and to do what He wanted him to do! Of course, before we get to that section however, let's just have a look at the record here, and some of the interesting

aspects of it, that in verse 9 we read, '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'.

What did he mean? Well, the Companion Bible of course, says that it is a fact that Elisha performed 16 miracles and Elijah performed 8; so that he had a double portion of his spirit! Well, I suppose there's something in that because if you taken certain miracles which you could say were performed by Elisha as miracles, then there would be 16, and Elijah did perform 8 miracles. But certainly, b&s, Elisha was asking for say, if Elijah had one ton of the spirit of God, he wanted 2 tons; I don't think for a moment that that was in his mind, and I'm absolutely certain that it wasn't because the very expression 'a double portion of thy spirit' in the Hebrew literally means 'two mouthfuls'. He wanted 'two mouthfuls' that's the literal expression and it's found in Deuteronomy (which we won't turn to because you know all about it) that in the law of the firstborn it was the duty of the father to confer upon his firstborn son, two mouthfuls as the original Hebrew has it, and of course, this expression comes from a custom where a father would serve his favourite son with a double portion in the meal. You remember the case of Joseph with Benjamin, he gave him five mouthfuls more, to indicate that he was favouring his own brother. But this was the custom, so what Elisha was asking was this; he was going to call Elijah 'my father, my father', there were the sons of the prophets, many of them, there were 50 watching them; what Elisha is saying is this, 'my father, I know that I'm equipped to lead this family. I believe I can work a work in these days that will be profitable, will you appoint me as the firstborn', that's what he was saying! And Elijah, b&s, wasn't able to do that because it was not his prerogative, and all he could do was to put Elisha in a position where if it was going to be conferred it had to be conferred by God and he says, 'look, it's beyond me to do this, but if you see me when I'm taken, it shall be so unto thee'. Now that's rather remarkable because the firstborn privilege which was going to rest upon Elisha depended, b&s, on if he saw that man ascend. And we are called an ecclesia of firstborns in Hebrews, why? because of all the people on the earth, we understand and see why it was that the Lord Jesus Christ was taken into heaven! we've seen it so Paul says to 'set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth'. If Elisha had that spirit in him, then God would appoint it; and he saw it, says the record in verse 12, and he got his request.

You know, b&s, he would have been the only one to see that! because I believe by the time Elijah was taken from him, they would have been a considerable distance from the river Jordan, because verse 11 says, 'And it came to pass, as they still went on and talked'. Now the Hebrew expression here is a rather quaint one and a very expressive one, (I'm not a Hebrew scholar, don't get me wrong, but I only rely upon the authorities) and they all make this point that it's quite an expression here 'they still went on and talked', the expression really is 'they walked and they walked and they talked'. What a wonderful conversation that would have been, they walked and they walked and they talked. And the idea that they walked some considerable distance and Elisha would have been the only one to see, I believe, that man taken and therefore, the only one qualified. 'For there needs be witnesses of His resurrection, says Peter, 'that they might testify to others', and where was the only witness to the ascension of Elijah but this

one? because they had walked, and had walked and they talked and had gone out of view. And no one else saw that, I believe that's implicit in this record, no one saw that but Elisha. And he was the only witness left, b&s, of the ascension and he went back to tell them that.

We now come to a very interesting thing, in verse 11 it says 'they walked and they walked and they talked and behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and they parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven'. You know, in all the representations you see, of Elijah being taken up, you have him taken up in a chariot. The bible doesn't say that; and I believe the reason it doesn't say that you see, the chariots of fire came and here were these two men walking and walking and talking, inseparable companions, but now b&s, the time had come when the Spirit of God was going to split them asunder (it parted them asunder and split them two just like that and the purpose of the chariots of fire was to split them. And as Elijah went one way and Elisha went the other way, a storm cloud came down and wrapped itself around Elijah (characteristically a storm cloud) and bore him up. What happened to those chariots? ever thought about that? They didn't take Elijah up, what happened to them? That's interesting and this is absolutely magnificent, you take 2 Kings chapter 6, Elisha is in the city of Dothan. He's got a feared servant with him, who's frightened to death because there happens to be outside the city, the army of Syria. The purpose of the army of Syria is to capture one man, that man is Elisha, they've come to get him because he keeps telling Israel what's happening out in the field of battle, because he can hear what the king is speaking in his bedroom. That's right! and when they told the king of Syria 'he knows what you're whispering in your bedroom', so the king says 'go get him'. So they go to the city of Dothan, a little city, and the whole of the army of Syria is around the city, and Elisha's as cool as a cucumber, but his servant's scared stiff.

Now Elisha says in verse 17 praying to the Yahweh, 'pray thee open his eyes that he may see. And Yahweh opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire (now underline these words) round about Elisha'. Those chariots of fire never left him after they parted him and Elijah! and when the young man opened his eyes he saw the mountain all around full of chariots of fire! Can you imagine that? his eyes almost came out of his head, and here he is in the city of Dothan, there's the army of Syria, there's the chariots of fire, but who's the focal centre? They weren't round about the Syrians, they weren't round about the city of Dothan, they were round about Elisha, that's where they were, they had never left him! And he, b&s, was the hub of that chariot, around about Elisha, now remember that, I reckon that's absolutely terrific because it shows that when Elisha was parted from his master, God took him and made him the hub of those chariots; and they never left him. And they weren't set around that city or the people and they wouldn't move away, and where Elisha moved as the Spirit of Yahweh, the cherubims of God moved with him as Ezekiel says, 'they had wheels within wheels and wherever they went, wherever the spirit went in the middle, they moved with it, and the hub of the cherubims of God, b&s, was Elisha; never left him. And as he came back he demonstrated that to the sons of the prophets.

Now have a look at this in 2 Kings chapter 2 in verse 12 he says, 'Elisha saw it and cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof', you know, the Hebrew is very expressive again, it says 'Elisha was seeing it and crying', and I can imagine it, b&s, the Spirit split the two of them, and parted them by some considerable distance, and the whirlwind and the storm cloud comes swooping down with all its awesome grandeur, lifting up Elijah; I can imagine Elisha seeing it and running up and crying, 'my father, my father the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof'. What was he saying? He was saying three things, he saw that man as his father, he saw him as the chariots of Israel and he saw him as the horsemen thereof. And there are brethren here who know what that means! (I can see one brother on my left down the back who knows all about this), and you see, there he was, Elijah was the father of Israel and Paul says to the Corinthians, 'you've got 10,000 instructors but you haven't got many fathers'. Where is the father b&s, who can not only be an instructor of the foolish and a guide to the blind, but someone who cares for them with a parental love? where are they? Elijah was such a man, he cared for him, he cared for Israel; he was the chariots of Israel. The chariot was a symbol of protection and of aggression, and he was all of that to Israel; and he was not only the chariot, b&s, but he was the horsemen, he was the one that directed that chariot, and by the power of God, God drove him around that land. Yahweh said to Elijah, 'go here' He said to Elijah, 'go there' He said to Elijah, 'go there', the only place He didn't tell him to go to was down to Horeb, all He told him was to go back! But everywhere else God told him and He drove him around Israel; and he cared for his children and he loved his children and he wouldn't have anybody to harm them, and if that meant driving the chariots over the top of Jezebel, well, he'd do that too! and he'd guide that chariot wherever it was needed, b&s.

And you don't need for me to tell you that here is a symbol of the cherubims; we all know that the cherubim was a word which means 'in which to ride', 'rechab' we know that Chronicles speaks about the chariot of the cherubim, and tell me this? what was the purpose of the cherubim? Well, you'll all be thinking about the future age when Christ comes when we'll be the cherubim of the future age, the four standards of Israel, the wheel within a wheel, the flashing eyes, the wind, we can all think about those symbols, but tell me this, what was the purpose of the cherubim? B&S, the purpose of the cherubim was expressed from the foundation of the world, they were to keep the way of the tree of life, and there were two men in Israel, in a time when Jezebel would have closed the way of the tree of life with bars and gates that kept that open; that was the purpose of the cherubim, not to keep Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden because God never wanted them back in there again, but to make sure that when they approached, when in the symbolic approach to the tree of life, it would have to be on the basis of divine principles, and He put cherubim there to make sure that everybody that came that way, did so correctly. And there were two men who kept the way of the tree of life open in Israel, and when Elisha was lying on his bed of sickness in which he died, Jehoahaz the king of Israel said, 'my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof'.

And now we want to conclude with Elisha coming back through the river of Jordan. And having understood, of course, what Jordan stood for, now we can appreciate this point,

b&s. And he came back to the river Jordan, and he stood by the river Jordan in verse 14, 'and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah?' Now you imagine, he came back and he stood at the lip of Jordan as the 13th verse said, he stood right on the lip of Jordan. And standing right on that lip of Jordan, in the sight of 50 men, he picked up that symbol of the prophetic office, and they all saw it in his hand and they're all watching this; now is the Spirit of God going to rest upon him as it did upon Elijah?; is he going to be the successor? And he says this remarkable phrase, where is the LORD God of Elijah? What did he mean by that? We've got a reference to prove what he meant by it, or at least a reference which shows the spirit of that expression, but I believe what he meant by it was this, b&s, holding that mantle up he virtually said (if you'll permit me to paraphrase it) 'there's the symbol of the prophetic office; Elijah rolled it up tightly, I've got it in my hands now, and I'm standing on the lip of Jordan; is the flesh too great that I can never cross back? Did Yahweh forsake the earth with His prophet? when he went did God go with him? Are we alone? Is there never going to be a way open through this barrier?' And then in anticipation, not in arrogance or presumption but in anticipation, confident, faithful anticipation, he called upon God, 'Where are you? Are you here or are you with Elijah? Where did the chariots go? Are they with me or with you? Where is the LORD God of Elijah? And WHACK! and the waters parted!

In the 2nd chapter of Jeremiah, look at this! and here we have the expression here used, and the spirit in which that expression can be used, not an expression of presumption, b&s, but one of faithful anticipation. Jeremiah 2 and verse 5, 'Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? Neither said they, where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof: but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not'. Why? why did they know Him not? because they had never asked for Him? And so when Elisha picked that mantle up, b&s, he prayed fervently, with confident anticipation, 'where is the LORD God of Elijah?' did He go with him or is He with me?' And then hitting those waters, they parted and he went over, and it says in the record 'that the prophets saw it'. The sons of the prophets saw it, b&s, and now let's conclude with this thought, and you think about the enormity of these principles.

There were three men (now you think of this, b&s, because this is, as far as I'm concerned, the thing which climaxes and stamps the divine seal of authority upon all that was said this morning). There were 3 men who were magnified before the children of Israel on the basis of coming through the river Jordan? Now you think of this! Moses was going off the scene, there had to be a successor, so God said to Joshua, 'this day will I magnify thee before the children of Israel'. How did He do it? 'For thou shalt pass over this Jordan'. Who was it? remember? Jehoshua! Now Elisha is brought through the waters of Jordan that he might be magnified in the eyes of 50 of the sons of the

prophets; so that God said to him, 'this day will I magnify thee in the eyes of these prophets'. The other man, b&s, was the Lord Jesus Christ, and what does Matthew say? You read it! 'And straightway after He came out of the water, the Spirit abode upon Him, and God said, 'that is my beloved Son, hear ye Him'. Now there were 3 men that were magnified before the children of Israel by crossing the river Jordan; they were Jehoshua, the salvation of Yahweh, they were Elisha, the salvation of God, and they were Jesus Jehoshua, the salvation of Yahweh. Tell me this, on what basis were they magnified? BY LEAVING THEMSELVES IN THE MUDDY WATERS OF JORDAN!

And the Lord Jesus Christ along with Elisha and Joshua were great, b&s, because they were nothing; and that constitutes the basis for leadership. If you've got those qualifications, if I've got them, let us step forward. If we haven't, take a back seat until we have! because that's the only basis, b&s, for any leadership in the truth's service, is to overcome yourself, and be prepared in all humility, to wade through the mud of Jordan, to get into its muddy stream and to confess your sins; and that's what they did in the river Jordan, confessing their sins and the river washed them away and they went into the Dead Sea. But that which stepped out on the shore, was the manifestation of God! Elisha, the salvation of God, and that's the basis, b&s, upon which he was appointed, the firstborn of the sons of the prophets. And from that point onward, he goes to demonstrate in his life, that the flesh profits nothing, but that the Spirit of God only, the still small voice is the only living power among men and woman whereby we can be saved!