

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 2 KINGS 2

2 KINGS 2:1-3

THERE SEEMS TO BE A BIT OF NERVOUSNESS ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF ELIJAH LEAVING.

WE SORT OF WALK INTO THIS STORY WITH SOME DETAILS CLEARLY ALREADY UNFOLDED IN THE REAL TIME HAPPENINGS. THE WRITER OF 2 KINGS OPENS UP CHAPTER 2 AS IF WE ALL KNEW THIS WHIRLWIND BUSINESS WAS ALREADY GOING TO HAPPEN. ADDITIONALLY, THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS, ANOTHER NAME FOR THE COLLECTION OF PROPHETIC APPRENTICES OF ELIJAH, ALREADY KNOW ELIJAH IS GOING AWAY. WE DON'T KNOW THE BACKSTORY AHEAD OF TIME, BUT WE WILL SEE THINGS COME TOGETHER AS WE READ ON.

2 KINGS 2:4-6

WE READ NEARLY THE SAME ACCOUNT FROM VERSES 1-3 BUT NOW ELIJAH GOING TO JERICO AND TO THE JORDAN (RATHER THAN BETHEL). ELISHA REFUSES TO LEAVE THE SIDE OF ELIJAH. "SONS OF THE PROPHETS" MEET ELIJAH AND ELISHA THERE AND BUILD THE ANTICIPATION OF ELIJAH'S DEPARTURE AGAIN.

2 KINGS 2:7-8 - THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

ELIJAH AND ELISHA LEAVE JERICO AND STAND AT THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER. THE JORDAN RIVER SERVED AS THE NATURAL BOUNDARY OF THE PROMISED LAND. WHEN THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FIRST APPROACHED CANAAN, JOSHUA LEAD THEM TO THE JORDAN RIVER WHERE THE WATERS OF THE RIVER STOPPED AND PARTED, ALLOWING THE PEOPLE TO WALK THROUGH ON DRY LAND. THIS "CROSSING OVER" SYMBOLIZED A NEW ERA IN ISRAELITE HISTORY.

AND NOW THIS MOMENT IS RE-ENACTED BY ELIJAH AS HE STOPS THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN TO WALK THROUGH, WITH ELISHA ON DRY GROUND. WE ARE LEARNING IN THIS MOMENT THAT PERHAPS ANOTHER NEW ERA IS BEGINNING.

2 KINGS 2:9-14 - ELIJAH TAKEN TO HEAVEN

V. 9 - ELIJAH GIVES ELISHA A CHANCE TO MAKE A FINAL REQUEST FROM HIS TEACHER AND EXAMPLE.

V. 10 - ELISHA (RATHER BOLDLY) ASK FOR A "DOUBLE PORTION" OF THE SPIRIT TO BE UPON HIM. ELIJAH ANSWERS THAT IF ELISHA IS PRESENT WHEN HE DEPARTS, THEN HIS REQUEST HAS BEEN GRANTED BY THE LORD.

ESV STUDY BIBLE: "THE IDEA OF GOING UP TO HEAVEN AT THE END OF AN EARTHLY LIFE WAS NOT COMMON IN ANCIENT ISRAEL. THE OT MORE CHARACTERISTICALLY SPEAKS OF THE DECEASED'S "GOING DOWN" TO SHEOL, (THE GRAVE). IT WAS THE FATE EVEN OF MIGHTY HEROES OF THE HEBREW TRADITION TO BE "GATHERED TO THEIR PEOPLE" IN THIS WAY (E.G., GEN. 25:7—8; 1 KINGS 2:10). ELIJAH REPRESENTS A REMARKABLE EXCEPTION TO THIS WAY OF SPEAKING." (NOTE ON 2 KINGS 2:1)

A CHARIOT OF FIRE, DRAWN BY HORSES OF FIRE SEPARATES THE TWO MEN. REMEMBER THAT ANYTIME ELIJAH HAS TOLD ELISHA TO LEAVE, ELISHA SAYS NO! IT'S GOING TO TAKE A FIERY MILITARY ESCORT TO BREAK THEM UP! AND THEN ELIJAH IS THEN TAKEN UP IN A WHIRLWIND! WOW! WE'VE NEVER SEEN THIS BEFORE!

2 KINGS 2:15-18 - THE SEARCH FOR ELIJAH

THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS HAD SEEN ELIJAH PART THE JORDAN AND CROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE WITH ELISHA. THEY KNEW ELIJAH WAS LEAVING THEM THAT DAY. AND NOW THEY SEE ELISHA RETURN TO JERICO (THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN) WITH THE "MANTLE" OF ELIJAH ON HIS SHOULDERS. AS A RESULT THEY RESPECTFULLY BOW TO ELISHA INDICATING THAT THEY ARE RECOGNIZING HIS AS ELIJAH'S SUCCESSOR.

AT THE SAME TIME THEY FEEL THEY SHOULD LOOK FOR ELIJAH. THEY WONDER IF THE "SPIRIT OF THE LORD HAS TAKEN HIM UP AND CAST HIM ON SOME MOUNTAIN...(V. 16)". ELISHA INITIALLY DISAGREES WITH THEIR IDEA TO SEARCH FOR ELIJAH, BUT THEN ALLOWS THEM TO GO ON THE SEARCH - A SEARCH THAT AFTER 3 DAYS IS ENDED BECAUSE ELIJAH IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.

2 KINGS 2:19-22 - ELISHA PURIFIES THE WATER

ELISHA PERFORMS A MIRACLE AND PURIFIES THE WATER IN THE CITY OF JERICO. IT HAD BEEN "BAD" CAUSING THE LAND TO BE "UNFRUITFUL" (V. 19). SOME TRANSLATORS INDICATE THAT THIS CONCEPT OF "UNFRUITFUL" OR BARREN" IMPLIES THAT THE BAD WATER OF JERICO WAS CAUSING MISCARRIAGES OR BARRENNESS IN THE WOMEN OF THE LAND. AND ELISHA BRINGS LIFE AND HEALING INSTEAD! THIS IS THE SECOND POWERFUL ACT OF ELISHA.

WHAT WE ARE SEEING IS THAT IN A WAY, ELISHA IS PROVING TO BE THE GREAT NEW PROPHET. FIRST HE'S PROVING THIS TO HIMSELF (THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN), THEN TO THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS (KNOWING THAT THEY WOULD BE UNABLE TO FIND ELIJAH), AND TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY (PURIFYING THE WATER OF THE ENTIRE CITY OF JERICO).

2 KINGS 2:23-25 - DON'T MESS WITH THE PROPHET

V. 23 - BETHEL - INTERESTINGLY ELISHA RETURNS THE EXACT SAME WAY HE HAD TRAVELED WITH ELIJAH. FROM BETHEL TO JERICO TO THE JORDAN AND NOW BACK OVER THE JORDAN TO JERICO, RETURNING TO BETHEL. HE'S GOING RIGHT BACK TO WHERE ELIJAH WAS. PROPHETICALLY, SPIRITUALLY, MIRACULOUSLY AND EVEN PHYSICALLY, ELISHA IS THE SUCCESSOR TO THE GREAT PROPHET ELIJAH.

SO WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH?

WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH. 2 KINGS 2 ALONE INDICATES THAT ELIJAH WENT TO HEAVEN. SOME LATER JEWISH TRADITION ACCEPTED THIS IDEA WHEN IT INTERPRETS MALACHI 4:5-6 ("BEHOLD I AM GOING TO SEND YOU ELIJAH THE PROPHET BEFORE THE COMING OF THE...DAY OF THE LORD") AS ELIJAH IS GOING TO LITERALLY RETURN AS A FINAL PROPHET BEFORE THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH. IF ELIJAH IS STILL IN HEAVEN ALIVE, HE'S OBVIOUSLY ABLE TO COME BACK WHEN NEEDED. MANY JEWS TODAY EVEN SAVE A SEAT FOR ELIJAH AT THEIR PASSOVER MEAL JUST IN CASE HE DECIDES TO MAKE AN APPEARANCE.

HOWEVER, THIS IDEA CHALLENGES THE MAJORITY VIEW OF SCRIPTURE THAT TEACHES THAT DEATH IS NOT A CONSCIOUS STATE, BUT COMPARABLE TO "SLEEP". IT WAS NOT UNTIL CENTURIES LATER THAT PLATO AND OTHER GREEK PHILOSOPHER'S INTRODUCED THE IDEA THAT HUMANS HAD "SOULS" THAT WERE "IMMORTAL" AND THUS LIVED ON AFTER SOMEONE DIED. THIS IS NOT THE BIBLICAL VIEW HOWEVER. IN CONTRAST, THE BIBLICAL VIEW

IS "RESURRECTION". ACCORDING TO THIS VIEW, JESUS WILL RAISE TO LIFE AGAIN THOSE WHO DIED. THE WHOLE PERSON THAT DIED WILL LIVE AGAIN (DANIEL 12:2, JOHN 5:28-29, JOHN 11:24-26, ETC). AND AS STRANGE AS THIS IS TO HAVE TO SAY, DEAD PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY DEAD (AS IN NOT ALIVE) UNTIL THE RESURRECTION COMES. OTHERWISE, WHY DOES JESUS NEED TO RETURN IF DEATH ACTUALLY TAKES US INTO HIS PRESENCE. (THIS TOPIC DESERVES A BIGGER CONVERSATION THAN THE ENDNOTES OF 2 KINGS 2, BUT IT IS NEEDFUL TO HIGHLIGHT BRIEFLY HERE.)

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF ELIJAH COMING BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD IS THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST CAME IN THE "SPIRIT OF ELIJAH" TO PREPARE PEOPLE FOR THE MESSIAH'S (FIRST) COMING THROUGH HIS PREACHING (MATTHEW 11:14). JOHN'S MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE WAS SIMILAR TO WHAT MALACHI MENTIONS THIS SECOND COMING OF ELIJAH WOULD BE:

MALACHI 4:6 "HE WILL RESTORE THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN AND THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS, SO THAT I WILL NOT COME AND SMITE THE LAND WITH A CURSE."

SO THE NEW TESTAMENT DOESN'T PRESENT A CASE THAT ELIJAH IS GOING TO LITERALLY RETURN (PRESUMABLY FROM HEAVEN) BEFORE THE END OF THE AGE. INSTEAD JOHN THE BAPTIST AND HIS MINISTRY FULFILL THIS ROLE. JESUS NEVER TEACHES THAT THE ORIGINAL 1-2 KINGS ELIJAH IS ALIVE AND THUS ABLE TO COME AGAIN. INSTEAD HE INTERPRETED THESE OLD TESTAMENT EVENTS AS BEING SYMBOLICALLY REALIZED IN JOHN.

SO WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH? BIBLICALLY SPEAKING, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED WHEN HE WAS TAKEN UP IN THE FIERY CHARIOT OR WHAT HE DID AFTER THAT. BUT THE OLD & NEW TESTAMENT'S TEACHING ON LIFE & DEATH DOES POINT US TO THE FACT THAT AT SOME POINT AFTER THAT (WE DON'T KNOW WHEN), ELIJAH MUST HAVE DIED TOO.

JESUS SAYS: "NO ONE HAS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, BUT HE WHO DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN: THE SON OF MAN. (JOHN 3:13)

AND SPEAKING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT HEROES OF FAITH, HEBREWS TELLS US:

"ALL THESE DIED IN FAITH, WITHOUT RECEIVING THE PROMISES, BUT HAVING SEEN THEM AND HAVING WELCOMED THEM FROM A DISTANCE, AND HAVING CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND EXILES ON THE EARTH. (HEBREWS 11:13)

THE BIGGER POINT IS OFTEN MISSED IN THE DISCUSSION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH AND "HEAVEN" (ETC) THAT COMES FROM THIS TEXT IS THAT ELIJAH IS GONE. ELIJAH, THE GREATEST PROPHET OF GENERATIONS IS GONE. THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS CAN TRY AND LOOK FOR HIM, BUT HE'S GONE. ELISHA IS THE PROPHET NOW. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? WHAT IS THAT GOING TO LOOK LIKE?

THIS CHAPTER HELPS US SETTLE THE ANXIOUS HEARTS THAT MUST HAVE WONDERED IF EVIL WAS GOING TO WIN OUT NOW THAT GOD'S "MAN" (ELIJAH) WAS GONE. AFTERALL, THOUGH WE HAVE PAUSED MOMENTARILY IN OUR STORY TO FOCUS ON THIS PROPHETIC TRANSITION, IDOLATRY STILL ABOUNDS IN ISRAEL AND HER KINGS ARE EVIL.

WHAT THE NEW PROPHETIC LEADER ELISHA INDIRECTLY TEACHES US IS THAT LEADERS COME AND GO, MINISTRIES COME AND GO, BUT THE WORK OF GOD ON THE EARTH CONTINUES ON. THE GREATNESS AND POWER AND MIRACLE IS NOT DEPENDANT ON ELIJAH OR ELISHA BUT THE GOD OF ELIJAH (V. 14) AND ELISHA.

IT'S GOOD TO REMEMBER THIS LEST WE FIX OUR EYES ON THOSE THROUGH WHOM GOD WORKS, RATHER THAN ON GOD HIMSELF.