

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE JOURNEY TO EKRON

“But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel”
(Isaiah 43:22.

I scarcely know a more heart-affecting expression than this. It is the mournful language of a neglected and disregarded friend. And who is this friend? It is he, who is Love itself; it is the Father of mercies; it is the Saviour of sinners. Alas! Who has more cause for such complaint than himself! If anyone is forgotten, neglected, and mistaken on earth, it is the compassionate Friend of penitent sinners!

Do not men seem to have conspired to blot out the remembrance of him? Thousands, who are called by his name, reject him. Those who are set as pastors of his flock will not hear his voice. To be followers of the Lamb, in the present day, is too much everywhere a reproach.

- Decorum forbids even his name to be mentioned;
- Social life has cast out the Lord of glory as a disturber of its peace;
- Science increasingly disregards him in places very many;
- Art dedicates its colors and its melody to ether gods;
- Most of the writings and books which are circulated through the world, boldly disclaim any connection or friendship with him.

There is therefore sufficient reason for the mournful complaint of the Holy One of Israel: **“Thou hast not called upon me: thou hast been weary of me!”** and who can doubt that he has a right to make this complaint, or that he has the very best claim upon our affectionate remembrance?

Behold, he took our nature upon him; he became a man of unparalleled sorrows; his head was crowned with thorns; he was crucified for us!

Yes, out of free love to sinners, he yielded up himself, that he might be our Surety and Representative, standing in our place, and bearing our punishment: and, be astonished, O ye heavens, regarding as parts of his own mystical body every individual whom he has redeemed.

- He associated himself with us in his death, that he might associate us with himself in his glory
- He caused our sins to be placed to his account, that he might clothe us with his virtues;

- He suffered himself to be crushed beneath our curse, that he might raise us to his own glory.

Behold, this has he done for us! What think you then? Does he require too much of us in requiring us to remember him, to call upon him, and not to be weary of him? This requirement he makes of everyone amongst us. May the heart of everyone be open to receive it, and to comply with it! For, are there none among us to whom it may be said, You no longer wish to remember him and to be in communion with him, as you once did? You have forgotten your first love.

Once you seemed to wait upon him, but now you love the world and the things that are in the world; preferring its husks before the bread of eternal life. Is it not so?

“Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord.”

O think upon what he has done for you; how he has preserved you; how he has delivered you. There was a time when you believed that the Lord had done it! But now you have forgotten this! And forgotten even the Lord himself. But his memory is not like yours. Lo, he stands before you, and complains that you have not called upon him, but have been weary of him.

O smite upon your breast, and say, **“God be merciful unto me a sinner.”** May our meditations on the subject now to be considered serve to impress these thoughts more indelibly upon our hearts!

“And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease. But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed” (II Kings 1:2-4).

This narrative may serve for a variety of serious reflections. We divide our meditation into three Parts, showing,

- I. The application to Ekron;
- II. His Divine jealousy;
- III. The paramount claims of Jesus Christ.

I. Israel had now changed its ruler

Ahab had fallen under the hand of the Lord, and the throne was filled by his son Ahaziah, a worthless character, who did only evil in the sight of the Lord, walking the ways of his father and mother, and causing Israel to sin. He served Baal and worshiped him, and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger, as his father Ahab had done. The Almighty therefore saw it not good to sheath the sword of vengeance.

The first painful stroke upon Ahaziah was the revolt of the Moabites.

This people had for many years been tributary to the kings of Israel; but under Ahaziah they rebelled, and conquered. We have now before us another visitation which Ahaziah experienced. Standing one day on a balcony of his palace, the balustrade on which he leaned suddenly gave way. The king was precipitated to the ground, was seriously injured, and **“was sick.”**

The Lord not infrequently so arranges it, that his judgments lay hold of the ungodly and profane at the very time when they are most at their ease and security. How often have we heard of men, who, with the cup of festivity in their hands, and the sound of the harp and the viol in their ears, have been suddenly struck dead by the divine hand, have fallen paralyzed to the ground, or been seized by some other catastrophe! The severity of God is then rendered the more apparent by the contrast between their revelry and the divine visitation; and the cry against the vanity of the world, uttered by such judgments, is the more loudly and alarmingly heard, by reason of the sudden reverse.

Ahaziah lies sick; but, alas, we behold in him the same state of mind on his sick bed as we perceive in many others who come within our own observation. Here is only another proof of the melancholy truth, that the severest afflictions are ineffectual in themselves to soften the sinner's heart; and thus we see that the power which converts the soul does not consist in misfortunes and outward events, but solely in the mercy and grace of God.

How much had Ahaziah heard and seen in his father's time, which, humanly speaking, might have led him to repentance! How remarkably had the Almighty revealed himself again in Israel, and what terrific proofs had he given of his severity and jealousy!

Though all this must have been fresh in Ahaziah's memory, yet he acts as if such awful realities, with his own father's fearful end, had been only an idle tale: instead of humbling himself before the living God, his heart still cleaves to idolatry; and he sends to the Philistine oracle at Ekron, where men worshiped an idol named Baalzebub; that is, the lord of flies: probably so named because the plague of flies, which was common in that region, was attributed to his displeasure; or else, because he was honored as a protector from that plague.

The idol of Ekron was supposed to give oracular answers, through the medium of its priests, respecting future events; and it had obtained such general credence, that it was resorted to from a considerable distance. That the predictions there uttered, and the prodigies there exhibited, were connected with infernal influence, can hardly be doubted.

Pagan idolatry in general seems to have been supported and maintained by infernal magic. When, in the divine Judgments upon Antichrist and his kingdom, Satan shall suffer that signal defeat which is denounced against him in the Word of God, it will be found that it was he who created and maintained the worship of idols, and that it was from his agency that the kingdom of darkness and falsehood received its Principal support.

And when heathenism shall become bereaved of this satanical support, then will the eyes of the blind world be opened, and men will be astonished how they could have adhered for thousands of years to a mere nonentity, and will come from the east and the west the Lord in Zion.

The idol at Ekron and his oracle was the first remedy that the sick king at Samaria could think of. He assembled his servants about him, and proceeded by their means to an act of impiety as great as could well be committed in Israel.

“Go,” said he, openly and shamelessly, **“inquire Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease.”**

Conduct such as this of cannot outwardly be imitated by ourselves, because gross idolatry exists no longer among us, and the polite world is too enlightened to consult the devil in person, having long held Satan and hell to be merely the puerile notions of antiquity. Yet after all, we find upon closer inspection, our own philosophic age is full of that heathen leaven, though it is now molded into a more refined form; and experience shows that disbelief of the more **“sure word of prophecy”** only leads into new superstition.

It is true, the presentiment of an invisible world, and the necessity of entering it, it is indelibly impressed upon the human mind. But those who scorn to submit this feeling to the rule of Scripture, and to seek satisfaction in the divinely revealed record, are sure to sink under dominion of darkness and imposture. As a counterpart to the oracle at Ekron and Endor, we have, present day visionaries and somnambulists; instead of the Delphic tripod and the Dodonian oak, we have pretended prophets and fortune tellers, whose numbers are greater amongst the people than is generally supposed; and if we above believing these, still we have our forebodings, our presentiments, and our dreams, of which many are apt to make as much as of the divine oracles.

The place of the ancient heathen mysteries is occupied by a multitude of covert associations, in whose mystic obscurities thousands seek those disclosures which they refuse to accept from the hand of the living God; and though they can smile with scorn at the magicians of antiquity, they do not think it beneath them to have recourse to amulets and charms, to which popular belief ascribes mysterious powers; or they endeavor to cure diseases by what are called sympathetic remedies.

But suppose we are free from such superstitions, still, when we hear a mother entreating the physician to save her child, and when, upon any one referring to the blessing of God for success, offence is taken at this reference, is not here the same spirit as we see in Ahaziah? Is not here a running after idols, an Idolatry of means? Yet how common is this among us. How many are there who have never seriously thought of applying to the God of Israel, and who seem to know of no other God in their necessities and embarrassments, except the creature—dust and ashes!

But woe unto those who give to idols the glory which belongs to God alone! That the Lord does not regard such conduct with indifference, the sequel of this narrative will teach us.

II. What then became of Ahaziah?

He sent to Ekron, to inquire of Baalzebub; but instead of the lying voice of the idol, he hears the awful words of the living God.

The angel of the Lord directs Elijah the Tishbite to **“go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and to say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.”**

It is Christ, the Angel of the Lord, who spoke thus to Elijah. Why it was he, is not difficult to understand. The Lord God Immanuel had the greatest cause for being displeased at Ahaziah's impiety! He had done everything to gain the hearts of sinners, and to lead them to the most entire confidence in himself. During a series of ages he had visited his people Israel with manifestations of the most condescending kindness and love.

Even in the times of the patriarchs, he had shown how his **“delights were with the sons of men,”** and how ready he was to assist them with his counsel in all their affairs; not only with means ordained by himself, but even without means upon many and various occasions. He had revealed himself as **“a very present help”** to those who sincerely sought him; and had shown his lovingkindness in such a manner, that it seemed as if he lived for their sakes. Yet Israel revolted from Him, and resorted to idols. This was a heinous offence, and justly provoked his displeasure. Such was the case in the present instance. He therefore appeared himself, to complain of the ingratitude, and with how much reason does he send word to the messengers, saying, **“Is it because there is no God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?”**

We can imagine with what difficulty some will be persuaded that it was the eternal God who here appeared to Elijah, and spoke to him as the children of men are wont to speak. But we must learn to know him in his deepest humiliation, in the manger and on the cross, and become acquainted with him in that love in which he was willing to become despised and rejected in the eyes of men, in order to bring us to glory; and in which he devoted himself to death as the Lamb of God, that he might obtain for us eternal redemption by his blood.

When we have once become acquainted with him in these profound humiliations, his other condescensions will no longer astonish us. He who has seen that which is greater, ceases to be perplexed at that which is less.

Nor let anyone be offended because the mighty God appears in this history as provoked at inquiry being made at Ekron, instead of being addressed to himself. Blessed be his grace! It is because of the greatness of his love that he is not indifferent how we are affected towards him. He wishes to be loved by his people; and not this only, but with wonderful and most condescending kindness, and with a holy jealousy he watches over our love to him, and desires to possess it entirely.

Yes, his children may well be on their guard against dividing their hearts between God and mammon. He will not suffer it, but will rather use severity even towards those who are as the apple of his eye. He will come with the rod and chastise them; or he will tear from their arms the objects which rob him of his place in their hearts. For he seeks to possess their whole hearts; and how blessed are we, when He who alone is worthy of our supreme love, has obtained it.

**III. And as he desires our love entire and undivided, so it is
his will that our confidence for peace and strength
should be reposed in alone**

Immanuel must be all in all to us.

Moses said, in the spirit of prophecy, Deuteronomy 33:8, **“Let thy Thummim and thy Urim, O Levi, (let thy light and thy righteousness) be with thy Holy One whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah,**” doubtless he refers to Christ. It is as much as to say, “O Levi, do not seek thy light, and thy perfections, or thy righteousness elsewhere; do not sever thy high priesthood from Messiah; do not go to any other for thine oracles.”

But how does this apply to us? I answer, Surely a separation of the Urim and Thummim from the Holy One is effected when we are no longer satisfied with him alone. When we consult human inventions for our help and comfort instead of walking in the simplicity of honoring the Lord Christ; when we seek to be our own priests and to atone for ourselves, instead of letting all our light, and righteousness, and perfection rest with our Holy One.

There are no complaints more commonly heard among believers, than of the poor work they make of praying, praising and thanksgiving. Hence they become painfully afraid lest their poor utterances should never obtain a hearing. But remember the great Intercessor, who stands day and night before God to receive such poor petitions of his people and to present them before the throne. Remember also that the sufferings and death of Christ, his obedience and righteousness—even the whole sum of his infinite and precious merits—make intercession for you, and, as it were, pray with you.

Wherefore, believer, if you can only utter three words before God, yea, if your very voice seem stifled at the foot of his throne, yet remember that he loves you with the same love with which he hath loved his Son; and, as often as you pray, hold fast this confidence. Remember that your great Intercessor prays with you and for you, and that your prayers ascend through his righteousness. This will give unction to your petitions, and whatsoever you ask you will receive of him.

In the breastplate of the high priest were set twelve of the most precious stones, engraven with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus these names were surrounded with glory and beauty; and as they served to typify the spiritual glory and beauty which all the Israel of God possess in their true High Priest, Christ Jesus, so they may serve to remind us not to separate our sanctification from Christ, but to let it rest entirely with him. Thus let thy Urim and thy Thummim be with thy Holy One.

But, alas! In how many different ways is this precept forgotten by professed Christians, and how many systems and methods are here which disagree with it.

Proud self-sufficient man, in his hereditary depravity, would live without dependence upon Him who is made unto us of God not only wisdom and righteousness, but sanctification also. I Corinthians 1:30. For how many who call themselves Christians, are righteous in their own eyes, and pure in their own sight! And what system of iniquity has been built up for ages in support of this delusion!

Devotees to this system think, by the accomplishment of a certain daily of religious exercises, to make themselves perfect in the sight of God. Such is the system of POPERY. There are many who seek their excellence in a variety of outward observances, and would gladly persuade themselves and others that they are purified from every spot of sin. But how little do they know the depth of their own corruption, or the unspeakable holiness of God!

Whereas the foundation of all our hope and confidence ought to be only the perfection of our surety, Christ Jesus. The faith of the heart in his imputed righteousness is the only true spring and principle of all Christian virtue. Its clothing is humility, its fruit is love, its aim is the glory of God.

When counsel was asked of God in Israel, application was made to the high priest, who, by the Urim and Thummim, obtained a Divine answer. In like manner let us act, and not make ourselves our own counselors. Ye who are anxious as to what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed, what are you doing? Is your High Priest dead, and are you constrained to bear the official breastplate yourselves? Cast your cares upon him, and He will be your Counselor. Suffer not this or that particular event to confuse or startle you; all will come to pass as the great Prophet of the church has predicted.

Look around you in this present world from the vantage ground of His word, and you will find firm footing amidst the whirl of daily occurrences: you will understand, in some salutary measure, the book of providence, and will look forward with joy to the finishing of the mystery of God. The eye of the Christian looks over the gloomy foreground into the golden distances which are behind, and sees the dawn of jubilee fringing with rosy edges the clouds of the present scene of things.

Let our whole wisdom be with Christ. Let us cleave to the sure word of prophecy, so much the more courageously and faithfully, as the father of lies shall make greater efforts to seduce us from the only citadel wherein we are secure, and to strip us of our Divine armor. Away with that philosophy and science which are falsely so-called; away with the dreams of modern illuminati; away with all vain pretensions to spiritual gifts, and abide in that which ye have heard from the beginning. "Keep that which is committed unto you; but shun profane and vain babblings!" Let your light and your righteousness, your knowledge and your wisdom, rest with your Holy One, even Christ.

Remember, that as the names of the children of Israel were inscribed on the precious stones of the high priest's breastplate, so our Saviour bears the names of all his children upon his heart; and that as their names are laid upon him by the Father, so Christ's name is laid upon them. As he is, so are we in this world. In Him therefore who died for us we can triumph, and say,

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.” In him who is risen again, **“who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,”** we can triumph and say, **“O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?”**

Let not unbelief, therefore, let not spiritual bareness, let not cold-hearted prayers, or any adverse occurrence, deprive us of the enjoyment of him, so as to make us doubt of his love, and utter the unbelieving complaint, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.”

Let us assuredly believe in the unchangeable of his love, and thus be preserved in cheerful obedience and resignation.

Let us become accustomed to regard ourselves as bound to the heart of our great Mediator; and commit to this Bearer of our names before God the whole care of our safety and happiness. Of all that the Father hath given him will he lose nothing.

Let us not, then, burden ourselves with matters which God hath as little imposed upon us as we are fitted for them. Let us commit all our affairs to our great Shepherd, Mediator, and Intercessor, and, leaning on his almighty arm, go on our way rejoicing. It is thus he would have us act, and thus he fulfills in us the blessing of the prophet.

“Let thy Urim and thy Thummim be with thy Holy One!” Remember, my brethren, that he is, and ever shall be, **“all and in all.”** As he is **“made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption;”** to look after any other aid than that which is prepared for us in him is vile ingratitude, an insult offered him, a crime against his majesty.

Cursed, therefore, be the paths that lead to Endor and to Ekron! The feet must fail and be maimed that are found on these roads! There is a God in Israel! who—be astonished, O heavens—full of salvation, righteousness, and aid, will supply all our need! To whom do we owe all our confidence but to him? O let us but be dissolved in tears of joy before our King; and **“let thy Urim and thy Thummim ever be with thy Holy One!”** Amen.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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