

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER ONE

ELIJAH'S FIRST APPEARANCE

It is a brilliant description which the Lord gives us of his true church here on earth, when, in the Song of Solomon, 4:4, he says, **“Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.”**

He compares it to that strong hold of the Jebusites, on the hill of Zion, which David took. Thus the church of God also stands founded on a rock, and that rock is Christ and his blood. It rests upon the power and word of God; the eternal triune Lord bears it in his hands, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The tower of David was builded for an armoury. And when was ever the fortress of the church of Jesus Christ unprotected. For nearly six thousand years has the infernal adversary bent his bow against it, and shot at it with his fiery darts; but it stands indestructible to this day. For there is one shield over it, which is better than a thousand: where is the lance that will penetrate it?

That shield is He who is the Alpha and the Omega, and his protection who can disannul?

But David's tower was hung with weapons of mighty men of valor.

- Here, the sword of the preacher of righteousness;
- There, of Moses the meek and much tried man;
- Here, the armor of Daniel;
- There, of Paul, who fought the good fight
- Peter, divinely surnamed a rock;
- Here, helmets, breastplates, and other equipments of Reformers, a Huss and a Wickliff, a Luther, a Calvin, and a Zuinglius.

All of these zealous for the truth for the honor of God and all valiant defenders of citadel of Zion.

And behold! amongst the swords of these spiritual heroes, one which presents itself with peculiar effulgence to the eye, one which has wrought mightily for the glory of the kingdom of God, and was sharp and piercing as any could be in arduous and evil times. Who once handled that noble weapon!

It was ELIJAH THE TISHBITE; a man mighty word, and deed, and in miracles besides; who broke forth like a fire, and whose word burnt like a torch, and who was so eminently distinguished by Divine grace, that, when the Lord of glory himself appeared upon earth, the Jews said, **“It is Elias!”**

The life of Elijah may be made an abundant subject of animation and encouragement, of strength and refreshment to our faith; we intend therefore to set forth the history of this man of God in a series of discourses. We shall accompany him at one time into the streets of the royal city, and to the prince’s throne; at another, into the solitary wilderness; upon the public and tempestuous scene of his labors, and into the quiet chamber and to the humble couch watered with his tears; and learn of him how the Lord guides his people, and how his imparted strength is perfected in weakness.

May the Spirit of the Lord God bless and seal these, our meditations, imparting to them such a life and power, that many a weary heart may be refreshed, and that the feeble knees of many may be strengthened!

“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (I Kings 17:1).

Thus commences the brief record of the prophet Elijah, abruptly setting us at once in the midst of his life.

At this very first mention of him we see the whole man, living and moving, in spirit and in conduct. This manner of his introduction to our notice is itself remarkable.

In the preceding chapters the inspired historian had, as it were, dug through the wall, and discovered to us the horrible abominations in which Israel, during those melancholy times, was so deeply immersed.

- Clouds and thick darkness covered the whole land;
- The images of Baalim and Ashtaroth fearfully gleam everywhere;
- Idolatrous temples and heathen altars occupy the sacred soil;
- Every hill smokes with their sacrifices, every vale resounds with the blasphemous yells of cruel priestcraft.
- The people drink in iniquity like water, and sport in shameless rites around their idols.

Alas! alas! How is the glory of Israel departed! How is Abraham’s seed no longer discernible! Their light is become darkness, the salt has lost its savor; the fine gold has become dim! And now, while darkness reigns, a darkness which can be felt, while no cheering star gleams through the universal blackness, on a sudden the history changes, with the words, **“AND ELIJAH SAID.”** —The man seems as if drop from heaven into the midst of this awful night-piece without father, without mother, without descent, as is written of Melchizedec. Lo, he stands forth in the midst of the desolation, but not without his God.

Almost the only grain of salt in the general corruption, the only leaven that is to leaven the whole mass; and that we may learn at once who he is, he commences his career with an unheard of act of faith, by closing, in the name of his Lord, the heavens over Israel, and changing the firmament into iron and brass. Thanks be to God! The night is no longer so horrible, for a man of God now appears, like the rising moon, in the midst of it.

Let us meditate for a few moments on what is here related of Elijah:

- I. His name and circumstances.
- II. His spiritual character.
- III. The prophetic denunciation with which he comes forward into notice.

I. His *name* is Elijah

It is no useless particularity to attach importance to the names of sacred personages, and to inquire into their meaning!

The names of Scripture characters were often given by God himself. Such names served to convey a Divine promise or assurance, or taught some rule of life, or carried some Divine memorial, or indicated the character and predominant disposition of the persons who received them, or expressed some Divine calling. Thus the name of Noah signified a comforter; the name of Abraham, a father of many nations. Names were to the people like memoranda, and like the bells on the garments of the priests, reminding them of the Lord and his government, and furnishing matter for a variety of salutary reflections. To the receivers of them they ministered consolation and strength, warning and encouragement; and to others they served to attract the attention and heart to God.

I am aware, that to make things of this kind the subject of any religious consideration at present, is to expose ourselves to the imputation of weakness and superstition. How few there are, even of professed Christians, who practically believe that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, that God's providence extends to matters the most minute, and that he is often specially glorified in the "**day of small things!**"

But he who possesses this childlike faith, accounting nothing as really little in God's sight, realizing his heavenly Father's gracious presence in his house and garden, under his vine and his fig-tree—blessed indeed is that man; he possesses much joy and peace, and Divine delight at all times; wherever he is, he beholds the traces and hears the voice of God.

The name of this wondrous man was ELIJAH— that is, being interpreted, "*My God of power,*" or, "*the Lord is my strength.*" A great and excellent name and he bore it in deed and in truth. He was a man like thee or me; nothing in himself, but the strength of God was his; he could do nothing, and yet deeds of omnipotence proceeded from his hands; he lay in the dust, a worm, but was commissioned with Divine authority and power; he was a royal personage, who had power to open and shut heaven, to bid the dead to live, the living to die, and to hold judgment upon the enemies of God. Thus he might justly be called "Elijah." And is the force of this name merely, "*God strengthens me?*" Certainly not; but rather, "*God himself is my strength.*"

Here is a distinction with a difference. It is not the same thing to say, "God holds his shield before me;" and to say, "God himself is my shield." If he holds his shield before me, not a hair of my head can be touched and the evil I dread shall not come nigh me. If God himself be my shield, I then lift up my head in the raging storm, as under a serene sky, and am a partaker of the happiness of God as much in the midst of tribulation as out of it.

Peter, when released from prison, when his chains fell from his hands, and the prison doors opened to him of their own accord, might shout for joy as he went on, and say, "The shield of the Lord is around me." But Stephen, when stoned to death by his enemies might cry out, with the countenance of an angel "God is my shield!"

If "God strengthens me," then, through his grace, I experience within me a Divine power by which I can accomplish something, and feel myself arrayed and armed with a courageous and joyful spirit; I smile at partition walls that would confine me, and at barricades that would exclude me, and I fear nothing. But if, finding nothing but weakness in my soul, and trembling at the sight of the danger that surrounds me, and at the immense mountains of difficulties which lie before me;—yet, with all the shrinking of nature, I advance with holy boldness to meet them, hoping against reason and feeling, in simple faith on Him who is eternally near, who will go with me, and to whom it is an easy thing to rebuke, with a word, the ocean's waves, and to thresh the mountains so that they shall become a plain; and if I walk by faith on the waves of nature's terrors, destitute of courage and yet a hero, out of weakness made strong, and out of despondency valiant—then I can exult and say, "God is my strength;" and my feet are placed upon a rock.

What a wonderful thing is faith, which lays hold of a power to do all things through Christ strengthening us; which brings man, who is a worm, into fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; and is the means whereby strength is ordained, and praise is perfected out of the mouth of babes and sucklings!

Elijah owed not his greatness to high birth or station, or a native place of renown. He was born, as we see from the text, among the mountains of Gilead, on the other side Jordan; a region which, though famous for its plants, and its balms and spices, was mostly inhabited by blind idolaters, and overspread with the abominations of the Amorites. It lay not far from the country of the Gergesenes, where, in the time of our Lord, the devils entered into the swine; and it may be supposed that, unless from extreme necessity, no Israelite would take up his dwelling among these mountains.

It was probably in some poor abode, possibly in a wretched banished Jewish family, that Elijah was born and brought up. His birthplace, Tishbe, may he considered as only a mean and obscure village in the mountains; and the prophet in his childhood could not have known much of schools, or seats of learning, or of the great world. But it has constantly been the way of our God in all ages to take those, by whom he purposes to do things, rather out of the dust than from off the throne that all may see how everything depends upon his choice, and know that flesh and blood have not wrought his mighty works, but that to him alone belongs the glory.

Hence it was that he thus prepared in Gilead the balm which should recover the health of the daughter of Zion; and in that den of murderers, the country of the Amorites, he raised up the man, by whose instrumentality he purposed to beat down altars, execute judgment upon kings, and destroy the priests of Baal.

If we translate the word “Tishbite,” it means a CONVERTER; and how well does this name befit the whole life and vocation of our prophet!

Elijah enters on the stage of history with a word of faith and power:—“**And Elijah the Tishbite said;**” —and where was it he spake, and to whom and when? Here surely is “**the voice of one crying in the wilderness.**”

Ever since the death of Solomon the evil of idolatry had been coming in like a flood, and no barrier could any longer avail to keep out the torrent of general corruption. The despotic declaration of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, upon coming to the throne, that if his father had scourged the people with whips, he would chastise them with scorpions, had occasioned such a disaffection, that the ten tribes had revolted, and formed a separate kingdom under Jeroboam. Only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained, subject to the house of David, and formed the kingdom of Judah; while the ten rebellious tribes styled themselves the kingdom of Israel.

The kings of Judah, who possessed the south of the promised land, resided at Jerusalem, on Mount Zion. The kingdom of Israel comprised all the northern districts, and its royal residence was first the fortified hill of Thirza, and afterwards the city of Samaria. The two kingdoms were at almost perpetual war with each other; but this was not the greatest evil. A thousand times worse was their internal disorder.

Jeroboam began his reign by introducing, from political motives, *a new idolatry*. He was apprehensive that, if the people continued in connection with the temple and the worship of God at Jerusalem, they would gradually fall away from him again, and return under the dominion of the house of David. He therefore made an imitation of the golden cherubim of the temple, transferred some of the festivals to other seasons, and chose priests out of all the tribes of the people, at his own pleasure, without restriction to the tribe of Levi.

This unlawful worship became open idolatry, when, in the year 900 before the birth of Christ, king Ahab, that tame obsequious slave of his bloodthirsty wife Jezebel, ascended the throne of Israel. Then it was, at the instigation of this ungodly woman of Sidon, that the worship of Baal became the established religion of the country, and the worshipers of the true God were persecuted with fire and sword.

O! The sad and evil times which now came on! The gross darkness which now covered the land; the horrible abominations which now went on accumulating! Gloomy idol temples rose in every direction; profane altars, stained with the blood of prophets and other holy men, bade defiance to the Most High, and called for Divine jealousy and vengeance. It seemed as if Satan had transferred his residence from hell to earth, and striving to obscure the light of heaven with the smoke and vapor of the most horrible idolatry.

Such were the times, such the awful state of things, when Elijah, the man of God, stood up. The kingdom of Ahab and Jezebel is the dark field of labor on which he enters, in the name of God, and where we are to behold him employed.

- How will he conduct himself in the midst of such a crooked and perverse generation?
- How will he navigate this stormy sea?
- How will he surmount walls and barriers like these?

Such questions will be fully answered as we proceed, and by every answer I trust we shall be strengthened in the faith, and constrained joyfully to exclaim, "**The Lord, he God! the Lord, he is God!**"

II. Let us now take a view of Elijah's *spiritual character*, the relation in which he stood toward God

This he indicates himself in the text, where he exclaims, "**As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand.**" Elijah stood before the God of Israel: such was his spiritual position and situation; such the characteristic state of his inward life.

Is it asked: Who is the God of Israel?

Who then was the angel that conversed with Abraham in the plain of Mamre, and the mysterious person in the form of man, who wrestled with Jacob till daybreak, and said to him, "**Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and has prevailed**" (Genesis 32:28).

What was that appearance in the burning bush at the foot of Horeb, and that bright and wondrous Presence, of which God the Father said unto Moses in the desert, "**My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest**" (Exodus 33:14).

Who was that living Rock which followed the people of Israel through the wilderness in their journey to Canaan; or that Captain of the Lord's host who appeared, with a drawn sword in his hand, unto Joshua, and who was himself the sword of Joshua's victories and the shield of his help? Joshua 5:13-15.

Dost thou know him well? MESSIAH is his name! He is the Lord, the God of Israel! Before him stand the thousands of thousands; before him, the angels whom he makes as the winds, and his ministers whom he makes as the flames of fire, before him stood Elijah.

"**Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee!**" so spake the queen of Sheba to Solomon. I Kings 10:8. But a greater than Solomon is here! And how much happier are those servants who stand always in the presence of the God of Israel! But no one can ever stand before him in his own strength. Those whom he suffers to appear before him, stand on the foundation of the Lord; stand in his righteousness and beauty.

For with an iron Sceptre he casts down all who dare present themselves before him in their own footing, or behold him in their own strength. Or lift up the head before him in their own righteousness; this he can never endure. But to the worm in the dust, to the Poor self-renouncing penitent, lying in his blood, he says, "***Lift thyself up, stand before me, behold my face with comfort, and be not afraid!***"

He that desires to lift up the head in his presence, must have drunk of the brook in the way, must have lain prostrate before him in the dust, must have abased and humbled himself.

How often may Elijah have fallen on his face before him among the mountains of Gilead, how many tears may he have shed in solitary caves and caverns, before he could say, "**As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, before whom I stand!**"

Elijah was a man reconciled to God in Christ Jesus, the promised Messiah, and clothed with his righteousness. This is implied his words, "**I stand before the Lord God of Israel;**" and is further evident from his having received the honor, a thousand years afterwards, to be a witness with Moses, on Mount Tabor, of the transfiguration of his Lord.

But *standing before the Lord*, expresses something more than a state of reconciliation in general. I stand before the Lord, when I desire above all things that the will of the Lord may be at all times plainly manifested to me, and that I may do nothing, from one moment to another, but what shall please him and promote his glory; when I keep my eyes waking, and place myself as it were at my post, to watch for the tokens of my King, and listen attentively with my spirit to his voice, and his commands within me and without; when I desire, according to the least of his intimations, to run the way of his commandments—I then stand before the Lord.

Thus Elijah stood before the Lord. To be an instrument for the accomplishment of the divine will, and for the glorifying of his name, was his ardent desire; he could say with Isaiah's watchman, "**Lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the day-time, and I am set in my ward whole nights**" (Isaiah 21:8). His life was a hearkening to God's voice; he passed his days in the presence of his eternal King, and "**Lord, speak! for thy servant heareth,**" was his watchword.

Such was Elijah, by the grace of God, and thus did he stand before the Lord God of Israel.

III. We shall consider the *denunciation* Elijah proclaimed

Let us direct our eyes to Samaria, that idolatrous city. There stands the man of God in the midst of foes, before the tyrant Ahab, and opens his mouth boldly and valiantly, and exclaims in such a manner as to make the people's ears tingle, "**As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.**"

Elijah—What art thou doing? What a risk thou art incurring! Is not this putting the honor of the Lord at stake? Will they not ridicule not only thee, but him also, if there be any delay in what thou hast announced? Yes; but Elijah is not afraid of this. He knows that the word of the Lord in his mouth is truth.

But how was it that Elijah was empowered to make such an announcement? The prophet, full of holy jealousy for the honor of his God, felt an inward assurance that such a chastisement upon the land would tend to melt the hardened hearts of the people, and to restore the glory of the Lord's name. He brought this matter before the Lord, as James tells us at the end of his epistle, ch. 5:17.

“Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain?”

And Amen! was the answer from above in his soul. Amen, be it so! It is given into thy hands to shut and to open heaven. Elijah took this Amen of the living God as a sword in his hand: depending upon this Amen, he prophesied drought with Divine infallibility.

The whole country of Samaria seemed to shake her head at it, and to laugh at his prediction. The luxuriant pastures and the well-watered fields seemed to exclaim together, “This judgment shall not be executed!”—and a thousand springs and brooks, flowing through the land, and the vapory hills, which form and attract the clouds, all seemed to join together to falsify his word. But Elijah was not confounded; with the Amen of his God in the hand of his faith, what were natural appearances or reasonings to him!

His voice was more mighty than that of many waters, for it was the voice of God within him; neither springs, nor brooks, nor clouds, nor the richest luxuriance of vegetation could aught avail against that word, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, over this land shall come a drought.”

So, sincere Christian, do thou also believe the Amen which thou hast received from God in thy heart respecting his adoption of thee, and his grace toward thee!

Suffer not thyself to be confounded either by thy objecting nature, or by the weakness of the flesh; either by the scruples of reason, or by the devil, the spirit that always gainsayeth. Keep a firm hold, by faith, of the Divine Amen once given thee, and abide by it, and say, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, and endureth forever, nothing shall condemn me, or separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

“As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word!”

Elijah said it, and immediately heaven and earth changed their appearance. The one became as iron, and the other as brass, and the dew of heaven was restrained. The word of the prophet struck, like a fever, into the heart of the earth, withering and scorching; and all that was fresh and green faded and hung its head; every stream and rivulet dried up, and all that had breath lay gasping and languishing on the ground.

Neither dew, nor rain, fell during three years and six months. Such were the effects produced by the voice of man—but a man who was in communion and accord with the Almighty.

In conclusion, I say unto you, my people, whom the Lord hath so highly favored; verily, if the high places in your hearts are not removed, the idolatry rooted out, the Baalim demolished, before Whom, alas, so many of you, secretly or more openly, bow the knee, it will be more tolerable for the land of Samaria and Israel than for you.

O it is already as if heaven had begun to close upon us. How sparingly does the dew of the Spirit fall! how few arise from the dead; and how long is it since a plenteous shower of heavenly rain has refreshed our vale! *

* The Valley of Barmen, where the author resides.

My friends, what is the cause of this? Has an Elijah stood forth in the midst of us with his word, “**As the Lord liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain these years?**” Or does Elijah sleep, forgetting to re-open what was shut up?

Church of God, thou little flock of Israel, thou people of his possession, thou art as Elijah. Yes, thy voice can call forth clouds and rain. Arise, and call upon thy God! for “**the effectual fervent prayer righteous man availeth much!**” (James 5:16)

Pray for dew and rain upon the dry land, and to announce it from the “Amen” of thy heart, say, The drought will soon be at an end; get thee up, eat and drink, and be joyful, for there is a sound of abundance of rain. May God graciously give it! Amen.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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