

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

F. W. Krummacher, D. D.

Copyright © 1880

CHAPTER TWELVE

ARRIVAL AT MOUNT HOREB

Many a true Christian has enjoyed luminous intervals in his life, which may be called his moments on Tabor. Such an interval was that experienced by Moses, when, overpowered by holy zeal for the Honor of God, and carried away by the ardor of a superhuman love, forgetting himself, he broke out, in the astonishing words:—“**Yet now if thou wilt forgive them their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book!**” And such, if we follow the common translation of the passage, Romans 9:3, appears to have been the case with the apostle Paul, when he said, he could wish that himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. If our cool, sober, calculating people of the present day are unable to comprehend ecstatic expressions like these, it is no wonder, neither is it any proof that holier men were not sincere in their wonderful desires.

An infant is incompetent to enter into the ideas of a courageous and valiant warrior; still there were such men as Gideon and David. Even Moses or Paul, after the Divine ecstasy of the moment was over, might feel astonished at the elevation to which their souls had been raised. For in such moments they were transported very far above their ordinary feelings.

You know, besides Paul and Moses, a third who was all along actuated thus; who said, “**I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!**” He actually carried his desire into effect: He was willingly “**made a curse for us.**” Many who call themselves Christians shake their heads at this truth; they do not believe that the love of the Lord Jesus went so far as to undergo the penalty belonging to the sins of the world. Were these adversaries of the atonement in the right, it would follow that the disciples, Moses and Paul, were above their Master in charity to Mankind. Therefore, from this very love on the part of his disciples, we can show that they are in the wrong. For, from whom did those disciples derive their fervor of love? Was it from themselves? Certainly not! It was from their Saviour’s fountain of love. Out of his fullness did they receive. As then the stream is, such must the fountain be; and what we perceive in the copy, must be found in the original. There is therefore a love in the heart of Jesus, which could desire to become an anathema for sinners; else how could such a love have been found in his disciples?

The recollection, however, of such love as this, in Moses or in Paul, is not altogether advantageous to the prophet Elijah, in comparing the scene of his life which we are now about, to contemplate for it contains a striking contrast to the conduct of those two saints.

“And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake” (I Kings 19:9-11).

Here we have the man of God again before us, in circumstances which are overruled to increase his humility and experience the life of God in his soul. The particulars which this portion of Elijah’s history brings before us are well worth our attentive consideration.

Here is,

- I. The night’s lodging in the cave;
- II. The Divine reproof;
- III. The prophet’s complaint;
- IV. The direction to appear before the,

I. The prophet’s efforts to restore Israel to the faith of their fathers had apparently failed

The mighty miracle on Carmel seemed to have produced no other fruit than redoubled hatred on the part of the inveterate idolaters: Jezebel’s murderous intentions had been brought to ripeness by this event. The prophet having been informed of this, fled without Divine direction. **“He went whither he would, to save his life.”** His distress increased with every step, and reached its height upon his arrival in the wilderness. He thought himself forsaken of God; in having become weary of life, he prayed for death; whereupon God, by an angel, sent him refreshment in body and spirit. He learnt that he was still conducted of God, and that the divine thoughts towards him were thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give him an expected end. Jeremiah 29:11. In the strength of the food of which he had partaken, and of the joyfully surprising angelic message, he entered upon the **“hard journey,”** and traversed the desert for forty days and nights, with high expectations of the result, and of the end that should terminate these solitary wanderings.

Now, when the forty days are drawing to a close, he sees in the azure distance a rocky mountain glistening before him, which soon becomes better known to him by its peculiar appearance and remarkable summits. It was Mount Sinai, towering like a magnificent temple. Another height near it appeared like its antechamber; it was lower than the former, but as boldly formed, and as wild and rocky. This was Horeb. What must have been the sensations of an Elijah at first beholding these sacred and ever-memorable heights! What elevating thoughts and delightful hopes might then have engaged his mind! Here, he might suppose, God could again meet him in all the glory of his benignity, and unfold to him truths respecting the restoration of Israel which would change his mourning into rejoicing, and gird him with gladness.

- As it was on Horeb that the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Elijah would in a lively manner be reminded of the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush, and would be refreshed in expecting it for himself.
- As it was the rock of Horeb was smitten and yielded a miraculous supply of water to the hosts of Israel, Elijah would here think of a water which would refresh and invigorate his soul.
- As it was on Horeb that the uplifted hand of the man of God prostrated the hostile strength of Amalek, and gave Joshua his glorious victory over the armies of the aliens, Elijah perhaps might reckon upon hearing from Horeb the sentence upon Ahab and Jezebel which would put down blasphemy and the destruction of souls in Israel!
- On Horeb God renewed his gracious covenant with his people, after he had delivered them from the iron furnace of Egypt; and Elijah might expect a renewal of his covenant with the Lord, fresh assurances and promises respecting his work of reformation.

Elijah being arrived at the mount of God, we may further imagine him climbing the rocky ridges to its summit with feelings of profoundest veneration. His feet stand upon Horeb, and doubtless his spirit prays in fervent expectation of further communications from the Lord. He would naturally experience alternations of hope and fear. He cannot but think that the Lord has conducted him to Horeb, yet he knows not wherefore, at least on what particular errand.

He is in an almost indescribable solitude. Nothing but rugged layers of stone, one above another, around him, and tangled thickets, with here and there a melancholy cypress or a gloomy tamarisk. Also, the devout wanderer might be at a loss what to think of his situation, and feel as if he were banished from the whole world! No trace of any human being is to be perceived.

The horror of this lonely, forsaken situation would be augmented by the approach of night. Ought he to travel on? He cannot do it. He feels the limit of his journey to be assigned him here. The strength which bore him through the desert, perhaps, has forsaken him; and, no less so, the cheerful spirit and the courage to proceed, and therefore nothing is left him but to seek out some retreat which may shelter him from wild beasts and poisonous serpents. He wraps his mantle around him, creeps into a gloomy cave, of which there are many on this rocky mountain, and lies down in order to pass the night in this melancholy lodging. This was, probably, one of the most anxious nights of his life; for, instead of enjoying the cheering manifestations of the Divine presence, or realizing any of the high expectations he might have indulged on his miraculous journey to Horeb, he was obliged, in most comfortless outward circumstances, to bury himself in the horrors of a desolate cavern. It may be easily supposed that no sleep could close the good man's eyes that melancholy night.

Satan, too, would not be inactive in his attempts against so decided an enemy, but would summon all his strength to overthrow the faith of the hard-trying prophet and to wound him with his fiery darts. For the circumstances in which Elijah was now placed would give to the father of lies great advantage in tempting him to doubt and distrust the love, and word, and promises of God, as if the Keeper of Israel himself could sleep, or, if not, could delight in chastising and trying his servants. "Where is now thy God?" might, be suggested to Elijah. "Where is now thy boasted happiness in his service?" And who knows whether the prophet was still ready for the conflict, or took the field fully armed, with cheerful courage, to resist such wiliness of Satan.

This at least we know, that if the invisible arms had not held him, which were wont to uphold him, especially when he was least aware of it, the temptation of despair would have swallowed him up.

II. Elijah takes up his abode in the cave

He thus further experiences that God's ways with his servants lead to mortification and total self-denial. While he is there, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, **“What doest thou here, Elijah?”**

Elijah at once recognizes the voice of the Almighty. But what an unexpected question was this! What a contrast to the expectations he had probably carried with him to Horeb! Perhaps he had thought that the whole journey from Samaria hither had been a Divine path, and that the Lord himself had called him to Horeb in order to enrich him there with spiritual enjoyments. And now such a salutation, or rather such an alarming inquiry! It must, however, have served to undeceive him, and lead him to consider the state of his heart. It placed before him the arbitrariness of his flight from Jezreel. It reminded him especially of the weakness of his faith; it must have made him ashamed, and have incited him to the profoundest humiliation.

When troubles come upon us, and we are disposed to lament over disappointed hopes and undertakings, God is gracious in making known to us our infirmities and sins, which are in one way or another the occasion of every disquietude. Unless this is done, we are in danger of misunderstanding his dealings with us, and of distrusting his love and faithfulness. A sense of our own guilt and unworthiness is the best preservative against those pangs of the heart which Asaph speaks of, Psalm 73:21. As it serves to explain many apparently hard passages of the divine conduct towards us, so it prevents the peevish and complaining thoughts which I would often arise within us respecting the hardships of our condition. How satisfied do we then become! nay, how heartily glad and thankful when only a glimpse of forgiveness, a single ray of undeserved favor shines once more into our hearts! We seem as if needing nothing more to make us happy; we submit humbly and serenely under the divine will, and all murmurings are exchanged for contrite and thankful confessions. **“O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee”** (Daniel 9: 7, 8).

“What doest thou here?” By an inquiry of this sort, divinely applied to the conscience, many a one has been shaken out of carnal security for the rest of his life. Painful indeed has been the experience many a sinner when thus overtaken on the paths which lead to death. But this has sometimes ended in the most happy result; for men have thus, like the prodigal son, **“come to themselves,”** turned to their Father's house and found a happy welcome there. But we may be even associated with the children of God, and yet the same question may surprise and alarm the conscience, **“What doest thou here?”** suggesting that we do not really belong to such society as we have mingled with, and may thus produce great distress and perplexity in the soul; leading it however to deep self-examination. It is also made the means of awakening sleepers in Zion, who are hereby aroused to spiritual conflict; and the unwatchful and careless are prevented from going further astray.

Thus it acts as a means of separating them more entirely from the spirit and the ways of this vain world, and of attaching them more securely to the service of the Lord Jesus.

But, alas, how many among us are there, of whom, although they bear the Christian name, it is to be feared that they are wandering in the wilderness out of the way of God? O that the Almighty may this day meet them with the inquiry, "**What doest thou here?**" may bring them to their right minds, and guide them into that way of peace which hitherto they have not known!

III. The prophet, at this question, recollects himself

He answers, "**I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts.**" This, indeed, was true, and he could say with the Psalmist, "**The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.**"

Alas, in the Laodicean character of the present day, how little is there of this spirit! Men can see and hear much that, is contrary to God, with an indifference that speaks but too plainly how lukewarm they are in his service, how unconcerned they are for his glory.

Where, alas, do we see that fervor with which the ancient saints, the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors testified to the truth in their days? How earnestly did they cry day and night to God, that he would exalt himself in his own strength among the nations! Where is that self-devotedness which Moses showed when he prayed, "**Yet if now thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book;**" where do we now find such fervent intercession for others? O pray, pray, my brethren, that the spirit of ancient wisdom, love, and zeal may again be poured out with awakening and reviving energy upon us!

"**The children of Israel,**" continues Elijah, "**have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword.**"

Now, if this be a sufficient cause for being zealous for the honor of God, how is it that we continue so unmoved? Why do we not glow with zeal for the Lord of Hosts? Are not the banners of rebellion against God waving openly enough around us? and are there not enough blasphemers and despisers, who have forsaken the covenant, in the midst of us? Must the name of God be still more openly profaned than it is already, in word and in deed, amongst us? And must the measure of iniquity become still more full, before we will wrestle with God, that he may exalt himself in the earth, and fill it with his glory? Is not this the reason of our lukewarmness, that we do not keep our own hearts with all diligence, out of which are the issues of life?

Personal and practical piety, real spiritual-mindedness, is a thing too little sustained by the diligent use of means in our closets. Is not this the true state of the case? Do we indeed give ourselves time to allow the fire of devotional love to kindle in our hearts? Or do we not suffer ourselves, after some few superficial performances in private, to be led away to other pursuits? How then is it ever likely that, in such a state of mind, we should be truly zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and for the spiritual interests of our brethren, or be able to say, with Jeremiah, "**I am pained at my very heart;**" or, "It was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and was unable to restrain myself" (Jeremiah 4:19; 20:9).

Elijah says further, **“I, even I only, am left.”**

The only one, he means, on the field of battle; for he was not the only child of God in Israel; for the others had fled, or were hidden in the rocks.

“And they seek my life, to take it away.”

He does not disguise it, that to save his own life he had left Samaria and fled to the wilderness, but relates the matter with all sincerity and candor.

God is gracious to those who open their hearts to him, however it may reflect upon themselves. But however candid this confession of Elijah may be, it does not sound quite right. However much holy indignation it expresses at the general contempt put upon the name of the Lord, there is human chagrin and vexation mixed with it, and it betrays an undue excitement of natural feeling.

Moses, when he placed himself in the breach for his idolatrous people, and entreated the Lord to blot him out of his book if he would not forgive them, appears greater to us, and in a more glorious light, than Elijah does in this instance. For he seems to accuse his people with some natural vexation and vehemence and even to plead against them before the Lord. Nay, more; his saying to God, how very jealous he had been for him, and then laying before him the fruitlessness of this jealousy and the unexpected and grievous result of his activity, seems to imply some complaint against God himself, as if he had said, “Lord, why hast thou done this to me? How couldst thou leave thy servant to be treated thus? How so forsake the work of thine own hands?”

The Lord, however, purposes answering their accusations himself; and vouchsafes him such a reply as will preserve him, all his life after, from similar mistakes.

IV. “And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord”

This divine injunction, I could wish, in a certain sense, that you would also lay to heart. It has reference to all who are situated in some respects as Elijah. The cave from which he was bidden to go forth, may remind us of the darkness and perplexity in which our own hearts have involved us. Happy he who perceives it, and whose eyes are opened to see the spiritual darkness and corruption generated from his own bosom! But he must not think to bury himself in this. It would be perverse and injurious so to do. Many amongst us however have often done so; they have imprisoned themselves in the mere thoughts of their own hearts, and we hear nothing from some, but complainings of the deadness, depravity, poverty and helplessness of their souls: truths, all good and salutary in themselves, but wretchedly misapplied to paralyze every spiritual and benevolent exertion. O, go ye forth from such a cavern of darkness, and stand upon the mount before the Lord! You will find neither life, light nor peace in your own hearts. Go forth, in spirit, from your gloomy cell to the mount: behold the Lamb of God: look up to him who was suspended on the cross for the ungodly; contemplate his spirit, his love, his merits! It is this which makes the believer courageous, joyful, and strong; and imparts new life to his spirit.

The same may be said to those who are troubled with evil thoughts, and incited to evil actions. He that busies himself in the painful consideration of such things, who lingers amidst the dark horrors of these temptations, looking only at the fiery darts which crowd upon him; he who stays in such a cavern as this, is liable to be swallowed up in despair. But let us go forth out of the cave; let us stand upon the mount before the Lord, where Jesus presents himself, having been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, and we shall find him in all points able also to succor them that are tempted. In the mount, the Lord shall be seen as having **“spoiled principalities and powers, as having made a show of them openly, and as ascended on high, having led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.”**

Contemplate this mighty Conqueror, in whom you have also overcome; bring all your wretchedness before his throne, roll your burden upon him, and he shall sustain you; courage and strength shall be given to you; you shall have victory and triumph over the world, the devil and the flesh.

The same may be said to all who suffer under the pressure of temporal trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, disgrace or any other adversity. Do the waves of this world thus toss you? Look not with Peter at the storm, instead of looking to Him who can rebuke it; look not with Martha to the pit of corruption, instead of to Him who is the resurrection and the life; this is only to imprison ourselves spiritually in our own gloomy cave. There can be neither joy nor peace in doing this.

Go forth! Go forth! Stretch forth the hand of faith toward the mighty and outstretched arm of Divine love; spread the wings of hope; stand forth upon the mount whereon is laid the sure foundation of Zion. Hereby you will learn something of the paternal heart of Him, who, though his ways are mysterious, nevertheless doeth all things well, and you will gain a prospect of that better country where **“they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”**

Whatever our circumstances may be, to place ourselves on every occasion before the Lord, with an open heart, without reserve or guile, is the grand secret of happiness and peace this world. Yes, and when the outward man itself perisheth, and the eye grows dim in the shadow of death, the soul shall hear a voice behind it, saying, **“Go forth, and stand on the heavenly mount before the Lord!”**

~ end of chapter 12 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
