

Eritrean Catholic Gheez-Rite Chaplaincy (ECGRC)

St. Francis Of Assisi R C Church

Pottery Lane

London, W11 4NQ

HOW FAR HAVE YOU WALKED?

Reading: 2Kings 2:1-18

Departure: From *Gilgal*

Places to go: 1- *Beth-el*

2- *Jericho*

3- *The Jordan*

Elijah was a great prophet of God in his time. If we read about him in the previous chapter, we will discover that he was a fiery prophet. King Ahaziah sent a group of fifty soldiers with a captain to bring Elijah to him from the mountain of God, three times. Since the first two captains approached him in violence, Elijah called the fire of God upon them and it devoured them with their soldiers. But the third one was humble and wise enough to beg the mercy of God upon him and his soldiers. With that he could save his life and the lives of his soldiers. Let Elijah call the fire of God's consuming power, and you will see fire falling from heaven in answer to his prayer. There was some thing very special about him and his ministry.

He had confronted 450 false prophets of Baal with his fiery faith in the God of his fathers. The challenge he brought forward was, to prove by fire who the True God was. The God who answers with fire, the God who devours the fire-less sacrifice with His heavenly fire is the True God; if someone or something believed to be god couldn't answer with fire, then he or it is not God. Baal couldn't do that while the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob could devour Elijah's sacrifice with His heavenly Fire (see 1Kings 18:16-40). The fire of God comes to us to cleanse and purify and to bless if we are good receivers; but it is also a terribly devouring power to those who resist it stubbornly.

It seems where the name of Elijah is mentioned, there will be some kind of fiery appearance of the Lord through his ministry. It was this same Elijah who decided to make Elisha his successor throwing his cloak over the young farmer who was ploughing in his father's field (see 1Kings 19:19-21).

Our study now is not about Elijah but Elisha, who followed the former until he was taken away to heaven by fiery chariots. Elisha's story begins by his following his master, Elijah. When Elijah threw his cloak around him, he knew he was called by God to be the former's successor as a prophet and he never hesitated about that. He asked to be given time to say good-bye to his parents and immediately he slaughtered his yoke of oxen. The fact he burned the ploughing equipment to cook their meat shows how determined he was in following his master. There would be no way of returning to his old trade, old way of life. From now on he would be a new person with a new mission. Since that encounter with Elijah, he never looked back to his family or work. He followed and served his master wholeheartedly until his ascension into heaven.

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Then came that day in which Elijah was about to be taken to heaven in the chariots of fire, and Elisha knew about that. That was why he didn't like to leave him alone before he was taken away from him. He wanted to be with him when he would be taken away from him. He wanted to see for himself what would happen to Elijah. Therefore, he should have been with his master wherever he goes, wherever he is and whatever he does and it paid off; yes he got what he wanted.

But what significance does this have to us today? And especially what do the places he had to go following Elijah have to say to us today? This story has a wonderful meaning for us in many ways. Let us begin with the places he had to go following his master.

1. Gilgal (I've rolled away your reproach from you. /see Joshua 5:/)

It was at Gilgal that the Israelites were circumcised by Joshua before they captured Jericho. It was a place of cleansing from once eniquities; it was a place of reconciliation. It was the first stage towards other bigger victories. It also marked the end of manna feeding for the Israelites. It was at Gilgal that they ate the last Passover meal before they entered Jericho and subsequently, inherited the land of Canaan as the Lord of Hosts had promised their forefathers centuries before. Gilgal is so important in one's spiritual journey but it is only the beginning not the end of the road. Unfortunately many prefer it to be their destination. Definitely, you have been there when you first came to the Lord confessing your sins and leaving your old self to your back. Where are you now? Have you moved ahead or are still lingering there? If you have moved ahead, well done; go forward still. If you are still standing there, I am afraid, let me tell you one thing, you are not doing well. So move on!

When Elijah was about to ascend to heaven, he begun his journey with Elisha from Gilgal. He tried to leave Elisha there, but the later couldn't be persuaded. His answer was: "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." (see 2Kings 2:2) So they went down to Beth-el.

2. Beth-el (house of God)

Elijah was trying to avoid Elisha during his rapture; but the later was aware of what was about to happen. So he refused to depart from his master. Not only Elisha but the prophetic groups around Beth-el knew that as well.

Beth-el had a long and impressive history. It was there that the Lord God appeared to Jacob in a dream while he was fleeing from his brother after taking the later's blessing cheating their father. The place was formerly known as Luz, but after his dream, Jacob called it Beth-el (the house of God) for he has seen the glory of God there. This was what Jacob said to himself: **"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. ...How awesome is this place! This is non other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."** (Genesis 28:16-17)

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It is here that we experience the wonderful presence of God. It is a place which we hardly want to leave but life must continue; there must be growth onwards and upwards. After experiencing the joys of being in Beth-el, who dares to depart early? Not even Peter and his companions. They were very reluctant to leave Tabor's glory and St Peter said to Jesus: "Master, it is good for us be here. Let us put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (Luke 9:33) To make things clear for us the Evangelist adds the following crucial clue: "He (Peter) did not know what he was saying". Yes once dazzled with the glory of God, it seems to us it is over; that we have reached the pick of revelation, but still there is a journey to be completed. Elisha has not finished his journey with Elijah at Beth-el no matter dazzling it were for him to reach so far. He knew, if he were to partake a portion from Elijah's Spirit, he had to go all the way down with his master. Thus he refused again to stop his journey at Beth-el. Have you not yet reached your Beth-el in following your master Jesus so far? Go on don't stop there! The road is not yet walked; take heart and continue from where you find yourself at this moment.

3. Jericho

The walls of Jericho are well known to any Bible reading person. It was there that the power of the praise of God's people seen to effect the crumbling of the strong walls in front of Joshua and his army (see Joshua 6:1-27). Elisha was determined to follow Elijah wherever he goes, whether it is Beth-el or Jericho, he was there to follow. Jericho is the sign of a place where the arm of God can be seen working powerfully. Our spiritual journey should reach that stage if we want to see God's power in us.

In the New Testament, Jericho constitutes both the beautiful and the ugly characters of humanity. To begin with the beautiful, it was there that the Lord Jesus wrought some of His incredible miracles and acts of mercy. It was in Jericho that Jesus healed the blind man Bartimaeus (see Mt 20:29 ff; Mk 10:46 ff; Lk 18:35 ff). It was there that Zachaeus the publican hosted Jesus at his house (this story is recorded for us by St Luke. See Lk 19:1 ff). God's mercy, even to a publican, was manifested there. This was Jericho at its best; but it had also a notorious side about it. It was the den of notorious robbers. It was the scene of the parable of the good Samaritan (the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, to be precise. See Lk 10:29 ff). Even in this parable, all the parties were not bad people, the good Samaritan could make up for what the others had messed up. Here, we are concerned about the Jericho of Joshua's and Elisha's times; Jericho of blessings! Have you reached there? If not, you have a serious job to be done. So stand up and move forward.

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4. The Jordan

The last stage of the pair's journey was the Jordan. This river had witnessed many wonderful events in the history of God's people. It was the culmination of Moses' mission and the beginning of Joshua's. Now it would be once again the culmination of Elijah's mission and the beginning of Elisha's mission. Moses led his people for forty years in the wilderness and he reached at the edges of the Jordan; he would see it down from the mountain of God but he wouldn't cross it. Joshua would take over the mission of leading the people into the Promised Land. All that would take place only after they cross the Jordan. Now, Elijah was about to conclude his prophetic mission and there was no better place for him to do that than the Jordan. This time, he would cross it; so did his disciple. He wouldn't allow his master to depart without his presence, and if necessary, without his service. He had served him all his life was it fair for him to abandon his master at this stage? Far from it! He was determined to follow him until the end.

The Jordan had witnessed the crossing of the Israelites on its dry beds long ago. Now it is time for it to witness the same miracle though there were only two men to cross it this time. Thus Elijah rolled his cloak and struck the water of the Jordan with it (mind that it was the same cloak he threw over Elisha when he called him to be his successor). The Jordan witnessed the miracle of Joshua once again. It was only after they crossed the Jordan over on dry ground that Elijah ask his disciple to ask him for what he wanted him to do for him, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" (2Kgs 2:9) It was obvious that Elisha wouldn't return leaving Elijah by himself. The crossing of the Jordan was very important for Elijah to reveal what was about to happen to him shortly. Elisha's perseverance paid off. He knew what he should ask for; it was not nothing less than a double portion of his master's spirit to rest on him. He wanted to have a double portion of Elijah's spirit to operate in him. What a bold and difficult demand! All his following until that point could have meaning only if he could see Elijah when he was taken from him; and he did it! He did not allow himself to be distracted with any thing at all. Since he was faithful and perseverant, he could see Elijah when he was taken, and as a result of it he could hold of his master's cloak which had fallen from Elijah and take it with him. With it he stroke the waters of the Jordan again and could divide them as Elijah did moments ago. It was evident to all that the spirit of Elijah had rested on him. Without him saying any thing about what happened to him, the company of prophets discerned that he had received his predecessor's spirit. After crossing the Jordan, Elisha's life couldn't be the same. He was totally a different person. He immediately succeeded his master and started to perform the same wonderful miracles.

Where have you reached my friend? Are you still beyond the Jordan? Stuck at Gilgal, Beth-el or Jericho? Remember you are at that Elisha, the disciple, the follower. Your Elijah is the Lord Jesus Christ whom you decided to follow wherever he leads. Where are you now? If you want to receive a double portion of His Spirit, follow Him up to the Jordan. Don't stop

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mid-way. The Lord Jesus Christ had walked those places too; He cured the blind in Jericho, met Zachaeus there. He was baptised in the waters of the Jordan after which, He began His public ministry. It was very important for Jesus to pass through the waters of the Jordan; do you think you shouldn't do that? It was there that He was filled with the Holy Spirit; He was empowered with the power of His Father. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, we need to go all the way with the Lord and pass through the waters of the Jordan. Otherwise, we will remain in the same complacent situation with no spiritual growth whatsoever. Yes, we need to pass through the experiences of Gilgal, Beth-el, Jericho and last but not least, the Jordan.

May the Lord be blessed forever and ever in our lives. Amen.

Abba Ephrem Andom