

THE MANNER OF ELISHA'S MINISTRY (PART ONE)

- Bro. Sam. Popoola

Elisha the Prophet took over from Elijah. Elijah was a prophet who demonstrated the power of God in its spoken visible form as he stood against all ungodliness in Israel and resisted King Ahab and his wife Jezebel without regard for his life for a season. Elijah was a symbol of the Pentecostal power against all visible and invisible form of idolatry. The Ministry of Elijah was to pave way for and father the ministry of Elisha. Elisha was to enjoy a double fold level of all the glory of Elijah's ministry and in his death demonstrate the power of Christ's Resurrection. Elisha symbolises the ministry going forth in this End-time which is designed of God to carry a double fold anointing of power and of glory. But for us to understand the nature and character of this End-time ministry beyond Pentecost, there is a need for us to review the manner of the calling of Elisha the Prophet of God. For our basis of illustration, we will choose the books of I Kings 19 vs 15-21 and II Kings 2 vs 1-15.

Towards the end of the Public and visible ministry of Elijah, there were 3 important assignments he had to carry out at the instance of the Lord. The last of these assignments in vs 16 of I Kings 19 was the anointing of Elisha as a prophet in the place of Elijah. Now let us read I Kings 19 vs 19-21. **“ So he departed thence, and found Elisha the Son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah and said, let me, I pray thee kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, go back again: for what have I done unto thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him”**. In this text, we need to underline and take note of some word expressions: first, in vs 19 Elisha was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him. Second, in vs 20 after Elijah had cast his mantle upon him, Elisha left the oxen. Third, Elisha took a yoke of oxen (apparently his own yoke out of twelve) and slew them (that is killed them) and boiled them. Fourth, Elisha arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him.

Now the Scriptures make us to understand in I Cor 10 vs 11 that the events in the life of the natural Israel happened so that God could set them forth for us as examples and they are written for us to learn from. Apparently there are spiritual lessons for us in the story of Elisha. All prophetic scriptures have their prophetic significance and relevance for us because they foreshadowed the New Testament Church. When the Bible says in vs 19 of I Kings 19 that Elisha was ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen, it is to convey some prophetic lesson. In God's dealing with Israel, we have the 12 sons of Jacob and hence 12 princes. The Lord Jesus Christ had 12 foundation apostles and the book of Rev 12 vs 1 speaks of the woman with a crown of 12 stars. The Lord Jesus Christ said in Mt 19 vs 28, **“Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”**. This statement of the Lord was corroborated by Luke in Ch. 22 vs 28-30. In scriptures, the number twelve will speak about government while the word oxen speaks about the will of man and the strength or energy of man without God.

Elisha ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen simply reveals that Elisha had his Kingdom

exercising government by the instrument of man and not by the counsel of God as at the time Elijah met him. While God may not disapprove of what Elisha was involved with and while what he was doing may not be overt sin in any way, it may not also be promoting God's interest but his own personal goals. Elisha understood this. His first reaction was to abandon the twelve yoke of oxen altogether. His second step was to slay his own yoke and boil it and offer it to the people. The steps taken by Elisha are pointing to something very significant to as many as are to partake of the Elisha's ministry that is, this end time ministry that goes beyond anything that we have already known or are already familiar with. It will be clear that those that God will use in the last move of the Spirit will be men and women who will already be involved either secularly or in spiritual sphere of things. They will be men and women who may have known how to labour and plough in the field of worldly fame and acceptance. But as they begin to feel a nudging of God in their spirit for a new direction they will also be men and women who will not look back but rather be willing to abandon whatever they may be involved with at any personal cost. This is the lesson that the first symbolic anointing of Elisha brings to us. Elisha abandoned everything and burnt the bridge behind him so as not to have the option of returning. He burnt his own yoke of oxen. He burnt his memory of the past so his future can be glorious. This was the manner recorded of the faith men and women in Hebrews 11 when in vs 13-16, the Scripture says **“these all died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”** There is one thing fundamental to men and women in all ages, who stand separate from all the rudiments of this evil world in order to please God, and that is this attribute of not being “mindful of the country from whence they came out” even though there is always the opportunity to return. But because such have always learnt to burn the bridge behind them so as to serve as the impetus to move forward.

Now I commend to your reading II Kings, Ch. 2 from vs 1. This was the instance when the ministry of Elijah was to change phase from the visible and public one to the less visible but quiet one: after the experience which the church normally refers to as Elijah's translation; Elijah was still to be heard of later in the reign of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat King of Judah when he wrote in judgemental prophesy to denounce the godlessness of the King (II Chr. 21 vs 12-15). Elijah's translation only marked a change of phase in his ministry from visible form to a less public one in divine response to his intercessory complaint.

In any case, let us not lose focus of our scriptures in II Kings 2 vs 1-15. As we read in these scriptures, the following spiritual milestones are worthy of note to those whose goals are to respond to God's ultimate calling to find a prophetic fulfilment in the manner of Elisha's calling. The first thing was that Elijah – Elisha journey commenced from Gilgal. And then the journey proceeded through Bethel to Jericho and then to Jordan and beyond Jordan.

Gilgal sounds very familiar. In Joshua chapter 4 after Israel had passed through Jordan, the Lord made them camp at Gilgal. There at Gilgal, Joshua was commanded to make sharp knives and circumcise the males in Israel the second time. This circumcision was symbolic of a life of

separation from the world typified by the bondage suffered in Egypt by the people of God. No wonder in vs 9 of Joshua 5, the Lord said unto Joshua “this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you” and as though to link the significance of this circumcision to a prophetic symbolism, the scripture says in the latter part of vs 9, “wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day”. The word gal in Hebrews means, “to roll”. Galgal or Gilgal is doubling of the Hebrew root for a double emphasis implied in “rolling off and away” the reproaches of Egypt or the reproaches of the world and all its mundane allurements. For Elisha staying back in Gilgal while Elijah proceeded to Bethel was to mean that though Elisha had good experience of frontal spiritual encounter with God for which he had entered into a covenant of separation from the world and all its enticements (Gilgal), he would have been content to remain and dwell with that experience and build some spiritual fame of a sort around this. It was tempting to build a spiritual Kingdom around the experience with Elijah at Gilgal and Elisha would have a great followership. In this context, Elijah symbolises the Lord Jesus Christ while Elisha is typical of a people that must follow in His steps to fulfil a divine purpose. Elijah was to prove Elisha’s sincerity in his commitment to follow on to know the Lord as prophesied by Hosea in Hos. 3 vs 6. Elisha was determined to press on with Elijah rather than be content and settle down with his present experience to pioneer and be the father of a great spiritual move. What a deep lesson in faithfully following God rather than being distracted by the glare and the glory of a public ministry. Whatever the glory attends a present spiritual experience; greater is the glory, which awaits a faithful saint who discovers something about not building an empire around a present spiritual “**engracement**”. (To be concluded...)

THE MANNER OF ELISHA’S MINISTRY (PART TWO)

- Bro. Sam. Popoola (Continued from last week)

Then Elijah said unto Elisha, “**tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel**” (II Kings 2 vs. 2). Elisha in return vowed, “**as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth I will not leave thee**”. The meaning and the import of Bethel is conveyed to us as we read Gen 28 vs 16-19. This was when Jacob was on the run after he had obtained the father’s blessing in the place of Esau his brother. In vs 16-17 Jacob said, “. . .surely **the Lord is in this place and I knew it not...how dreadful is this place!**

This is none other but the house of God, and is the gate of heaven”. Bethel means “**the house of God**”. The kind of separation as typified by Gilgal almost automatically qualifies for higher level of prophetic insight into the mind of God to launch Elisha into the open heavens of God’s unlimited revelations. And this was enough to build for Elisha a world fame of a mighty man of God. But to sit back in Gilgal was to be robbed of the glories of Bethel. Elisha was more spiritually alert than to commit this gross mistake. For him it was better to carry the lessons of Gilgal along with the empowerment that was synonymous with this than become the big spiritual

father of Gilgal and be robbed of the glories of Bethel, the house of God. They both got to Bethel. Added to the list of distractions were the sons of the prophets. These were prophets in making whose base of operation was at Bethel. The announcement by the sons of the prophet to Elisha of the imminent translation of Elijah could provoke Elisha's reaction in several ways. This could trigger in Elisha the pride of stepping into the shoes of a prophet of Elijah's status. The joy and the euphoria could distract him from the most important lesson, which was ability to keep focus on a goal, the vision of a higher glory. Elisha on the other hand could become so discouraged by the knowledge of an imminent separation from a man of God that could pass for a spiritual mentor, a "**god-father**". Other possibilities existed each of which could be strong enough to keep away the eyes of Elisha from the main focus. This was Bethel. If Elisha was not satisfied by staying back at Gilgal may be because the pains and the agonies of the ways of the cross are not always the best of friends of the flesh man: Gilgal is a type of the lessons of the cross; he should naturally cherish staying back here at Bethel. The sons of the prophets were here for a good company; an opportunity to prove a more spiritual experience conferred by long acquaintance by Elijah. Back in Bethel Elisha would make a good fortune as a prophet of God. All the needed respect would be accorded him. He could make a successful prophetic career. He would be fulfilled. So Elijah told him in vs 4 of II Kings 2, "**tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.**" This was a good opportunity to prove Elisha's heart. If greed, covetousness, pride, ego and all the sorts were there enthroned in the heart of Elisha, he could not help but jump at the great opportunity and encouragement given him by the very prophet of God, the man Elijah who would naturally qualify as one among equals in today's contemporary church setting. In Deut 8 and in vs 2-3, Moses in reminding Israel of the various spiritual lessons that their journey through the wilderness conveyed said, "**and thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manner, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.**"

The lesson is clear. Every path that God causes a man to follow is to be seen as an opportunity for a deep spiritual lesson the end of which is to encourage for continuous dependence on God and a necessary need to keep progressing in the way. In keeping with this understanding, Elisha would not be satisfied with all the promises that Bethel offered. He must press on in the way. He said, "**as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.**" With this deep commitment, they both came to Jericho. Jericho is synonymous with Divine miracle and God's intervention in the affairs of men. To be part of Jericho's experience is to be able to tell stories of the realities of God's undisputable miracles. Elisha also had a great opportunity to stay back in Jericho and study the history of the fall of the walls of Jericho and all the spiritual technicalities involved. He could abide here fasting and praying for God's anointing of the magnitude of that which brought down the proud walls of Jericho in the days of Joshua the servant of God. He could stay here all his life and receive many in holy pilgrimage who could be taught the art of spiritual warfare without the use of human engines. But Elisha would not give in to anything that appeals to the carnal man even when Elijah told him to, "**tarry, I pray thee here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan.**" Rather than for Elisha to bulge under pressure and in the face of all fleshly temptations, he would only insist the more and repeat his memory verse:

“as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.” They came to Jordan. Joshua chapters 3 and 4 relate the passage of Israel under Joshua through river Jordan. In prophetic symbols, Jordan represents a place where we die to our self-life. It conveys all the lessons of the cross of Christ. It is to be a place of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in his death and his resurrection. Passing through Jordan symbolically is dying with Jesus. Paul said in Roman 6 vs 4-5, **“therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”** In II Tim 2 vs 11-13, he said, **“It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him, if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself”**. The last ordeal was here to test Elisha’s perseverance in living with a principle he believed. A little impatience or a little active seed of a self-life could bust the life time vision of knowing him. It happened to Esau; for a pot of porridge he sold his birth right. It happened to Judas Iscariot; for thirty pieces of silver, he sold out and betrayed his saviour. What does it take? It takes a minute of compromise of one’s faith. It happened to Eve in the garden. Take your eyes away from the vital principles of life and you have missed it. Though Esau sought the inheritance by tears after, it was already too late. That is how matters of eternal value could vaporise in the eyes of a man. Elisha persisted. What a deep lesson. It was Ruth who said to Naomi her mother in-law, **“intreat me not to leave, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”** What a confession. This was the manner of life conducted by the apostles of faith. In vs 13-16 of Heb. 11 we are told, **“these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.**

And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city”. In vs 24-37, it says further, **“...Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the King: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”** This was the deep conviction that gave Elisha the impetus and the self-motivation to keep pursuing with patience and perseverance a goal and a vision for the glory land. It was the zeal, which fired the men who fought along with Gideon in the battle against the Midianites and the Amalekites for the Bible reported concerning them in Judges 8 vs 4 that Gideon and the three hundred men that were with him though fainting, pursued the enemy. It takes a vision to be physically tired and fainting in the face of a fierce battle against multiple enemy nations and refused to be discouraged or perplexed but rather be self-motivated to fight

on. It is a vision that makes a woman of Esther's status declare, **"and so will I go in unto the King, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish,"**(Esther 4 vs 16).

They came both to Jordan. Elijah and Elisha. They both by some divine miracle crossed over Jordan with all the lessons to be learnt. Now the last all-important test. Elijah's double fold anointing. On passing through Jordan which was like the last milestone test to be passed by Elisha, Elijah requested for what the servant-prophet would have been done for him before **"I be taken away from thee"**, and Elisha said, **"I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me"**. Elisha could have asked for one of the myriads of worldly blessings and benefits which would have also proved the state of his heart, rather, he wanted a spiritual benefit. Elijah acknowledged that **"thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so"**. In the first place the revelation of Elijah's imminent translation became affirmed, confirmed and authenticated to Elisha because he persevered. He saw something. He had a vision and he would not allow anything however alluring and imposing its values, to distract his attention.

Elisha had the last test to pass. To a man who has set his face as a flint to pursue an objective, this was going to be worth all the labour. He was prepared and determined to pay whatever price. Elijah said, **"If thou see me, when I am taken from thee..."**

God said in Jer. 29:13 that you will seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. In John 9 vs 4, Jesus said, **"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"**. The principle is the same. In John 19 vs 37 the writer quoting an earlier prophesy in Zech. 12 vs 10 said, **"they shall look on him whom they have pierced"**. Heb 9 vs 28 tells us **"... unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."** The lesson is to keep our focus always on Christ. To be distracted is dangerous. To submit to compromise is to commit perjury. Elisha passed the test. He did not go into lethargy nor slip into apostasy in the course of endless tests in faithfulness, obedience and perseverance. He maintained a constant posture of a deep commitment to a divine goal that is able to save his soul.

While the two, now more relaxed having scaled through the more tasking ordeals went on discussing, suddenly a whirl-wind separated Elijah from Elisha; the beauty of it all was that Elisha saw the whole scene and could lay hold on Elijah's mantle that fell from him. Jesus said in John 14 vs 12, **"verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do..."** there is an implication here requiring a role to be played by whoever will do the greater works. There is always a man's side of the responsibility to every divine promise. This is a deep lesson for those who have a higher purpose for following God than the entire primary benefits: be they the provisions or the healings or the miracles. The scripture says, **"they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful"** (Rev. 17 vs 14). And, **"moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful,"** (I Cor 4 vs 2).

The last great move of the spirit is to be witnessed and partaken by those who are willing to live by the principles of the cross of Christ – they must learn the way of crucifixion. Dying to sin and dying to self is the key. There is no life but through death. He that will resurrect will first die. To partake of the glory of the age to come is to deny ourselves of the mundane things of the present age. May the Lord enlighten our minds in the knowledge of his will.

(Concluded).