

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Forty-Seventh Week - Friday

### THE CHARIOT OF FIRE

*"Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?' Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.' So he said, 'You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.' Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!' So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, 'Where is Yahweh God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over" (2 Kings 2:8-14).*

It is clear that a great day had come. The young men in the schools of the prophets at Gilgal, at Jericho, and at Bethel, are in unusual agitation. Elijah visits them all in succession. His manner is even more than commonly solemn, and his countenance and conversation more heavenward. All his demeanor seems to say, "Ye shall see my face no more." They fear to ask their great master any question, but venture a whisper to Elisha whether he knows that his master and theirs was to be taken away that day.

Elisha persists in accompanying Elijah as he departs from the sons of the prophets. They come to the Jordan, for even an Elijah must cross the Jordan before he passes from the world, though it be not by the gates of death. But, lo, a wonder! The prophet takes his mantle and smites the stream with it, and the Jordan divides to let the friends pass through. This was witnessed by fifty of the sons of the prophets who watched from distant hills.

Elijah then asks his faithful disciple what last favor he could do for him. This was a trying question, and one which few would be able to answer promptly without having second thoughts afterward. But Elisha knew that he could not ask too much when it came to spiritual blessings. He therefore said, "Let a double portion of your spirit rest upon me." What was that double

portion that Elisha desired? One would think that he meant such qualities as would make him twice as great a prophet as his master. But that is not so; for although Elisha became a great prophet and worked miracles as great as those of Elijah, and in greater number, no one feels that he was greater, or as great, a prophet than his master. Elisha's meaning is explained by the fact that the heir was entitled to a double portion of his father's goods. Hence in asking for the double portion of his master's spirit, Elisha meant to claim the heirship, that is, the succession, to Elijah in his place as prophet in Israel. He had reason to suppose that it was meant for him, but he wished to be assured of this by some token which should be satisfactory to himself and others.

As they went on conversing of high things, suddenly a whirlwind separated Elijah from his companion. Elijah was borne aloft to heaven in a "chariot with horses of fire," or glowing like fire, followed by the cry of the forsaken disciple, "*My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!*" This is generally understood to mean that Israel was now bereft of its strength by the departure of this great prophet.

Elisha stooped to pick up the precious mantle that had fallen from Elijah, and as he rose he felt in the beating of his own heart the assurance that his prayer had been granted. And he knew it still more when he reached and smote the waters with the mantle. At first, it seems, there was no response; but when he repeated the stroke with the words, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" the waters separated and he passed over. The sons of the prophets saw this and knew by this sign that the spirit of Elijah indeed rested on Elisha, their new master.

This is a strange event, and we cannot hope as yet to understand it fully. It seems, however, to be but an isolated anticipation of that which shall happen collectively to the righteous who are alive on earth at our Lord's second coming. "*And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*" (I Thess. 4:16,17). In that sudden strange transition the body will undergo a change, divesting it of its earthy essence and bringing it into conformity with the glorified bodies of the saints raised from the dead.