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Introduction

Ahab tells Jezebel what Elijah had done; she is enraged, and threatens to take away his life, 1 Kings 19:1, 1 Kings 19:2. He leaves Jezreel, and comes to Beer-sheba, and thence to the wilderness, where he is fed and encouraged by an angel, 1 Kings 19:3-9. His complaint and the vision by which God instructs him, 1 Kings 19:10-14. He is sent to Damascus, in order to anoint Hazael king over Syria, and Jehu king over Israel, 1 Kings 19:15-18. He meets with Elisha, who becomes his servant, 1 Kings 19:19-21.

Verse 1

Ahab told Jezebel - Probably with no evil design against Elijah.

Verse 2

So let the gods do - If I do not slay thee, let the gods slay me with the most ignominious death.

Verse 3

He arose, and went for his life - He saw it was best to give place to this storm, and go to a place of safety. He probably thought that the miracle at Carmel would have been the means of effecting the conversion of the whole court and of the country, but, finding himself mistaken, he is greatly discouraged.

To Beer-sheba - This being at the most southern extremity of the promised land, and under the jurisdiction of the king of Judah, he might suppose himself in a place of safety.

Left his servant there - Being alone, he would be the more unlikely to be discovered; besides, he did not wish to risk the life of his servant.

Verse 4

A day's journey into the wilderness - Probably in his way to Mount Horeb. See 1 Kings 19:8.

Juniper tree - A tree that afforded him a shade from the scorching sun.

It is enough - I have lived long enough! I can do no more good among this people; let me now end my days.

Verse 5

As he lay and slept - Excessive anguish of mind frequently induces sleep, as well as great fatigue of body.

An angel touched him - He needed refreshment, and God sent an angel to bring him what was necessary.

Verse 6

A cake baked on the coals - All this seems to have been supernaturally provided.

Verse 7

The journey is too great for thee - From Beer-sheba to Horeb was about one hundred and fifty miles.

Verse 8

Forty days and forty nights - So he fasted just the same time as Moses did at Horeb, and as Christ did in the wilderness.

Verse 9

He came thither unto a cave - Conjectured by some to be the same cave in which God put Moses that he might give him a glimpse of his glory. See Exodus 33:22.

What doest thou here, Elijah? - Is this a reproach for having fled from the face of Jezebel, through what some call unbelieving fears, that God would abandon him to her rage?

Verse 10

I have been very jealous for the Lord - The picture which he draws here of apostate Israel is very affecting: -

1. They have forsaken thy covenant - They have now cleaved to and worshipped other gods.

2. Thrown down thine altars - Endeavoured, as much as they possibly could, to abolish thy worship, and destroy its remembrance from the land.

3. And slain thy prophets - That there might be none to reprove their iniquity, or teach the truth; so that the restoration of the true worship might be impossible.

4. I only, am left - They have succeeded in destroying all the rest of the prophets, and they are determined not to rest till they slay me.

Verse 11

Stand upon the mount before the Lord - God was now treating Elijah nearly in the same way that he treated Moses; and it is not unlikely that Elijah was now standing on the same place where Moses stood, when God revealed himself to him in the giving of the law. See Exodus 19:9, Exodus 19:16.

The Lord passed by - It appears that the passing by of the Lord occasioned the strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire; but in none of these was God to make a discovery of himself unto the prophet; yet these, in some sort, prepared his way, and prepared Elijah to hear the still small voice. The apparatus, indicating the presence of the Divine Majesty, is nearly the same as that employed to minister the law to Moses; and many have supposed that God intended these things to be understood thus: that God intended to display himself to mankind not in judgment, but in mercy; and that as the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, were only the forerunners of the still small voice, which proclaimed the benignity of the Father of spirits; so the law, and all its terrors, were only intended to introduce that mild spirit of the Gospel of Jesus, proclaiming glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will unto men. Others think that all this was merely natural; and that a real earthquake, and its accompaniments, are described.

1. Previously to earthquakes the atmosphere becomes greatly disturbed, mighty winds and tempests taking place.

2. This is followed by the actual agitation of the earth.

3. In this agitation fire frequently escapes, or a burning lava is poured out, often accompanied with thunder and lightning.

4. After these the air becomes serene, the thunder ceases to roll, the forked lightnings no longer play, and nothing remains but a gentle breeze.

However correct all this may be, it seems most probably evident that what took place at this time was out of the ordinary course of nature; and although the things, as mentioned here, may often be the accompaniments of an earthquake that has nothing supernatural in it; yet here, though every thing is produced in its natural order, yet the exciting cause of the whole is supernatural. Thus the Chaldee understands the whole passage: "And behold the Lord was revealed; and before him was a host of the angels of the wind, tearing the mountains, and breaking the rocks before the Lord, but the Majesty (Shechinah) of the Lord was not in the host of the angels of the wind. And after the host of the angels of the wind, there was a host of the angels of commotion; but the Majesty of the Lord was not in the host of the angels of commotion. And after the host of the angels of commotion, a fire; but the Majesty of the Lord was not in the host of the angels of fire. And after the host of the angels of fire, a voice singing in silence," etc.; that is, a sound with which no other sound was mingled. Perhaps the whole of this is intended to give an emblematical representation of the various displays of Divine providence and grace.

Verse 13

Wrapped his face in his mantle - This he did to signify his respect; so Moses hid his face, for he dared not to look upon God Exodus 3:6. Covering the face was a token of respect among the Asiatics, as uncovering the head is among the Europeans.

Verse 15

To the wilderness of Damascus - He does not desire him to take a road by which he might be likely to meet Jezebel, or any other of his enemies.

Anoint Hazael - For what reason the Lord was about to make all these revolutions, we are told in 1 Kings 19:17. God was about to bring his judgments upon the land, and especially on the house of Ahab. This he exterminated by means of Jehu; and Jehu himself was a scourge of the Lord to the people. Hazael also grievously afflicted Israel; see the accomplishment of these purposes, 2 Kings 8 (note), and 2 Kings 9 (note).

Verse 16

Elisha - shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room - Jarchi gives a strange turn to these words: "Thy prophecy (or execution of the prophetic office) does not please me, because thou art the constant accuser of my children." With all their abominations, this rabbin would have us to believe that those vile idolaters and murderers were still the beloved children of God! And why? Because God had made a covenant with their fathers; therefore said the ancient as well as the modern siren song: "Once in the covenant, always in the covenant; once a son, and a son for ever." And yet we have here the testimony of God's own prophet, and the testimony of their history, that they had forsaken the covenant, and consequently renounced all their interest in it.

Verse 17

Shall Elisha slay - We do not find that Elisha either used the sword, or commissioned it to be used, though he delivered solemn prophecies against this disobedient people: and this is probably the sense in which this should be understood, as Elisha was prophet before Hazael was king, and Hazael was king before Jehu; and the heavy famine which he brought on the land took place before the reign either of Jehu or Hazael. The meaning of the prophecy may be this: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, shall be the ministers of my vengeance against this disobedient and rebellious people. The order of time, here, is not to be regarded.

Verse 18

Seven thousand in Israel - That is, many thousands; for seven is a number of perfection, as we have often seen: so, The barren has borne seven - has had a numerous off-spring; Gold seven times purified - purified till all the dross is perfectly separated from it. The court and multitudes of the people had gone after Baal; but perhaps the majority of the common people still worshipped in secret the God of their fathers.

Every mouth which hath not kissed him - Idolaters often kissed their hand in honor of their idols; and hence the origin of adoration - bringing the hand to the mouth after touching the idol, if it were within reach; and if not, kissing the right hand in token of respect and subjection. The word is compounded of ad, to, and os, oris, the mouth. *Dextera manu deum contingentes, ori admovebant*: "Touching the god with their right hand, they applied it to their mouth." So kissing the hand, and adoration, mean the same thing -

Thus Pliny,

Inter adorandum, dexteram ad osculum referimus, totum corpus circumagimus: Nat. Hist. lib. xxviii., cap. 2. - "In the act of adoration we kiss the right hand, and turn about the whole body."

Cicero mentions a statue of Hercules, the chin and lips of which were considerably worn by the frequent kissing of his worshippers:

Ut rictus ejus, et mentum paulo sit attritius, quod in precibus et gratulationibus, non solum id venerari, sed etiam osculari solent. - Orat. in Verrem.

I have seen several instances of this, especially in the paintings of old saints: the lips and mouth of beautiful paintings literally worn away by the unmerciful osculations of devotees.

Verse 19

Twelve yoke of oxen - Elisha must have had a considerable estate, when he kept twelve yoke of oxen to till the ground. If, therefore, he obeyed the prophetic call, he did it to considerable secular loss.

He with the twelfth - Every owner of an inheritance among the Hebrews, and indeed among the ancients in general, was a principal agent in its cultivation.

Cast his mantle upon him - Either this was a ceremony used in a call to the prophetic office, or it indicated that he was called to be the servant of the prophet. The mantle, or pallium, was the peculiar garb of the prophet, as we may learn from Zechariah 13:4; and this was probably made of skin dressed with the hair on. See also 2 Kings 1:8. It is likely, therefore, that Elijah threw his mantle on Elisha to signify to him that he was called to the prophetic office. See more on this subject below.

Verse 20

Let me - kiss my father and my mother - Elisha fully understood that he was called by this ceremony to the prophetic office: and it is evident that he conferred not with flesh and blood, but resolved, immediately resolved, to obey; only he wished to bid farewell to his relatives. See below.

What have I done to thee? - Thy call is not from me, but from God: to him, not to me, art thou accountable for

thy use or abuse of it.

Verse 21

He returned back - He went home to his house; probably he yet lived with his parents, for it appears he was a single man: and he slew a yoke of the oxen - he made a feast for his household, having boiled the flesh of the oxen with his agricultural implements, probably in token that he had abandoned secular life: then, having bidden them an affectionate farewell, he arose, went after Elijah, who probably still awaited his coming in the field or its vicinity, and ministered unto him.

On the call of Elisha, I may make a few remarks.

1. Elijah is commanded, 1 Kings 19:16, to anoint Elisha prophet in his room. Though it is generally believed that kings, priests, and prophets, were inaugurated into their respective offices by the right of unction, and this I have elsewhere supposed; yet this is the only instance on record where a prophet is commanded to be anointed; and even this case is problematical, for it does not appear that Elijah did anoint Elisha. Nothing is mentioned in his call to the prophetic office, but the casting the mantle of Elijah upon him; wherefore it is probable that the word anoint, here signifies no more than the call to the office, accompanied by the simple rite of having the prophet's mantle thrown over his shoulders.

2. A call to the ministerial office, though it completely sever from all secular occupations, yet never supersedes the duties of filial affection. Though Elisha must leave his oxen, and become a prophet to Israel: yet he may first go home, eat and drink with his parents and relatives, and bid them an affectionate farewell.

3. We do not find any attempt on the part of his parents to hinder him from obeying the Divine call: they had too much respect for the authority of God, and they left their son to the dictates of his conscience. Wo to those parents who strive, for filthy lucre's sake, to prevent their sons from embracing a call to preach Jesus to their perishing countrymen, or to the heathen, because they see that the life of a true evangelist is a life of comparative poverty, and they had rather he should gain money than save souls.

4. The cloak, we have already observed, was the prophet's peculiar habit; it was probably in imitation of this that the Greek philosophers wore a sort of mantle, that distinguished them from the common people; and by which they were at once as easily known as certain academical characters are by their gowns and square caps. The pallium was as common among the Greeks as the toga was among the Romans. Each of these was so peculiar to those nations, that Palliatus is used to signify a Greek, as Togatus is to signify a Roman.

5. Was it from this act of Elijah, conveying the prophetic office and its authority to Elisha by throwing his mantle upon him, that the popes of Rome borrowed the ceremony of collating an archbishop to the spiritualities and temporalities of his see, and investing him with plenary sacerdotal authority, by sending him what is well known in ecclesiastical history by the name pallium, pall, or cloak? I think this is likely; for as we learn from Zechariah 13:4, and 2 Kings 1:8, that this mantle was a rough or hairy garment, so we learn from Durandus that the pallium or pall was made of white wool, after the following manner: -

The nuns of St. Agnes, annually on the festival of their patroness, offer two white lambs on the altar of their church, during the time they sing Agnus Dei, in a solemn mass; which lambs are afterwards taken by two of the canons of the Lateran church, and by them given to the pope's sub-deacons, who send them to pasture till shearing time; and then they are shorn, and the pall is made of their wool, mixed with other white wool. The pall is then carried to the Lateran church, and there placed on the high altar by the deacons, on the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul; and, after a usual watching or vigil, it is carried away in the night, and delivered to the sub-deacons, who lay it up safely. Now, because it was taken from the body of St. Peter, it signifies the plenitude of ecclesiastical power: and, therefore, the popes assume it as their prerogative, being the professed successors of this apostle, to invest other prelates with it. This was at first confined to Rome, but afterwards it was sent to popish prelates in different parts of the world.

6. It seems, from the place in Zechariah, quoted above, that this rough cloak or garment became the covering of hypocrites and deceivers; and that persons assumed the prophetic dress without the prophetic call, and God threatens to unmask them. We know that this became general in the popish Church in the beginning of the 16th century; and God stripped those false prophets of their false and wicked pretensions, and exposed them to the people. Many of them profited by this exposure, and became reformed; and the whole community became at least more cautious. The Romish Church should be thankful to the Reformation for the moral purity which is now found in it; for, had not its vices, and usurpations, and super-scandalous sales of indulgences, been thus checked, the whole fabric had by this time been probably dissolved. Should it carry its reformation still farther, it would have a more legitimate pretension to the title of apostolic. Let them compare their ritual with the Bible and common sense, and they will find cause to lop many cumbrous and rotten branches from a good tree.