

2KINGS 2: 1 When the LORD was about to take Elijah up by a whirlwind into heaven, Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

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Elijah, about to be taken up to heaven, goes in company with Elisha from Gilgal to Beth-el, 2Kgs 2:1, 2Kgs 2:2. Thence to Jericho, 2Kgs 2:3-5. And thence to Jordan, 2Kgs 2:6, 2Kgs 2:7. Elijah smites the waters with his mantle; they divide, and he and Elisha pass over on dry ground, 2Kgs 2:8. Elijah desires Elisha to ask what he should do for him; who requests a double portion of his spirit, which is promised on a certain condition, 2Kgs 2:9, 2Kgs 2:10. A chariot and horses of fire descend; and Elijah mounts, and ascends by a whirlwind to heaven, 2Kgs 2:11. Elisha gets his mantle, comes back to Jordan, smites the waters with it, and they divide, and he goes over, 2Kgs 2:12-14. The sons of the prophets see that the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha, 2Kgs 2:15. They propose to send fifty men to seek Elijah, supposing the Spirit of the Lord might have cast him on some mountain or valley; after three days' search, they return not having found him, 2Kgs 2:16-18. The people of Jericho apply to Elisha to heal their unwholesome water, 2Kgs 2:19. He casts salt into the spring in the name of Jehovah, and the water becomes wholesome, 2Kgs 2:20-22. Forty-two young persons of Bethel, mocking him, are slain by two she-bears, 2Kgs 2:23, 2Kgs 2:24. He goes to Carmel, and returns to Samaria, 2Kgs 2:25.

#### Verse 1

When the Lord would take up Elijah - It appears that God had revealed this intended translation, not only to Elijah himself, but also to Elisha, and to the schools of the prophets, both at Beth-el and Jericho, so that they were all expecting this solemn event.

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2KINGS 2: 2 Elijah said to Elisha, "Please wait here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel."

Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

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#### Verse 2

Tarry here, I pray thee - He either made these requests through humility, not wishing any person to be witness of the honor conferred on him by God, or with the desire to prove the fidelity of Elisha, whether he would continue to follow and serve him.

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2KINGS 2: 3 The sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from your head today?" He said, "Yes, I know it; hold your peace."

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#### Verse 3

Knowest thou that the Lord - Thus we see that it was a matter well known to all the sons of the prophets. This day the Lord will take thy master and instructor from thee.

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2KINGS 2: 4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please wait here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." He said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho.

2KINGS 2: 5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from your head today?" He answered, "Yes, I know it. Hold your peace."

2KINGS 2: 6 Elijah said to him, "Please wait here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." He said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." They both went on.

2KINGS 2: 7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood opposite them at a distance; and they both stood by the Jordan.

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#### Verse 7

Fifty men of the sons of the prophets - They fully expected this extraordinary event, and they could have known it only from Elijah himself, or by a direct revelation from God.

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2KINGS 2: 8 Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that they two went over on dry ground.

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#### Verse 8

Took his mantle - Την μίλῳτην αὐτοῦ, his sheep-skin, says the Septuagint. The skins of beasts, dressed with the hair on, were formerly worn by prophets and priests as the simple insignia of their office. As the civil authority was often lodged in the hands of such persons, particularly among the Jews, mantles of this kind were used by kings and high civil officers when they bore no sacred character. The custom continues to the present day; a lamb's skin hood or cloak is the badge which certain graduates in our universities wear; and the royal robes of kings and great officers of state are adorned with the skins of the animal called the ermine.

They were divided hither and thither - This was a most astonishing miracle, and could be performed only by the almighty power of God.

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2KINGS 2: 9 When they had gone over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me."

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#### Verse 9

A double portion of thy spirit be upon me - This in reference to the law, Deu 21:17 : He shall acknowledge the first-born, by giving him a Double Portion of all that he hath-the right of the first-born is his. Elisha considered himself the only child or first-born of Elijah, as the disciples of eminent teachers were called their children; so here he claims a double portion of his spiritual influence, any other disciples coming in for a single share only. Sons of the prophets means no more than the

disciples or scholars of the prophets. The original words פי שניים pi shenayim, mean rather two parts, than double the quantity.

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2KINGS 2: 10 He said, "You have asked a hard thing. If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so."

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#### Verse 10

A hard thing - This is what is not in my power, God alone can give this; yet if thou see me taken away from thee, it shall be so. Perhaps this means no more than, "If thou continue with me till I am translated, God will grant this to thee;" for on the mere seeing or not seeing him in the moment in which he was taken away, this Divine gift could not depend.

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2KINGS 2: 11 As they still went on, and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

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#### Verse 11

Elijah went up - into heaven - He was truly translated; and the words here leave us no room to indulge the conjecture of Dr. Priestley, who supposes that as "Enoch, (probably Moses), Elijah, and Christ, had no relation to any other world or planet, they are no doubt in this;" for we are told that Elijah went up into heaven; and we know, from the sure testimony of the Scripture, that our blessed Lord is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ever living to make intercession for us.

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2KINGS 2: 12 Elisha saw it, and he cried, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" He saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and tore them in two pieces.

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#### Verse 12

The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof - The Chaldee translates these words thus: "My master, my master! who, by thy intercession, wast of more use to Israel than horses and chariots." This is probably the sense.

In the Book of Ecclesiasticus 48:1, etc., the fiery horses and chariot are considered as an emblem of that burning zeal which Elijah manifested in the whole of his ministry: "Then stood up Elijah the prophet as fire, and his word burned as a lamp," etc.

And rent them in two pieces - As a sign of sorrow for having lost so good and glorious a master.

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2KINGS 2: 13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of the Jordan.

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## Verse 13

He took - the mantle - The same with which he had been called by Elijah to the prophetic office, and the same by which Elijah divided Jordan. His having the mantle was a proof that he was invested with the authority and influence of his master.

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2KINGS 2: 14 He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the waters, and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" When he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha went over.

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## Verse 14

Where is the Lord God of Elijah? - The Vulgate gives a strange turn to this verse:

Et percussit aquas, et non sunt divisae; et dixit, Ubi est Deus Eliae etiam nunc? Percussitque aquas, et divisae sunt huc et illuc. "And he smote the waters, but they did not divide; and he said, Where is the God of Elijah even now? And he struck the waters and they were divided hither and thither."

The act of striking the waters seems to be twice repeated in the verse, though we get rid of the second striking by rendering the second clause, when he also had smitten the waters: which has the same Hebrew words as the first, and which we translate, he smote the waters. The Vulgate supposes he smote once in vain, perhaps confiding too much in his own strength; and then, having invoked the God of Elijah, he succeeded. This distinction is not followed by any of the other versions; nor is the clause, et non sunt divisae, "and they divided not," expressed by the Hebrew text.

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2KINGS 2: 15 When the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho over against him saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." They came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

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## Verse 15

The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha - This was a natural conclusion, from seeing him with the mantle, and working the same miracle. This disposed them to yield the same obedience to him they had done to his master: and in token of this, they went out to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

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2KINGS 2: 16 They said to him, "See now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up, and put him on some mountain, or into some valley.

He said, "You shall not send them."

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## Verse 16

Fifty strong men - Probably the same fifty who are mentioned 2Kgs 2:7, and who saw Elijah taken up in the whirlwind.

Cast him upon some mountain - Though they saw him taken up towards heaven, yet they thought it possible that the Spirit of the Lord might have descended with him, and left him on some remote mountain or valley.

Ye shall not send - He knew that he was translated to heaven, and that therefore it would be useless.

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2KINGS 2: 17 When they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, "Send them." They sent therefore fifty men; and they searched for three days, but didn't find him.

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Verse 17

Till he was ashamed - He saw they would not be satisfied unless they made the proposed search; he felt therefore that he could not, with any good grace, resist their importunity any longer.

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2KINGS 2: 18 They came back to him, while he stayed at Jericho; and he said to them, "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't go?'"

2KINGS 2: 19 The men of the city said to Elisha, "Behold, please, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land miscarries."

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Verse 19

The water is naught, and the ground barren - The barrenness of the ground was the effect of the badness of the water.

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2KINGS 2: 20 He said, "Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it." They brought it to him.

2KINGS 2: 21 He went out to the spring of the waters, and threw salt into it, and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'I have healed these waters. There shall not be from there any more death or miscarrying.'"

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Verse 21

And cast the salt in there - He cast in the salt at the place where the waters sprang out of the earth. Jarchi well observes here, "Salt is a thing which corrupts water; therefore, it is evident that this was a true miracle." What Elisha did on this occasion, getting the new cruse and throwing in the salt, was only to make the miracle more conspicuous. If the salt could have had any natural tendency to render the water salubrious, it could have acted only for a short time, and only on that portion of the stream which now arose from the spring; and in a few moments its effects must have disappeared. But the miracle here was permanent: the death of men and cattle, which had been

occasioned by the insalubrity of the waters, ceased, the land was no longer barren; and the waters became permanently fit for all agricultural and domestic uses.

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2KINGS 2: 22 So the waters were healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.

2KINGS 2: 23 He went up from there to Bethel. As he was going up by the way, some youths came out of the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you baldy! Go up, you baldy!"

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#### Verse 23

There came forth little children out of the city - These were probably the school of some celebrated teacher; but under his instruction they had learned neither piety nor good manners.

Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head - קרַח עלה קרַח עלה aleh kereach, aleh kereach. Does not this imply the grossest insult? Ascend, thou empty skull, to heaven, as it is pretended thy master did! This was blasphemy against God; and their punishment (for they were Beth-elite idolaters) was only proportioned to their guilt. Elisha cursed them, i.e., pronounced a curse upon them, in the name of the Lord, בשם יהוה beshem Yehovah, by the name or authority of Jehovah. The spirit of their offense lies in their ridiculing a miracle of the Lord: the offense was against Him, and He punished it. It was no petulant humor of the prophet that caused him to pronounce this curse; it was God alone: had it proceeded from a wrong disposition of the prophet, no miracle would have been wrought in order to gratify it. "But was it not a cruel thing to destroy forty-two little children, who, in mere childishness, had simply called the prophet bare skull, or bald head?" I answer, Elisha did not destroy them; he had no power by which he could bring two she-bears out of the wood to destroy them. It was evidently either accidental, or a Divine judgment; and if a judgment, God must be the sole author of it. Elisha's curse must be only declaratory of what God was about to do. See on 2Kgs 1:10 (note). "But then, as they were little children, they could scarcely be accountable for their conduct; and consequently, it was cruelty to destroy them." If it was a judgment of God, it could neither be cruel nor unjust; and I contend, that the prophet had no power by which he could bring these she-bears to fall upon them. But were they little children? for here the strength of the objection lies. Now I suppose the objection means children from four to seven or eight years old; for so we use the word: but the original, נערים קטנים nearim ketanim, may mean young men, for קטן katon signifies to be young, in opposition to old, and is so translated in various places in our Bible; and נער naar signifies, not only a child, but a young man, a servant, or even a soldier, or one fit to go out to battle; and is so translated in a multitude of places in our common English version. I shall mention but a few, because they are sufficiently decisive: Isaac was called נער naar when twenty-eight years old, Gen 21:5-12; and Joseph was so called when he was thirty-nine, Gen 41:12. Add to these 1Kgs 20:14 : "And Ahab said, By whom [shall the Assyrians be delivered into my hand?] And he said, Thus saith the Lord, by the Young Men, בנערי benaarey, of the princes of the provinces." That these were soldiers, probably militia, or a selection from the militia, which served as a bodyguard to Ahab, the event sufficiently declares; and the persons that mocked Elisha were perfectly accountable for their conduct.

But is it not possible that these forty-two were a set of unlucky young men, who had been employed in the wood, destroying the whelps of these same she-bears, who now pursued them, and tore them to pieces, for the injury they had done? We have already heard of the ferocity of a bear robbed of her whelps; see at the end of 2Sam 17:28. The mention of She-bears gives some color to

the above conjecture; and, probably, at the time when these young fellows insulted the prophet, the bears might be tracing the footsteps of the murderers of their young, and thus came upon them in the midst of their insults, God's providence ordering these occurrences so as to make this natural effect appear as a Divine cause. If the conjecture be correct, the bears were prepared by their loss to execute the curse of the prophet, and God's justice guided them to the spot to punish the iniquity that had been just committed.

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2KINGS 2: 24 He looked behind him and saw them, and cursed them in the LORD's name. Two female bears came out of the woods, and mauled forty-two of those youths.

2KINGS 2: 25 He went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

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