

## ELIJAH'S MANTLE

### *II Kings 2*

The lesson should begin with a brief review of the story of the division of Solomon's kingdom and the reasons for it. The substitution in Israel of the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan in place of worship in the temple at Jerusalem makes an excellent connection between the general lesson of the divided kingdom and the mission of Elijah and Elisha.

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#### **Doctrinal Points**

*The power of the Word is exercised through its literal sense.*

*It is of divine providence that one becomes aware of the teachings of the Second Coming.*

*We never reach a point where we no longer need to study the Word.*

*If we see the spiritual meaning and God's love speaking through it, the letter of the Word will have new and much greater power in and through us.*

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#### **Notes for Parents**

I wonder if we haven't all at some time been just a little bit irritated by some dear old lady who was so good she just couldn't believe anything bad of anyone? We knew she was good and that it is right to look for the good in everyone, but when we were perhaps trying to correct some fault in one of our children and she insisted on shielding him and saying the child was such a little dear that we didn't need to worry about him, we couldn't help feeling that something wasn't quite right. The story of the division of Solomon's kingdom after his death shows us that there really is something wrong in refusing to recognize and condemn evil either in ourselves or in others. It is a very deep temptation which comes to everyone who reaches the beautiful state pictured by Solomon's reign, the state when one has come to love to do right. We are tempted then to feel that we can't do wrong, and no one ever

reaches that state in this world.

After Solomon's death the whole northern part of the land and the cross-Jordan country rebelled against Solomon's son and set up an independent kingdom. Worse than this, they set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan, as their centers of worship, so that they would no longer have to go to the temple at Jerusalem. When we have struggled with the temptations of our earlier lives and established what we believe to be a good character, it is all too easy to fall into the thought that we no longer need to study the Bible or go to church and that if we are kind and helpful and honest in our dealings with our neighbors, the Lord cannot expect any more of us. Then our attention becomes centered on the things of this world only. This was what happened to the people of the northern kingdom when they separated themselves from the worship at Jerusalem.

It was to these northern tribes that the Lord sent the two great prophets Elijah and Elisha. All the prophets spoke from the Lord. Our "prophet" is the written Word of God. If we hear and obey it, the Lord can lead us and take care of us. Our story for today tells how, when Elijah's work was over, he asked his servant and disciple Elisha what last wish he could grant him, and Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah told him that if he saw him when he was taken away, his wish would be granted. Then Elisha did see the horses and chariot of fire which carried Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind, and Elijah's mantle fell back to earth for Elisha to wear. This is a beautiful picture of how the Bible in the literal form which we know comes to us with double power once we really see that it is not just a book written by men but that it comes to us from God and connects us with heaven.

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### Primary

The story is easy to tell and one in which the children will be interested. Emphasize the distinction between Elijah and Elisha and the relation between them. Elisha acted for a time as Elijah's disciple and servant and then became his successor. Before telling the conclusion of the story read to the children

verses 9 and 10. The granting of a wish always catches a child's imagination. We remember how many fairy tales are based on this theme, but do not mention this fact to the children unless they bring it up themselves. If they do, be sure to impress upon them that the Word is not a fairy story. In fact, the idea as it appears in the fairy stories doubtless goes back to the instances recorded in our Word and in the Ancient Word, as so many universal modes of thought and speech do.

Do you remember what the Lord promised Solomon after he built the temple? He promised that if the people would obey his laws, He would always be with them in the temple and take care of them.

But the people didn't remember. After Solomon died and his son Rehoboam became king, a man named Jeroboam persuaded half the people to rebel against Rehoboam and set up a new kingdom. They accepted Jeroboam for their king. The other half of the people remained faithful to Rehoboam.

Jeroboam was afraid that if his people continued to go up to the temple at Jerusalem to worship, they might change their minds. So he set up two golden calves for them to worship.

Jeroboam was a wicked king, and all the kings that followed him were wicked too. Jeroboam's part of the land was called Israel and Rehoboam's part was called Judah. One of the very worst of the kings after Jeroboam was Ahab, and he had a wife called Jezebel who was even worse than he was. While Ahab was king, the Lord tried to save the people of Israel by sending a great prophet to warn them. His name was Elijah. Elijah showed Ahab in many ways just how foolish he and his people were to turn away from the Lord and worship idols. Ahab was almost persuaded, but Jezebel hated Elijah and tried to kill him.

But the Lord always protected him.

When Elijah was old, he was told by the Lord that a man named Elisha was to succeed him.

How did they cross the Jordan?

What wish did Elisha make?

What did Elijah tell him?

How was Elijah taken to heaven?

Did Elisha see it?

How did Elisha get Elijah's mantle?

What did he do with it?

Near what city did this happen?

What did some of the prophets learn from the miracle?

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### Junior

Try to do more in this class with the division of the kingdom, using a map. This is an excellent opportunity for a map review lesson, comparing the Holy Land as divided among the tribes with this division into two parts and with the later division into three in the time of the Gospel story.

Solomon reigned forty years in peace and honor, but during the last part of his life he was led away from perfect allegiance to the Lord. He married a great many wives from other lands and set up in the Holy Land altars to their various gods. Also in order to keep up his splendor and the palaces for his wives he taxed the people very heavily. So after he died ten of the tribes rebelled against his son Rehoboam and set up a new kingdom in the northern part of the land with its capital at Samaria. This new kingdom was called Israel and the southern part of the land, which remained faithful to Solomon's son, was called Judah and kept its capital at Jerusalem.

The kings of Israel were uniformly wicked kings, not worshiping or obeying the Lord. The Lord sent many prophets to warn them. One of the greatest of these was Elijah. Perhaps you remember some stories of the miracles he performed through the Lord's power. King Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel made many attempts to destroy him. Our lesson today is concerned with the end of Elijah's life. The Lord had told him that Elisha was to be his successor, and he had called Elisha to go with him as his disciple and servant.

How did Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan?

What power had parted it once before?

What wish did Elisha express?

What did Elijah tell him?

What did Elisha see?

If you should see such a thing as that, you could never forget it, could you? You would know that Elijah had been a real prophet or speaker for the Lord. No matter what anyone said or did, you would be sure you were right and would tell him so. That is like Elisha's double power. When we learn the commandments and try to obey them because our parents and teachers tell us we should, they have power to make our lives orderly; but when we are older and see that the commandments are really the Lord's laws, given to lead us to happiness and heaven, they have double power in our lives.

What fell from Elijah as he was caught up to heaven?

His mantle was well known by the people, especially by the "sons of the prophets."

So when they saw Elisha with Elijah's mantle, they knew he was Elijah's successor.

What did Elisha do with the mantle which proved this?

What miracle did Elisha perform for the sons of the prophets in Jericho?

As Elisha was going to Bethel, what did some children call him?

What happened to them?

This does not seem to us a very serious offense, does it? But in those days it was considered a disgrace to be bald, and "bald head" was a very bad name to call anyone. Elisha was the Lord's prophet and had to be respected by the people. When you are older, you will learn more of what this part of the story means.

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### Intermediate

The correspondence of the time of the divided kingdom as it applies to us individually is important for this class, and also the meaning of Elijah and Elisha and of the double power given to Elisha and why it could be given.

The divided kingdom is a picture of a state in which we often are. At heart we want to be good, but our minds find all sorts of excuses for our being selfish instead. Judah represents the heart and Israel the mind when they are divided in this way. All the kings of Israel were bad. In fact, they grew worse and worse in spite of the many prophets the Lord sent to warn them, the greatest of

whom were Elijah and Elisha. In his old age, when Jezebel had vowed to take his life, Elijah fled to Horeb and asked the Lord to take him out of his troubles, and the Lord sent him back to do some last things, one of which was to anoint Elisha to be his successor. In our lesson for today Elijah has done all the things he was commanded to do and his work is ended. Elisha has been with him for some time as his disciple and servant, and now his worthiness to succeed his master is to be proved.

First Elisha refused to turn back from following Elijah in his last journey. The Gilgal from which they started is not the Gilgal near Jericho, but another Gilgal just north of Bethel. The journey of the two prophets from Gilgal first to Bethel, then to Jericho, then to and across the Jordan pictures the way in which the letter of Scripture reaches down from the heights to the very outmost plane of our lives. It is in this outmost plane that we are in danger of losing our connection with the Lord by thinking of the letter of the Word as a mere dead relic of the past.

But Elisha, because he wished to obey the Lord, was given a new assurance. Horses are symbols of intelligence and a chariot the symbol of doctrine, the kind of organized teaching which enables our intelligence to work effectively and to carry us on from state to state, in this case even to heaven. Fire, of course, pictures divine love. Elijah, as the Lord's prophet, stands for the Word; Elisha also stands for the Word, but for the Word as seen from a higher understanding. When Elisha saw Elijah taken up to heaven by the horses and chariot of fire, he knew beyond question that Elijah's power had been a heavenly power coming from divine love, and this knowledge gave Elisha himself a double power. If we read the Word because we know we ought to and try to obey it for the same reason, it will indeed work miracles in our lives. But if we see within it its spiritual meaning and how the Lord's love is speaking to us through it, it has a new and much greater power in and through us.

Elijah's mantle pictures the letter of the Word. We should note that when he used it to part the water, he "wrapped it together," and later Elisha did the same. This pictures the fact that we need

to see the teaching of the letter of the Word as a whole if we are to use it effectively in our lives. We cannot pick and choose what we like to believe and forget the rest. We must have an organized knowledge of its teaching. And no matter how much we know of the inner meaning of the Word, the power is still in the letter. We should all learn as much as possible of the letter of the Word and cultivate the ability to “quote Scripture” in times of need for ourselves and for others.

The rest of our chapter gives us two incidents in the beginning of Elisha’s career as a prophet. First he showed the power to make the bitter waters of Jericho sweet. Jericho was in the plain near the head of the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on the face of the earth. The sons of the prophets there picture our efforts to correct the lowest plane of our lives, the cravings of our senses. The truth is bitter to us on this level, but the new understanding of it which Elisha pictures furnishes a new cruse—a new container—full of salt to make it sweet. Salt is the symbol of “the desire of truth for good.” This means the urge to apply truth to our lives as soon as we learn it. When we have this desire, truth is sweet to us and makes our lives fruitful. Then Elisha started up toward Bethel and the little children came out and called him “baldhead.” This is almost the only place in the Bible where little children are used in a bad sense, except in the passages where the Israelites are told to destroy their enemies including the little children.\* Usually we think of the innocence and trust of little children, but little children are also ignorant and incapable of judgment. They represent beginnings. When they do good things, they picture beginnings of goodness, but when, as here, they do bad things, they picture the beginnings of evil. The hair, which is the outmost thing of the body in which there is life, represents our most external thoughts and deeds. The hair of the prophet represents obedience to the commandments in the outmost form. To call Elisha “baldhead” is to ridicule the necessity of learning and obeying the command-

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\*See, for example, Psalm 137:9. —Ed.

ments and in general to ridicule the letter of the Word. This leads people into gross external evils, pictured by the bears from the woods, and to spiritual death.

*Basic Correspondences*

the prophet's mantle = the letter of the Word  
salt = the desire of truth for good

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**Senior**

There are important lessons for the Seniors in this story. They will soon face the temptation to yield to the ideas in the world about them concerning the Word, and to think that if they measure up to the world's standards of goodness, they need no longer go to the Word for guidance. They need also to be shown that since, under divine providence, they have been introduced to the teachings of the Second Coming, a responsibility has been laid upon them to live the more spiritual life demanded by these teachings.

Elijah and Elisha, as prophets of the Lord, both represent the Word. The Word comes to us, as the prophets came to Israel, to show us our evils, to warn us, and also to show us the way of true happiness, to heal our griefs and troubles.

We recall that after the death of Solomon ten of the tribes, the whole northern half of the Holy Land and the cross-Jordan people, rebelled against Solomon's son Rehoboam and set up an independent kingdom called Israel with its capital at Samaria and its worship centered in the images of two golden calves, one at Bethel and one at Dan on the northernmost border. When we allow worldly reasoning to lead us away from worship of the Lord and come to think that if we do the outward kindly acts which the world praises, we are good people, we have, like Israel, separated ourselves from Jerusalem and set up golden calves in place of the ark and the temple. At the bottom of our hearts we may still acknowledge the Lord and admit that we ought to be led by Him—Judah, the southern kingdom, remained faithful to the line of David and nominally to the worship of Jehovah. The two books of kings are principally concerned with the history of the divided kingdom, the



story swinging back and forth from Israel to Judah to Israel again, just as our attention alternates between our good intentions and our false reasonings when our minds and hearts are not in harmony. For when the mind turns from the guidance of the Lord, it goes further and further astray. The kings of Israel were increasingly evil.

The Lord through the Word does all He can to bring us back to the true way of life, as He sent Elijah and Elisha to Israel. In our lesson for today Elijah's mantle represents the letter of the Word. Folded together—that is, accepted and understood as a consistent whole—it is able to part the waters of Jordan, just as the ark had done long before. Swedenborg tells us that the power of the Word is in its fullness in the letter. We can see how this is. Take, for example, the twenty-third Psalm. We can study it verse by verse, learn more and more of its spiritual meaning, and understand it and its application to life better the more we learn; but all this is contained in the actual words of the Psalm, and we never reach the point where we do not need and love to repeat the Psalm in its letter. The more deeply we understand it, the more it affects us as we say it. So Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit because he was permitted to see Elijah taken up to heaven by the horses and chariot of fire.

The two familiar stories told in the rest of the chapter are closely connected with the same thought. The prophet's hair as the outmost expression of his life, as well as his mantle, pictures the letter of the Word. So to call Elisha "baldhead" was equivalent to denying the holiness of the letter of the Word. The children who did this were torn by she-bears from the wood. Bears are hairy animals and picture an affection for the outmosts of things. So today those who deny the divine inspiration of the Word are often absorbed in the study of its letter as a mere human production; studying it in this way, they get further and further from the Lord. Their very study gradually destroys their spiritual life.

The story of the "healing" of the spring by putting salt in it is easily understood if we remember that salt represents the element which unites truth to goodness. Truth produces nothing unless it is

lived. When we learn new truth, we should not go on doing just as we did before. Each new truth we learn should make a change in our life. This is especially true of the new truths the Lord made known in His Second Coming. We cannot be truly New Churchmen and continue to live the same old worldly, stumbling lives. If our “spring” is barren, it is because we need the “salt” of active application of newly learned truths to our own thought and conduct.



### Adult

The meaning of Solomon's sin and of the division of the kingdom and the setting up of the golden calves makes a good discussion topic to begin with. This should be followed by a discussion of the meaning of the wrapping together of the mantle, Elisha's vision, its result, and Elisha's first acts as prophet.

The transition from the peaceful, triumphant reign of Solomon to the divided kingdom is a sudden and striking one. Why did Solomon's kingdom not endure? The external reasons, as stated in the letter, seem inadequate. One would have expected the whole people to be too proud of their obvious glory and prosperity and of their great capital and beautiful temple to be tempted to rebel. The answer is to be found in the spiritual meaning of Solomon's own later acts. We recall that in the latter part of his reign he married many wives from other nations and set up altars so that they might worship their own gods, and finally began himself to worship those gods in addition to his own. There is a grave warning for us in this story. Solomon's reign at its best represents the highest state we can reach, when we have come to obey the truth from love. But this highest state carries with it a deep temptation, the temptation to imagine that now we can do no wrong and to be proud of our own all-embracing love. This leads to an unwillingness to see anything but good in ourselves and others, and to a state in which we excuse and finally embrace many attractive forms of evil. At heart we still intend to be good—as Judah remained faithful to Solomon's line and continued the temple worship—but our minds, having accepted the idea that everyone who does the

outward kindly acts which the world recognizes as good is a good person, are led further and further astray. After Jeroboam set up the golden calves in Bethel and Dan to keep his people from going to Jerusalem to worship, the kings of Israel, who represent the governing principles in the mind, became more and more wicked.

The Word is full of warnings against this state. No matter how good our intentions may be, it is the mind (i.e., our thought life) to which the Word must address itself. So it was to Israel, the rebellious northern kingdom, that the great prophets Elijah and Elisha were sent. In AC 5321<sup>5</sup> we learn that “by both Elijah and Elisha was represented the Lord as to the Word.” In the writings they are frequently mentioned together and no clear distinction is drawn between the two. Yet we know there must be a distinction. The power of Elijah passes over to Elisha in double measure, indicating that Elisha must represent a more potent presence of the Lord through His Word than Elijah. The Word in our minds increases in power as we progress in understanding and experience. We are familiar with the thought that garments picture external truths, like the language with which we clothe our thoughts. The prophet’s mantle pictures the letter of the Word, “the Word in ultimates” (AE 395<sup>4</sup>), in which, we are told, the power of the Word is in its fullness. The same number gives us a detailed explanation of the parting of the Jordan by Elijah’s mantle. As the Jordan represents the first truths which initiate us into the church, the mantle wrapped together—that is, the sense of the letter of the Word taken as a whole—has power to part the waters for us. We must have a knowledge of the general teaching of the Scriptures before we can rightly understand the particular passages of the Word which are presented to us. Failing such general knowledge, we are often baffled by the waters of Jordan: particular passages do not yield their true meaning and are turned into falsity. So in AC 4255<sup>4</sup> we are told that the dividing of the Jordan pictures the “removal of evils and falsities.” The same miracle was accomplished by the ark in Joshua’s time, because the ark represents the commandments and the commandments are a summary of the whole teaching of the Word.

When Elijah first called Elisha (I Kings 19:19), he cast his mantle upon him, and now Elisha assumes the mantle which Elijah drops, both these incidents representing the transfer of the representation of the Word from Elijah to Elisha.

Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Those who grow up in the New Church and are introduced gradually to a knowledge of the spiritual sense of the Word are not conscious of the transition from Elijah to Elisha; but for one who has tried to understand the Word from a knowledge of the letter only and then finds the New Church teaching concerning correspondences, the experience of Elisha is a very real one. Elisha was told that if he saw Elijah when he was taken into heaven, his request would be granted. Elisha saw first a chariot of fire and horses of fire which parted Elijah from him. That is, Elisha's eyes were opened to see a representation of the Word in the heavens; the chariot of fire pictures "the doctrine of love and charity from the Word" and the horses of fire "the doctrine of faith therefrom" (AC 2762). And then he saw Elijah lifted up by a whirlwind into heaven. When we are permitted to see that within the letter of the Word there is a heavenly meaning which teaches a consistent doctrine of love to the Lord and the neighbor, the Word is lifted up as by a whirlwind in our minds. The letter, Elijah's mantle, remains but now has a double power. This is a very real experience. When we study the Word in the light of correspondences, passages which have been obscure and even meaningless to us are lighted up and become effective helps for life; and not only that, but we find ourselves acquiring an ability to remember and to quote the Word in our conversation with others and to pass on something of our new understanding and especially something of the recognition of the power of the Word.

The meaning of the healing of the waters of Jericho is explained in detail in AC 9325<sup>9-10</sup>. Jericho, as a city near the Jordan, pictures an external or natural teaching concerning the letter of the Word. If there is not the desire to apply these teachings to life, the waters are bitter and produce no fruit. The new cruse pictures new knowl-

edge of good and truth and the salt “the longing of truth for good.” The spring of the waters, into which Elisha cast the salt, is “the natural of man which receives the knowledges of truth and good, and which is amended by the longing of truth for good.” When we see the Word only in its external meaning, many passages have no effect upon our lives because we cannot see their application. We often seem to read the Word without effect—our land is barren. This state can be healed by the added power which comes with our new understanding. If we have the desire to apply what we learn, every passage which we read with our new understanding can be made effective in our lives.

An example of this is found in the last verses of our chapter, where we are shown the office of the prophet in pointing out and condemning evil. As in the story of Uzzah, the punishment seems to us at first too severe for the offense, and here again a literal understanding of the passage has sometimes turned people away from the Word. But when we realize that Elisha represents the Word and his hair the letter of the Word, we see that to call Elisha “thou baldhead” is to ridicule the letter of the Word. Children always picture beginnings. Thus our story teaches us the danger of beginning to take the letter of the Word lightly, even through mere thoughtlessness, to make jokes about it or to laugh at such jokes, to make light of any of its stories. The punishment of the children was that they were torn by bears from the wood. Bears picture “those who read the Word and do not understand it.” If we allow ourselves to break down our reverence for the letter of the Word, we become a prey to all those arguments and influences which emanate from the study of the Word as a mere natural history product. This is spiritual destruction. “For all the power and sanctity of the Word are gathered up and have their seat in the sense of the letter; for without this sense the Word could not exist, since without it the Word would be like a house without a foundation, which would be shaken by the wind, and thus be overthrown and fall to pieces.” (AE 781<sup>11</sup>) See also AC 3301<sup>9</sup>, AR 573, and SS 39.

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### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Apocalypse Explained*, n. 395<sup>4</sup>: “Because Elijah represented the Lord in relation to the Word, which is the doctrine of truth itself, and Elisha continued the representation, and because ‘mantle’ signified Divine truth in general, which is the Word in ultimates, so the mantle divided the waters of Jordan. . . . ‘Elijah’s casting his mantle upon Elisha’ signified the transference to Elisha of the representation of the Lord in relation to the Word; and that ‘the mantle fell from Elijah when he was taken away, and was taken up by Elisha,’ signified that this representation was then transferred to Elisha, for Elijah and Elisha represented the Lord in relation to the Word and they were clothed according to what they represented, ‘the mantle’ signifying the Word in which is Divine truth in general, or Divine truth in the whole complex. ‘The dividing of the waters of Jordan by Elijah’s mantle,’ first by Elijah and afterwards by Elisha, signified the power of Divine truth in ultimates; ‘the waters of Jordan’ signifying, moreover, the first truths through which there is introduction into the church, and these first truths are such as are in the ultimates of the Word.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What happened to Solomon’s kingdom after he died? *divided*
- P. What were the two divisions of the kingdom called? *Israel, Judah*
- P. Which remained faithful to the line of David? *Judah*
- P. What two great prophets were sent to Israel? *Elijah, Elisha*
- P. When Elijah’s work was ended, what did Elisha ask? *double portion of power*
- P. What did Elijah tell him? *granted, if you see me go*
- P. What vision was granted to Elisha? *fiery chariots and horses*
- P. What fell from Elijah as he was taken up to heaven? *his mantle*
- J. How did the sons of the prophets know that Elisha had become the successor of Elijah? *saw him part waters of Jordan with mantle*
- J. What miracle did Elisha perform for them? *“healed” water*
- J. What name did some children call Elisha? *baldhead*
- J. Why was this so bad? *a sign of disgrace*
- J. What happened to the children? *mauled by bears*
- I. What do the two parts of the divided kingdom represent? *mind, heart*
- I. What does the prophet’s mantle represent? *letter of Word*
- S. What is the difference in correspondence between (1) Elijah, and (2) Elisha?
  - (1) *Word studied from obedience*
  - (2) *Word studied with awareness of inner sense*