

# ELIJAH AND ELISHA

by W.W. Fereday

---

*W.W. Fereday's study of the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, exploring themes of faithfulness, power, and the grace of God.*

21 Chapters

## Table of Contents

0. Elijah and Elisha
1. The Call to Service
2. The Double Portion
3. The New Cruse
4. Scoffers Judged
5. The Three Kings
6. The Pot of Oil
7. The Shunammite
8. "Death in the Pot"
9. The Firstfruits
10. Naaman, the Syrian
11. Is It a Time to Receive?
12. The Iron Did Swim
13. God and the Kings
14. Chariots of Fire
15. The Lesson of War
16. The Four Lepers
17. The Returned Shunammite
18. Ministers of Wrath
19. The Lesson of the Arrows
20. Life Out of Death

## Elijah and Elisha

---

## The Call to Service

---

Elijah journeyed to Abel-Meholah to find a successor, and lo, in the goodness of God, he found a companion. For the fiery prophet's trials were not yet ended, and he was henceforward to be comforted by the fellowship of a kindred heart. "Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow" (Eccl. 4:9-10). How truly Elisha refreshed his master's spirit is suggested by the words in 2 Kings 3:11: "He poured water on the hands of Elijah." In 1 Kings 19:21 it is said: "He arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

A pleasant picture is exhibited to us in 1 Kings 19:19-21. In the midst of Baal worshippers, a pious farmer pursued his course, his soul doubtless sorely grieved by the apostate condition of God's people, yet himself wholly separate in heart and mind from the prevailing unfaithfulness. His call to service and testimony came to him when Elijah passed by. The call is given in 1 Kings 19:19; his anointing is found in 2 Kings 2:9. In like manner, the apostles of our Lord heard the call in Matthew 4:18, etc., and received the anointing in Acts 2.

It was but the work of a moment, Elijah's casting of his mantle upon Elisha, but it was the turning point in his spiritual history. It the great crisis of his life. If he had failed to perceive the significance of that moment his whole after career would have missed the divine intention.

Similar crises occur in the history of souls today; what we need is the spiritual sensibility to recognize them when they come. Thus a disciple may hear the distinct call of the Lord to forsake all and devote himself to the work of the Gospel in a wild land. If he hesitates, the honor may pass by him forever. If, on the other hand, he humbly submits himself to the divine mandate, his whole course is "Forward" from that moment. Our lives, as far as usefulness is concerned, are either made or lost by ability to discern these crises when they arise. We are only really useful when in the place where God would have us.

Elisha left all to follow devotedly the footsteps of another. Here is our example. "Follow thou Me" is the voice of Christ (John 21:22). Let us cultivate the spirit of Ruth in her fervent outburst to Naomi: "Entreat me not to leave thee, 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" (Ruth 1:16, 17). This is devotion indeed.

Further, Elisha left all to tread a path of loss. Elijah was a proscribed man, and danger tracked his every step. From the quietness and security of the farm, Elisha went forth to be his disciple. His complete breach with the past seems indicated by the fact that he not only slew the oxen, but also "boiled their flesh with the implements." So to speak, he burned his boats behind him. From that day there was to be no looking back. We, brethren, are followers of a rejected Christ. Loss, not gain; suffering, not ease, are the appointed accompaniments of true discipleship. Are we really prepared for these things! Our apostle trod an unparalleled path (his account of it will be found in 2 Cor. 11:12); but what sustained him therein! Hear him in Philippians 3:7-8: "What things were gain

to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but rubbish, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.”

## The Double Portion

---

Whatever services Elisha may have rendered (Timothy-like) in association with Elijah while the latter remained on earth, his testimony proper began after Elijah was carried to heaven. Their last journey together is full of spiritual significance. Starting from Gilgal, they proceeded west to Bethel; thence they turned back towards the east and visited Jericho; and from Jericho they passed to Jordan, and across to the other side. All these points spoke of a blessed past and an evil present. Israel's Canaan history commenced at Gilgal (Josh. 5). There their camp was formed; there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away; and thence they marched forth at the divine bidding for conquest. The associations of the place were thus very precious to a pious Israelite. But Gilgal was now one of the chief centers of national iniquity (Amos 4:4; 5:5; Hos. 4:15). The place of Israel's early consecration to God had become the place of gross unfaithfulness to God. How sadly we are thus reminded of what the Church was in the beginning and of what it is today.

Bethel, meaning "house of God," was sacred as the spot where God manifested Himself to Jacob, and graciously pledged Himself to His servant (Gen. 28:10-22). Now one of Jeroboam's calves stood there (1 Ki. 12:28-29), causing Jehovah to speak of the place in contempt as Bethaven—"house of folly" (Hos. 4:15).

Jericho once witnessed a marvelous display of divine power when Jehovah caused the walls to fall down flat; it was now a standing proof of the nation's apostasy from God (Josh. 6:20; 1 Ki. 16:34).

Jordan once opened to let Israel into the land; now it opened to let Elijah out. Jehovah seemed thus to sunder link after link all that which once bound the people to Himself. They had rejected Him; He now rejected them. It is as if He was saying to His servant, "They do not want Me, and they do not want you; let them alone."

The holy persistency of Elisha on that memorable journey is very remarkable. At the start Elijah gave him the opportunity of remaining at Gilgal while he went on to Bethel (2 Ki. 2:2). But Elisha protested, "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." At Bethel and at Jericho further opportunities were given, but Elisha refused them in the same determined manner. Was the departing prophet really desirous of getting rid of his companion, or was he instead testing him as to how far he entered into the circumstances of that moment! We believe it was the latter. As the words of the sons of the prophets show, there was an impression abroad that Elijah was about to be taken away, and Elisha was bent upon remaining with him until the end. His soul felt that blessing was connected with association with Elijah, and he was determined not to miss the blessing. So "they two went on." Oh, that we clave to Christ with the same set purpose that Elisha clave to Elijah! Herein is the secret of power for life and testimony.

Arrived at the river, Jordan fled before the prophet, "so that they two went over on dry ground." Expressive type of Christ—death's Master. But His death is also ours, and we find ourselves, in consequence, with Him outside of the present evil world. Do we indeed realize that this is our true position?

Jordan being passed, Elisha's great opportunity came. "Ask what I shall do for thee," said his master, "before I be taken away from thee." Like Solomon at an earlier date (1 Ki. 3:5), his purpose of heart expressed itself in his reply. "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon Thee." The "double portion" was the portion of the firstborn (pt. 21:15-17), whereby he was enabled to worthily represent the dead, and maintain the honor of his name. All in the Church are firstborn ones (Heb. 12:23), and as such are endowed with blessings such as saints in former dispensations never knew. Nothing could exceed the wealthy portion which is ours in the risen Christ, that "better thing" which God has "provided for us" (Heb. 11:16). By the power of the Spirit we are enabled to enter into the realization of it, and so become fitted to worthily represent the absent Christ in the scene of His rejection.

Not until Jordan was passed did Elijah propose blessing to his disciple. In like manner, Calvary must be left behind in resurrection power ere the Spirit could be given from above, and full Christian blessing be enjoyed.

But there was a condition imposed upon Elisha. "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Elisha did see the glorious sight, and so the longed-for power and blessing became his. Do we see the Man who has gone up to God! Is the eye of our faith upon Him! The apostle prayed for the Colossians (Col. 1:11) that they might be "strengthened with all might, according to the power of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." Strengthened in this manner, Stephen could die in triumph, and Paul could live and serve dauntlessly.

From the departing prophet there fell the mantle. This Elisha took up, and forthwith rent his own clothes in two pieces. We must put off in order to put on. We must be divested in order to be invested. In measure as the old "I" is practically renounced (God's sentence of death upon it really accepted) so Christ is manifested in us. The apostle describes his own experience thus: "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:11). He even welcomed the most painful circumstances when they contributed to this grand result (2 Cor. 12:9).

Possessed now of power, Elisha turned back towards Jordan: "And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah! and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over" (2 Ki. 2:9). Elijah had gone, but God remained. What we all need is faith in the Unseen. Israel failed in this when Moses disappeared in the mount (Ex. 32:1). The Church has likewise failed in its faith in the invisible Head, and in the invisible Spirit. Men come and go, but God is ever with His people. Let us not live in the past, lamenting that "the former days were better than these" (Eccl. 7:10); but let us rather lay hold upon God for today, assured that we shall find Him as good to us as ever He was to His saints in ages past.

## The New Cruse

---

The ministry of the “son of thunder” being ended, that of the “son of consolation” began. Its general character savored of the grace of Christianity, and no wonder, for it flowed (typically) from death and resurrection, as we have seen. Mark here the goodness of the divine heart. Sentence had been already passed upon guilty Israel, and its very executors had been named Hazeel and Jehu (1 Ki. 19:15-17), yet God instituted a new ministry of grace. The avenging sword was held back awhile in forbearing mercy. Even so is it with the world at this time. Its doom was long ago pronounced (Jn. 12:31; 16:11) yet no sooner had it been pronounced than the Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven with that wonderful message of love and mercy with which our hearts are so blessedly familiar, and which far exceeds all other divine overtures in earlier ages of the world’s history. But when the present divine mission is finished, the stroke will fall irremediably.

After the rapture of Elijah, Elisha tarried at Jericho, and there a very serious complaint was addressed to him by “the men of the city” (2 Ki. 2:18-19): “The situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren.” Thus man’s infidel pride, while it could rebuild the city in defiance of the Word of God, was powerless to remove the curse which lay upon it. And what are men able to accomplish in their little world today! With many schemes, long and laboriously matured, they are constrained everywhere to acknowledge that the world is very far from what they would like it to be. A blight manifestly rests on every creature device. The high hopes of today are the bitter disappointments of tomorrow. The “pleasantness” is there, for God has created it, but “the water” —the spring from which men would draw satisfaction and pleasure— “is bad” and “the ground is barren” —no fruit is produced for God. Both for God and for man everything is the exact opposite of what it should be.

God’s man was the only hope of the needy men of Jericho, even as the Man of God’s right hand is men’s only hope today, though they understand it not. Elisha called for a new cruse, with salt therein, “and he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith Jehovah, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.” The remedy was thus “a new cruse, with salt therein,” with its contents cast into “the spring of the waters.” Here we learn God’s way of blessing for man. It is not by the patching up of an old thing, but by the introduction of something altogether new. Those who have not lost confidence in flesh are all the time seeking to repair its glaring defects. It is frequently said at the present crisis that we should have more confidence in humanity, i.e., in flesh. But God has long since declared flesh to be incurable in its evil, and He condemned it as such in the death of Christ (Rom. 8:3-8). Nothing avails but a new nature. Hence the Lord Jesus speaks in Luke 5:36-38 of a new garment, new wine, and new bottles; and the apostle tells us in Ephesians 4:24 of a “new man, which, according to God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Nicodemus was taught in John 3 that his great need was to be born wholly anew. Apart from this, religious person though he was, he could neither see, nor enter into the kingdom of God. God thus puts something “new” into the very “spring” of a man’s moral being.

Elisha's cruse was full of salt. This great preservative represents the power which separates a man from evil, and keeps it far away. Only the man born of the Spirit possesses this. The religious man may indeed escape "the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," but such a one is always in danger of being again entangled therein. There is no capacity for moral resistance, and so it happens to him "according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet 2:20-22). The man born of the Spirit escapes "the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:4), a much deeper thing than the world's pollutions, which are but external.

At Jericho fruit followed the application of the salt. So in our case having "salt in ourselves" (Mk. 9:50), we are enabled to be fruitful for God in the midst of a barren world.

## Scoffers Judged

---

Only at Bethel do we find Elisha calling down judgement upon his foes (2 Kings 2:23-24). Grace derided and rejected must of necessity be avenged, whatever the dispensation may be. Men in Christendom are in even graver peril than the young people of Bethel. "Little children" is an improper and misleading translation. In many other Old Testament passages the same Hebrew word is rendered "young men." The offenders were similar in character and years to many who stand loutishly at our street corners today, with no respect for either God or man. Bethel ("house of God") had truly become Bethaven ("house of folly") when God's venerable servant could be pursued with the mocking cry: "Go up, thou baldhead; go up, thou baldhead." Not one of Jeroboam's priests intervened to protect God's witness; how, indeed, could it be expected! What cared they for the wonderful story of God's rapture of His despised prophet! As little did they care for the new witness whom God had raised up in his stead. Accordingly, Elisha turned back, and looking upon his tormentors, he "cursed them in the name of Jehovah." The chronicler adds, "And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." Whether "tare" means killed or simply injured is not stated. It is a solemn thing to join issue with God. The heavy judgement of 2 Kings 1, when two captains with their fifties were destroyed for their impiety, had no deterrent effect upon the scoffers of Bethel. How often is the rod of God unheeded! But however long drawn out this longsuffering may be, the judgement of God upon rejecters is sure in this dispensation as in every other.

## The Three Kings

---

Three kings were in sore trouble; two of them ungodly men, the other a backsliding servant of Jehovah (2 Ki. 3). Jehoram, King of Israel, was at least a religious professor. On occasion he could wear sackcloth upon his flesh, and make use of Jehovah's name (2 Ki. 6:27-30), and he could even purge away some of the grosser evils introduced by his parents (2 Ki. 3:2). The King of Edom was just a man of the world, with no pretension whatever to relationship with God. How could Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, associate himself with such a pair, with any expectation of aid or blessing from Jehovah! This was neither the first nor the second time that he had weakly allied himself with evil men. When he returned from helping Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead, the prophet remonstrated with him thus: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Jehovah!" (2 Chr. 19:2). When he joined himself with Ahaziah in a commercial enterprise, he was divinely informed that Jehovah would break his ships, a catastrophe which really happened (2 Chr. 20:35-37). What is sorely needed amongst God's saints is the spiritual energy to say "No" (at whatever cost) when invited by the world to cooperate with it in its schemes, of whatever character the schemes may be.

The three kings sought to subjugate Mesha, King of Moab, who had repudiated the suzerainty of the King of Israel after the death of Ahab. Instead of exercising his conscience before God as to why this had been permitted, Jehoram had recourse to arms. This is the only remedy known to men who are destitute of the knowledge of God. When Jehoshaphat was invited to help, he replied, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Oh, the shame of it! Should he not rather have replied, "By the grace of God, I am the opposite of what thou art!"

The allied sovereigns took a circuitous route in order to avoid Moab's fortified cities, and presently they found themselves with no water for their host. Jehoram cried out in despair, "Alas! that Jehovah hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" Jehoshaphat asked if there was available a prophet of Jehovah by whose means they might inquire of Him. One of the King of Israel's servants remarking that Elisha was within reach, the three kings went down to him, Jehoshaphat saying, "the Word of Jehovah is with him." If the King of Judah had sought the Word of God before venturing forth, he would not have found himself in such a strait. Elisha at first bade Jehoram go to the prophets of his father and mother, knowing well that he sought water, not God; but presently he said, "As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." Elisha thus distinguished between God's saint (even though in a backsliding condition) and the evil men with whom he was associated.

His next words are remarkable: "But now bring me a minstrel." Why was this! The fact is, his spirit was checked while the ungodly were before him, and he felt it imperative to abstract himself in order to get into proper touch with God. What a lesson is here! Oh, that we all understood it! How different would Jehoshaphat's course have been had he understood it! While the minstrel played, the hand of Jehovah came upon Elisha, and he said, "Thus saith Jehovah, make this valley full of

ditches,” etc. This being done, the valley should be filled with water, an ample supply for both men and beasts. Moreover, victory should follow over rebellious Moab. How good of our God! What an appeal to the consciences of all the confederate kings!

God’s way of blessing on this occasion contains some very important principles. Note, the scene of it was a valley. The low place is the place of repentance and self-judgement. When God’s people get down low enough before God, the blessing is never lacking. Ditches must be dug in order to receive and hold what God had to give. The deeper the ditches, the more energy thus displayed, the more water they got, the greater the blessing from God. There is tremendous need of spade and shovel work today. Brethren, there is a vast amount of earth to be got rid of ere the blessing of God can really fill our souls. Dare we deny that earth has taken large possession of us! Has not the extraordinary prosperity of recent years affected even God’s saints adversely? It may be that now God is withdrawing it from us in order to uplift our souls. Christ is the Christian’s only true object. Not to this world of sin and death, but to the other world of life and glory, where Christ is, does the Christian really belong. By the Spirit’s power we are enabled to enter even into the enjoyment of things invisible and eternal. But earthly-mindedness is grave hindrance to this. The blessing came “in the morning, the meal offering was offered” (9:00 a.m.). Frequently in Scripture do we find the blessing vouchsafed at the hour of offering (cf. 1 Ki. 18:36; Ezra 9:5; Dan. 9:21; Acts 2:15; Acts 3:1; Acts 10:3). God has no good thing for man apart from the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The work of God for the kings was in parts: (1) water for themselves and their hosts, and (2) victory over the enemy. “This is but a light thing in the sight of Jehovah: He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.” The refreshment of the army was thus only a means to an end. In like manner today the work of the Spirit goes far beyond getting Christians right. He does indeed meet our need most blessedly, ministering Christ to our souls, and rebuking and restoring us whenever we go astray; but He does more than this. He strengthens us for God, that we may be enabled to war successfully against His foes and ours. The life of the believer should be characterized by victory from first to last.

The victory being gained over Moab, the kings were told, “Ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.” An unsparing judgement assuredly. The lesson for us is plain. Our only safeguard is to overthrow for ourselves all that in which flesh might trust or delight itself, for God would have us find our all in Christ. We dare not give quarter to anything that might draw our hearts away from Him.

## The Pot of Oil

---

In 2 Kings 3 we have Elisha ministering to the necessities of kings; in 2 Kings 4:1-7 he ministers to a widow and her sons, for there is room in the divine compassions for both the exalted and the lowly. Remarkably both Elijah and Elisha had dealings with a widow, and in each case a little oil in a vessel constituted an important item in their worldly possessions.

“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear Jehovah: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondsmen” (2 Ki. 4:1). A pitiful story is here, a story suggestive of the meditations which drove Asaph to the very verge of infidelity (Ps. 73). That the godly should suffer while the ungodly prosper has frequently been a sore puzzle to tried hearts. In the present case the widow laid emphasis upon the fact that her husband feared Jehovah, yet he had been snatched from her by death, with no remainder but debts, slavery for her children being the only possible result, so far as the eye could see. Unbelief is apt to cry in such circumstances, “All these things are against me” (Gen. 42:36); faith quietly says, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The greater the emergency, the greater the opportunity for God to show Himself on behalf of His people. When the men of Israel magnified the prowess of the nations of Canaan, Joshua and Caleb, true men of faith, said, “Thee are bread for us; Jehovah is with us; fear them not” (Num. 14:9). Bread indeed! for every difficulty surmounted by faith in God yields strength and nourishment to the soul. Our wonder-working God is able to make the eater yield meat, and the strong one sweetness (Judg. 14:14). It is a great reality to have to do with God. “He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

The widow of our chapter proved the truth of this most blessedly. Let us note that in her trouble she sought the aid of “the man of God.” This is a title more frequently applied to Elisha than to any other person named in Holy Scripture. Seventy times we read of “the man of God” in the Old Testament, twenty-two of the passages referring to Elisha. What are we to understand by the title! Is it the equivalent of “saint,” and therefore applicable to every man born of the Spirit? The Spirit’s sparing use of the term forbids the thought. It is first applied to Moses in Deuteronomy 33:1. This gives us the key to its meaning. Moses was one who cut himself entirely adrift from the world, renouncing absolutely all its honors and advantages in order that he might be wholly for God. Only persons of this stamp may rightly be regarded as men of God. In the midst of general ruin and departure, the man of God is God’s emergency instrument. It is open to us all to be in this blessed position, if so our hearts desire. The Church in these days needs men of God.

But what had Elisha for the distressed widow? Nothing, as far as his own resources were concerned, and yet he more than met her need. He could have said with the apostle, “As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:10).

And what have we wherewith to meet the need of souls? The amount contained in our pockets is a small matter; the question is, what have we in our hearts! Blessed be God, we have that enshrined there which is capable of meeting every form of human necessity. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Our hearts have thus been illuminated by the knowledge of God, and from us that knowledge should radiate to others. Herein lies an immense opportunity for spiritual usefulness in a dreary world.

But Elisha asked the woman, "What hast thou in the house?" She replied, "Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil." But there were great potentialities in the pot of oil, though the widow knew it not. Whatever else we lack, every Christian has his pot of oil. In other words, every Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit within him. Let us use it in faith, and all our difficulties become as nothing. So the widow must beg empty vessels of her neighbors—not a few. "And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full."

Picture the scene in that humble house. What had the widow to look upon that day? Just a small vessel of oil, a number of empty receptacles, and two poor orphan lads earmarked for slavery. This was what the eye saw, but there was something else that no natural sight could behold—God. In Matthew 6:1-18 we are taught that the Father's eye is upon us, and in verses 19-34 that our eye should, in consequence, be solely upon Him. In this is rest and peace.

Now observe a remarkable thing. The oil flowed while a vessel remained to take it. It was only when the son said "there is not a vessel more" that the oil stayed. What a lesson is here! The blessing is limited by man only. In 2 Kings 3 the kings obtained water according to the depth of the ditches that were prepared. In 2 Kings 13:18 Joash, King of Israel, missed the opportunity of his life, when in the presence of the dying prophet, and with full knowledge that the actions of that day were significant, he smote upon the ground thrice only. This meant three victories over his enemies instead of total annihilation. Abraham, in Genesis 18, when making intercession for the guilty cities of the plain, paused at ten persons. though God had given no indication of weariness in listening to His servant's voice. Alas! alas! It is always man who limits the blessing.

Oft we credit not, that God e'er gives as God

But the widow's need was now met, so the prophet bade her, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." Brethren, we have a debt to discharge, which only the power of the Spirit can enable us to discharge. Paul felt this deeply in Romans 1:14: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise." How he paid the debt is described in Romans 15:19: "Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ." How far have we entered into the spirit of the devoted apostle, as expressed in these words! The cold principle of formal ministerialism has doubtless damaged the zeal of many a child of God. What is needed is to get our souls so divinely full of the things that we profess to believe that our lips must speak. Like Peter and John when they said to the Jewish council, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Like Paul again, when he exclaimed in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "We believe, and therefore speak." Men who are profoundly convinced of the truth of the Christian verities, and who are persuaded of men's deep need of the

knowledge of them, will surely seek to “repay their debt.” And for this the power of the Spirit is divinely sufficient.

But Elisha added, “Live thou and thy children of the rest.” Testimony to others, however important, is not everything. There is a life to be lived, with all its hard facts and varied circumstances. For this none of us possesses the smallest power in ourselves. But the power of the Spirit of God is our competency. It enables us to worship, suffer, and bear fruit at all seasons. “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

## The Shunammite

---

The adjective “great,” as applied to the woman of Shunem, doubtless refers in its first significance to her position in the world as a person of substance, but she was also “great” in that which alone counts for greatness with God—in faith (2 Ki. 4:8). In this she was conspicuous in her generation. We find a number of God’s “great” ones in Hebrews 11—men and women “of whom the world was not worthy.”

The Shunammite was spiritually superior to the widow of Zarephath, in that she was persuaded that Elisha was a holy man of God before the miracle was wrought; the widow got the same assurance concerning Elijah after the miracle (1 Ki. 17:24). “I perceive—,” said the woman of 2 Kings 4:9. Oh, that we were all more keen in our spiritual perception!

As a lover of hospitality, the Shunammite frequently lodged Elisha. Those who are unable to bestow loving attentions upon the Son of God Himself, as Martha and Mary did, may always lavish care upon those who represent Him, if they have the heart for it, and this is good and acceptable with God (1 Tim. 3:3; 5:10). It was her reading of Elisha’s life which constrained the Shunammite to say to her husband, “Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.” It is well when a man’s ways are this eloquent for God. The apostle could remind the Thessalonians of what manner of men he and his fellow laborers were among them for their sakes. Indeed, he could say, “Ye are witnesses and God also” (1 Th. 1:5; 2:10). With Timothy he could appeal not only to his doctrine, which was sound, but also to his, “manner of life, purpose, faith,” etc. (2 Tim. 3:10). In his last conversation with his Ephesian friends he was able to review his whole course amongst them as in every way an example for them to follow (Acts 20:18-35). Faithful servant! True ambassador for the absent Christ!

One day, when Elisha was in the Shunammite’s house he bade Gehazi, his servant, call her to him. He expressed the desire to do something for her in recognition of her many kindnesses to himself. “Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host?” (Possibly Elisha’s services at the time of the expedition to Moab had given him some influence at court.) The woman’s reply was excellent: “I dwell among mine own people.” Worldly honors had no attraction for her; she loved the simplicity of her own proper surroundings. How would we have replied to a similar inquiry? What is the world to us—anything or nothing? Would we be spoken for to the king? For the Christian, “mine own people,” means the Assembly. Is it really there that we find our truest joys, albeit the Assembly is composed of “the poor of the flock,” the weak, the base, the despised, etc. (1 Cor. 1:26-29)? Sometimes the blunder is made of regarding the saints as they are naturally instead of regarding them in the light of the infinite grace of God. What they are to Christ, and the fact that His presence is known in their midst should endear the saints to our hearts beyond everything else. Happy are we if our souls are so fully satisfied with the communion of saints that each one of us is able to reply to every overture, “I dwell among mine own people.” In the shade with God, apart from the world, is the safest place for us all, and the only proper place.

If worldly honors were nothing to the Shunammite, her family joys should be increased. Accordingly, Elisha promised her a son, and in due time the son was born. A few short years of domestic bliss followed, and then the dark shadow of death entered the home. But the death of the lad brought out all that was spiritually noble in the mother. Her reticence to her husband concerning the great sorrow is suggestive that he was either not born of God at all, or that his faith was not up to the level of her own. Behold her hastening across the plain of Jezreel (perhaps thirty miles) in order to spread out her grief at the feet of the man of God at Mount Carmel. Such was her confidence in God that in reply to the inquiry: "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?" she could reply, "It is well." Brethren, it is always "well." "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Contrary to the principle laid down in Amos 3:7, Jehovah had not seen fit to acquaint Elisha beforehand with the object of the woman's errand. As soon as he understood it, he bade Gehazi take his staff, and lay it upon the face of the child. This, however well meant, did not satisfy the Shunammite. She said to the prophet, "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." She preferred the living person to the lifeless staff, symbol of power though the latter might be. Perhaps Elisha was testing her, as Elijah tested him on the day of his translation. If so, her faith responded nobly. Alas, how many in our time cling to lifeless forms (sacraments, etc.) to the neglect of the living Christ! On their way to Shunem the prophet and the mother met the returning Gehazi with his report: "The child is not awaked." Entering into the house, Elisha "went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm." Even so, it is only contact with the living Christ that can give life, and also sustain the life when it has been received.

"Call this Shunammite," said Elisha to Gehazi. "Take up thy son," said he to the mother. "Then she went in and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out." The scene is full of moral grandeur. No expression of rapture and surprise at what had happened; nay, she expected it. Her faith had gripped the God of resurrection. "Through faith . . . women received their dead raised to life again" (Heb. 11:35). The Shunammite could but fall at the feet of the one who had brought life to her. In like manner we prostrate ourselves before Him who has shattered the power of death on our behalf, and secured for us life for evermore.

## “Death in the Pot”

---

This incident, and that which follows, furnish us with a sort of typical picture of man’s history from the Creation to the Millennial age. Christ in His two comings is suggested in the deliverances wrought by the man of God.

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal” (2 Ki. 4:38). Gilgal was originally the place of blessing. There the presence and power of God were experienced by Israel in a remarkable degree. The earth could once be described in the same way. But for man’s defection it might be so described still. The sons of the prophets being assembled around Elisha, “he said unto his servant, set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pottage; for they knew them not.” The gourds were poisonous. The man had gathered a lapful of colocynths, really a wild cucumber, though in appearance like a vine. His eyes deceived him, and so he introduced a death dealing element into the food of his fellows. How like to what happened in Eden! The forbidden tree was pleasant to the eyes, and in every way so desirable that the woman yielded to the temptation of the evil one, and so ate thereof, “and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). Death followed. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Rom. 5:12). “O thou man of God,” cried the sons of the prophets, “there is death in the pot!”

But the remedy was at hand, for God is very good. He desires not the death of any. Elisha “said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.” The meal (as in the Levitical sacrifices) typifies Christ. He is God’s great remedy for all the mischief which man’s sin has brought into the world. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21). His death is our deliverance from the old sin-stricken order of things to which once we belonged; it has become the means of life to us; and eternal life is ours now in Christ risen. We belong to another sphere where death can never come, and where the power of Satan is unknown.

For the Christian, while walking here, there is always “a dearth in the land.” There is absolutely nothing that can satisfy the new man. Whatever men provide for their own satisfaction, there is always “death in the pot.” The simplest things that men devise they spoil. Science, art, music—all those occupations with which men seek to delight themselves, and which are not necessarily sinful, yet contain in them the element of death, as many unwary saints have proved to their hurt. Only when the meal is cast in is anything fit or safe for the people of God. Everything earthly that we venture to handle apart from Christ is to our spiritual damage. When shall we learn the lesson for ourselves, and for our children? How many once faithful witnesses lie scattered and wrecked upon the rocks through lack of vigilance and care, and how many of the children of God’s saints have been ruined from the same cause! There is “death in the pot” at every turn in this scene where Christ is not, yet how often do we forget it!

## The Firstfruits

---

The feeding of the hundred men follows suitably. The two incidents seem designed to be considered together, if only because, in each case, the miracle was wrought in connection with eating. "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men! He said again, Give unto the people, that they may eat; for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before the men, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord" (2 Ki. 4:42-44). The first fruits were properly the portion of the priests (Num. 18:8-12), but everything was in disorder in Israel. Aaron's sons were in exile, Jeroboam's priests doing duty instead at his idolatrous altars; the first fruits were accordingly presented to the man of God, as Jehovah's true representative in the land. Observe that the offering came "from Baal-shalisha." From the place of Baal's abode, where Satan reigned, something was brought to God. Even so will it be in the Millennial age. This poor world, where Satan's throne now is, will yet yield its true offering to God. The usurper is destined ere long to be overthrown, in order that the Man of God's good pleasure may be established in the place of power and glory. "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7).

Then the feeding time will come. No longer will there be "dearth in the land"; never again will there be "death in the pot." Of Zion it is written: "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Ps. 132:15). The Lord Jesus gave an earnest of this when He fed the five thousand. So enthusiastic were the people after that marvel that they were disposed to take Him by force and make Him King (Jn. 6:15). He refused their desire, and retired to the mountain alone. When the hour for the appointed kingdom comes, He will receive it neither from men nor from Satan, but from the Father, who alone has authority to delegate it to any.

In Elisha's day, "They did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." There was plenty for all. In the Millennial age, "There shall be abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains [surely a most unlikely place]; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon" (Ps. 72:16). To Israel, "The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength. Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine for the which thou hast laboured; but they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness" (Isa. 62:8, 9).

How blessed when all the woes of Israel and the nations are healed, and when all men's wants are fully met! "According to the word of the Lord"; so shall it be. But this awaits the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Naaman, the Syrian

---

There are two men of this name spoken of in Holy Scripture, the one a son of Benjamin, and the other a Syrian officer (Gen. 46:21; 2 Ki. 5). Doubtless, to contracted Jewish minds, the Benjamite was much more to God than the Gentile; and, in fact, our Lord's audience in the synagogue of Nazareth were so enraged at His mention of the Syrian that they forthwith cast Him out (Lk. 4:29). Our Lord cited the case to show that there is goodness in the heart of God for strangers, and also that Israel's rejection of Himself would have the effect of diverting the stream of divine grace in their direction. This is how the blessing has reached to us, reader and writer alike.

In Naaman we see man at his best estate. He was successful in his undertakings, highly esteemed by his master, and evidently capable of winning the affections of those who served him. But everything was blighted by the terrible disease which afflicted him, for he was a leper. Other foes trembled before him; to this foe he was a helpless victim. Leprosy is ever in Scripture a type of sin—that loathsome moral disease which unfits every man for the divine presence, and from which no man is able to deliver himself.

The captive maid is an attractive character. She was a true child of faith. The graciousness of her spirit is remarkable. Though a victim of Naaman's military operations, no resentful feeling was permitted to lurk in her mind. Her sufferings became fruitful in blessing to others. She might almost have said with the apostle in 2 Corinthians 1:6, "If we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation." Assured that there was goodness in the heart of God even for the Gentile, and longing that her master might be blessed, she said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." But when had God ever done such a thing? From the day that Leviticus 12-14 was written, no case is recorded of any man being recovered of his leprosy. Even at that very time there were "many lepers in Israel" (Lk. 4:27), and none of them were cleansed. We are reminded of Abraham at Moriah, who accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead, though no person had been raised since the world's foundation (Heb. 11:19). It is blessed to note the confidence that faith has in God. Faith refuses to believe that anything is impossible with Him.

But Naaman knew not God as the maid knew Him. Accordingly he went armed with a letter from his own sovereign to the King of Israel. The healing, if it could be brought about, must come through official channels, with all due pomp and ceremony. But the maid said nothing about the King of Israel. The latter was dismayed at the letter, suspecting only an excuse for a quarrel. This was really shameful in Jehoram. Jehovah had taken great pains with this man in order to teach him that He is God. Had the king quite forgotten the water in the desert? (2 Ki. 3:20). Had not Jehovah said, "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal?" (Dt. 32:39). Why did not Jehoram at once think of the prophet of God! Alas, flesh learns no lessons, let divine favors be ever so abundant.

How often in our own time do souls turn in wrong directions in their search for good! Law keeping, sacraments, etc.—anything and everything but the Christ of God.

Presently, however, Naaman found himself at the door of Elisha. The prophet, hearing of the king's alarm, sent him a messenger, saying, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Now behold the famous captain at the prophet's door. He had his own thoughts as to how the cure should be effected, and he was prepared to pay a big fee for the blessing. He had already humbled himself considerably in order to be blessed. He was following the advice of a mere servant girl, he was seeking a favor in the land of a beaten foe, and he was now halting with his equipage at the humble lodging of Elisha. Surely nothing more in the way of condescension could be expected! But he must come down a great deal lower ere God could meet him. Flesh in all ages resents this coming down. A toilsome pilgrimage, a burdensome pledge, or a huge fee would suit flesh today better than God's simple terms of salvation by grace alone, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Men's devices put honor upon the flesh. But God's plan is to utterly abase it, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:29).

It was a tremendous setback for Naaman when the prophet sent a messenger out to him, saying, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." This was more than flesh and blood could bear. The Syrian was deeply affronted. As he turned away in rage, he said, "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." We all have our own ideas as to how God should work. But He has said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). How blessed to come to the end of ourselves, and give up "I thought" once and for ever! The soul only then begins to truly learn.

If men in Israel felt scorn for the uncircumcised Syrian (as evidenced by the anger of the men of Nazareth in our Lord's day), the Syrian returned the scorn upon them to the full. He could even rail against their streams! "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel! May I not wash in them, and he clean?"

Naaman may well be eternally grateful to his servants who forthwith pleaded with him, venturing to point out the unreasonableness of his wrath. "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it! how much rather then, when he said to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

To Jordan then. Let the word of Jehovah through the prophet be tested. When did His Word ever fail! When were any disappointed who had staked little or much, or even their all, upon His words. "Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." Let us not misunderstand this type. Not blood, but water was the element in which Naaman dipped himself. Cleansing by blood has reference to what a man has done (for nothing but atoning blood can put away sins); cleansing by water has reference to what a man is, as scion of a ruined stock. In God's great plan, the sinner must be got rid of as well as his sins. Now Jordan is typical of death. In the picture before us we have the man of military fame, the man who would have purchased with money the gift of God; the man of "I thought," taking his plunge into death, and seen as such no more. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child." So to speak, he made a new start with God. In like manner, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). The believing soul endorses the sentence

of death upon himself, and gratefully accepts the death of Christ as the door out of his former sinful state, that hence forward he may “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Baptism is connected with this truth. The soul which has entered into the significance of it delights to say with the apostle, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). The old “I” has gone (for faith) with all its appurtenances, and Christ alone remains.

## Is It a Time to Receive?

---

He who has received blessing from God is of necessity grateful, and his lips hasten to make their due confession. Accordingly we find Naaman returning from Jordan to the house of Elisha. In the presence of all his retinue he said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Ki. 5:15). This was a great deal for the famous captain to say after all his victories over that people. But God, not men, was now before his soul, and God had become his light and his salvation. How could he do aught but publicly confess Him! Moreover, in his gratitude he would leave a tangible blessing behind him. Had he not brought ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment with him from Syria! Payment was doubtless his thought when he started out; to leave behind him a grateful offering was now his heart's desire. But the circumstances forbade Elisha to accept it. "As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." Even urgent pressure from Naaman would not induce him to touch what he had brought. The healing of the Syrian was intended to be a picture of absolutely free grace to Gentiles (a great lesson to Israel and a notable testimony to the nations), and it must not be marred by the passing of gold and silver.

Naaman then asked the favor of two mules' burden of earth, "for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto Jehovah." He would raise a testimony to Jehovah on his return home, and that not with hewn stone (product of human effort); his altar should be of earth only, according to the divine command in Exodus 20:24. Whatever the cost, he would confess Jehovah in the face of all the idolatry of Syria. This is the spirit that is a delight to God in all ages.

But Naaman had a difficulty, and this he frankly laid before the prophet. His official duties required him to attend his sovereign when he went into the house of Rimmon to worship there. This would naturally be painful to him in days to come, and so he pleaded, "When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon Jehovah pardon thy servant in this thing." Elisha replied, "Go in peace." Every newborn soul has his exercises as he returns to his former surroundings. A teacher taught of God, as was Elisha, would never grant a license in connection with doubtful matters, but he would be equally unwilling to impose a burden upon the conscience by demanding a pledge. Left to itself with God, the soul that only desires to please Him will soon learn what is comely, and grace will infallibly be granted to carry it out. "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

So the Syrian started for home. Alas, there was one (connected with the testimony of God) who watched his well-laden equipage with covetous eyes. It was Gehazi, "the servant of the man of God." It was too much for him that so willing a giver as Naaman should be allowed to return to Syria as rich as he came. "As Jehovah liveth [said he], I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." Sin is aggravated a thousandfold when the divine name is brought into it. Covetousness led to lying, for sins seldom travel alone. The fabrication concerning the two young men from Ephraim secured a fine booty for Gehazi. Yet another lie followed to cover these transgressions.

Challenged by Elisha as to his errand, he denied that he had been anywhere at all. Then followed the terrible denunciation: "Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee! Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants! The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever." And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

Gehazi is here a type of his nation, once outwardly near to Jehovah, but evidencing by their behavior that their hearts were far from Him. As His responsible witness in the earth, Israel has utterly misrepresented Him to the nations (Isa. 42:18-20; 43:8-10; Rom. 2:24); and as a consequence His hand has come down upon the people in judgement, and for the time being they have been put outside the place of testimony altogether. Gehazi's case reminds us somewhat of Miriam in Numbers 12. She was smitten with leprosy for her rebellion against Moses in the matter of the Ethiopian woman whom he had taken to wife. Both Miriam and Gehazi were utterly out of harmony with the mind of God concerning Gentiles. Their contracted hearts objected to Gentiles having a free share in the goodness of God to His people. Thank God, Israel's heart will yet be changed, and they will gladly disseminate blessing far and wide. But they must themselves be restored to God on the ground of mercy ere this can be (Rom. 11:26-32).

Let us take warning for ourselves. We stand in the place of the smitten witness, and we are here to represent the gracious God who has revealed Himself so wonderfully in the Man Christ Jesus. Our ways must correspond to our words. If our words are to have weight with men, our lives must be eloquent for God. A censorious or covetous spirit absolutely belies the God of all grace. The departing apostle could appeal in Acts 20 to his manner of life; could we do the same! The ministry with which he was entrusted molded the minister. Is it the same with ourselves! The ministry of the unveiled Christ (2 Cor. 3) produced an unveiled man (2 Cor. 4), i.e., he walked transparently before both God and man. God was truly represented in his life. From him radiated the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Hear his appeal to ourselves: "Brethren, be imitators of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Phil. 3:17). "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

## The Iron Did Swim

---

To the man who knows not God it may seem puerile to introduce the story of a lost axe head into a volume of so exalted a character as the Bible. But the fact that it is able to stoop to small matters as well as unfold the highest themes is one of the many proofs to the believing heart that the Bible has really come from God. For it is a most precious fact that every detail concerning His own who are in the world is of the deepest interest to Him with whom we have to do. He numbers our hairs; He takes account of our tears; He remembered Paul's need of a cloak; and He considered the weak condition of Timothy's stomach. A petty raid is of greater importance in the divine sight if saints are involved in it than the mightiest military campaigns if they do not affect them. This is why a whole chapter is devoted to Chedorlaomer's attack upon Southern Palestine (Gen. 14), while many of the great military movements of antiquity (diluted upon by historians) receive no notice in Scripture whatever.

In this materialistic day it is considered childish to accredit miracles. An axe head fetched up from the bed of a river by the simple expedient of casting a stick into the water (2 Ki. 6:1-7). Here indeed is food for the contempt of the proud. But the narrative presents no difficulty to faith. No reverent mind believes that the Lawgiver of the universe is limited by the natural laws which He has Himself established. While allowing those laws to have their full ordinary operation, He is quite able to act apart from, and in superiority to, them whenever it pleases Him to do so.

The physical miracle of recovering a lifeless axe from the depths may indeed be great, but the moral miracle of recovering for God a man dead in trespasses and sins is immeasurably greater. The latter may well be pictured in the former. The axe head which broke away from its proper position, where alone it could be really useful, and which then became an instrument for mischief, is strikingly suggestive of revolted man. If he were still standing in his original God-appointed position, he would be of service for God in the universe; having broken away from that position, he is Satan's most efficient tool for evil.

"Alas, master," cried the hapless woodman, "for it was borrowed." To lose what belongs to another is more serious than to lose what is really our own. Now all that constitutes what man is, is derived from, and belongs to, Another. No man has anything that he can properly call his own. This truth was pressed upon guilty Belshazzar by the prophet Daniel on the last night of a wasted life. "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. 5:23). To many another the same strong words might be addressed with equal suitability.

"The axe head fell into the water," i.e., into Jordan, the familiar Scripture type of death. Is man a fallen creature, or is he not? The wisdom of the twentieth century objects to saying "Yes," and yet men cannot deny that something is radically wrong with the race in every quarter. Civilized Europe, with its barbarous conflict, wherein every convention is ruthlessly trampled underfoot, cannot with decency again reproach the uncivilized heathen. Let none deny it—man is fallen, and away from God. Jordan speaks of death, and death unquestionably lies upon men everywhere in consequence of their fallen condition.

“And the man of God said, Where fell it?” Having learned, “he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.” In like manner, as the living branch was cut down and cast in where the lost iron lay, even so was the living Christ cut down, and went right down into death where lost men lay. We are thus reminded of the words of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.” Readers should beware of the Revised Editor’s rendering of this passage. The point before the mind of the apostle is this: the fact that Christ died for all is the proof that all men were in a state of death (spiritual death, of course). He who would deliver men must go where men were; nothing else could avail. The modern ritualist attaches all possible importance to the: Incarnation; but by so doing, he would rob us of the benefit of redemption. Such was men’s condition by nature and practice that Christ’s death and blood shedding alone could meet it.

Physical miracles may today be absent, but moral miracles are being wrought amongst us continually. Men dead towards God are being quickened into new life by the Spirit’s power, the instrument used for the mighty transformation being the old gospel concerning the Savior who died for sinners upon Calvary’s tree, and rose again. Miracles of this description will continue to be wrought while the dispensation of grace lasts.

## God and the Kings

---

In 2 Kings 6:1-7 we have divine goodness to saints; in the verses which follow we have the same goodness extended to others also. This is on the principle of 1 Timothy 4:10, where the living God is declared to be “the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.” Only folly would introduce the salvation of the soul into such a passage. It simply affirms the truth of God’s providential interest in all His creatures. With this agrees Psalm 145:9: “The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works.”

Continuing our study of 2 Kings 6 from verse 8, we have first Jehovah addressing Himself once more to Jehoram, King of Israel’s ten tribes. He took great pains with this man, yet we have no reason to believe that anything resulted from it, so hopeless is flesh. We are reminded of the apostle’s warning in Hebrews 6:7-8: “The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” The “rain” of God’s goodness fell “oft” upon Jehoram, but no fruit for God is discoverable in the record of his life in consequence of it.

War having again broken out between Syria and Israel, the King of Syria found that his plans were becoming known to his antagonist in some mysterious way. Being much perplexed thereat, he charged his staff with treachery, and was informed by them, “Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.” And indeed this was true, for several times the man of God had sent messages to Jehoram, saying, “Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down. And the King of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there not once or twice.”

Let none suppose that the divine interest is confined to the Church. The Church is indeed a very special thing in the earth, united as one body to Christ its Head in heaven, and being such is tenderly cared for with all the strength of infinite love. But all men, even though unappreciative of the wonderful grace of God revealed in the gospel, are nevertheless the creatures of His hand, and He cannot but feel an interest in their welfare. It was intended that Jehoram should learn that deliverance does not depend upon “men, money, and munitions.” There is at all times a God to be reckoned with, who is well able to circumvent all the designs of the mightiest enemy, and to give deliverance apart from military efforts altogether. Kings and their advisers should remember that the secrets of the council chamber (however carefully kept from the people) are all known to God. “With Him all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou!” (Dan. 4:35). These are lessons that God would teach the leaders of men in this day; happy would it be for all concerned if they would but learn them! One of the mightiest monarchs of antiquity was given to understand that “the heavens do rule.” Being unwilling to acknowledge it, fearful disaster fell upon him. Ultimately the broken king was enabled

to say, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgement, and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan. 4:37). The schemes of the haughty are speedily frustrated when God is pleased to act. Surely such a God is worthy of men's faith and prayers!

## Chariots of Fire

---

The special interest of the living God in those who are in relationship with Himself is amply shown in connection with the efforts of the Syrian king against Elisha. Being desirous of getting rid of one whose warnings to Jehoram so thwarted his operations, he sent a great host with horses and chariots to Dothan to apprehend him (2 Ki. 6:13, etc.). What could a helpless man do against such an array! Clearly nothing. But the King of Syria should have known, from the remarkable way in which his secrets had been revealed, that he was really contending with God, a very serious matter assuredly. The God whom he entirely overlooked soon covered his fresh schemes with confusion.

To the terror of Elisha's servant, when he arose one morning the city was encompassed with an army. "Alas, my master," said he, "how shall we do!" "Fear not," the prophet replied, "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The eye of faith in the man of God could see what the eye of nature could not see. When the young man's eyes were opened, in answer to his master's prayer, he beheld the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. The man who saw the heavenly vision when his leader was translated had Heaven always very near his soul. His whole course as a servant of Jehovah was deeply colored by the circumstances of its commencement. It was so with Isaiah. He saw the glory of the Lord (Isa. 6), and received his commission from thence, and in how many passages does he speak of the glory of Jehovah in his writings! The apostleship of Paul is even more to the point in this respect. The fact that he saw Christ in glory at the beginning of his career stamped a special character upon his whole subsequent ministry. Christ glorified is more the theme of Paul than of any other writer.

There were two hosts around Dothan that day. The servant saw the Syrians, and was dismayed; the prophet saw the heavenly armies, and was confident. In like manner when the angels of God met Jacob, as recorded in Genesis 32:1, he called the name of the place Mahanaim—"two hosts." As the Psalmist puts it in Psalm 119:150-151, "They draw near that follow after mischief, . . . (but) Thou art near." Danger may indeed be imminent, but God is nearer to us than all our foes. We may well ask ourselves, which host do we see today—the assemblage of those who hate us, or the company of "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of [inherit] salvation!" (Heb. 1:14). In all our perplexities and perils, surely we can say with Elisha, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them."

A remarkable thing then happened. Elisha prayed that the Syrians might be smitten with blindness. This was as truly mercy as the smiting of the Sodomites with blindness was judgement (Gen. 19:2). The Syrians were to be taught two great lessons: (1) the impossibility of harming God's people, and (2) the goodness of the heart of God even towards Gentiles. The wording of verse 19 in the Authorized Version has caused Elisha to be suspected of untruthfulness by some; substitute "and" for "but," and all is plain. When the Syrians reached Samaria, and had their eyes opened, they were indeed in the presence of the man they sought, i.e., Elisha; there was no subterfuge whatever. The King of Israel was willing on this occasion to obey the directions of the

prophet, with the result that the captives were feasted, and then sent away to their master. “So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.” This astonishing incident closed the campaign. If Israel learnt nothing from the wonderful ways of God, Syria did—at least for the time being.

It is interesting to us as Gentiles to observe in the Old Testament these occasional flashes of divine grace to men outside of Israel. Truly the heart of God is good and gracious. It is significant that the exhortation to Christians in Romans 12:20, “If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink,” is a quotation from the Old Testament from Proverbs 25:21-22.

Our chapter (2 Ki 6) assuredly teaches us that there is a God who is able to outwit every enemy device, and to bring to naught all his strategy. This is the God to whom His people are entitled to look in all the trying circumstances of wilderness life.

## The Lesson of War

---

“It came to pass after this.” Note the words. Not for long does the enemy allow the people of God to enjoy quietness. His restless hatred watches every opportunity to stir up trouble for them. So it was in Elisha’s day, and so it is in our own time also. Still, 2 Kings 6:24 reads strangely after the remarkable story related in the preceding verses. We might almost have supposed that after the feeding of the Syrian host by Israel, for very shame they would not have attacked them again, and in that generation. But the human heart is incorrigible in its evil. The richest grace produces no effect upon it apart from new birth. This alone explains the worldwide revolt spoken of in Revelation 20:7-9 as following our Lord’s thousand years reign. Even the marvelous blessing of that era of glory will not reconcile flesh to God.

But nothing happens without a cause. The Syrians’ new war against Israel was altogether evil. God was not taken into account in their mischievous plans. But, while this is true, there was also that in the condition of God’s people which called for discipline, and which could only be corrected by the stern ordeal of war. So we find the citizens of Samaria reduced to direst extremity, the awful need of the hour being vividly brought home to the king by the pitiful story of the woman who had been compelled to boil her son. How true is God’s Word, in its warnings as well as in its promises! In Leviticus 26 and also in Deuteronomy 28, the calamities which would result from disobedience were solemnly described to the people by Moses before they entered into the promised land at all; now in Jehoram’s reign we find them literally fulfilled.

We are now passing through a grave crisis ourselves. In these favored islands, whatever our inconveniences, losses, and sorrows, we are hardly able to realize what is taking place in lands more directly touched by the ravages of war. In the midst of all the suffering, experiencing weariness and painfulness, cold and nakedness, the people of God are found. Is it without a cause that affliction has thus fallen upon the Church as well as upon the world? What has our record been during many years of tranquility and prosperity? Half-heartedness, worldliness, and division. Are we learning the lessons of this terrible time! If men at large will not fear the rod, and Him who has appointed it, are we, the redeemed people of God, willing to hear? Have we yet humbled ourselves before God concerning our shortcomings and sins? Jehoram was not the worst of Israel’s kings. He wrought evil in the sight of Jehovah, but not like his father and like his mother (2 Ki. 3:2). There was with him even a show of piety. He made use of Jehovah’s Name, and wore “sackcloth within upon his flesh.” But his heart was never right towards God. Accordingly, the fiery trial of war only served to bring out the terrible evil of his heart. Like the rocky ground hearers of Matthew 13:21, he could not face tribulation. Thus, when he heard the painful story of the woman and her son, he exclaimed, “God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day.” Instead of humbling himself before God in dust and ashes, and so drawing down mercy from on high, he lifted up his hand to strike. Who would he strike? God, if he could reach Him; but, as that was impossible, he would murder the man who represented Him.

“Why does not God stop the war!” is the irritable demand of our own time. “If there be a God, why does He allow all this sorrow!” That their own sins have made war inevitable, and that it might not be for their good for the cloud to be lifted too soon, does not seem to occur to the mass of our fellowmen. In their eyes God is a sort of public officer who should hasten to the rescue, asked or unasked, whenever men get into trouble. In their blindness they forget that instead He is a moral governor, whose claims they have set at naught, and whose very existence they have practically ignored. Men have sown to the wind, and they are now reaping the whirlwind. It could not have been otherwise. The road to deliverance lies along the line of repentance. “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). Behold the instrument of Jehoram’s wrath, with his master at his heels, proceeding to the home of the prophet. Unlike his predecessor, who fled at Jezebel’s threat, Elisha sat still in the house. When the would be murderer appeared, instead of a divine denunciation, lo! a wonderful announcement of divine grace was sounded forth. Elisha said, “Hear ye the word of Jehovah, Thus saith Jehovah, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria” (2 Ki. 7:1) Our minds travel to the cross of Calvary, and to all that followed that dark scene. As in Elisha’s day, so it was then; when man’s worst was fully told out, God brought forth His very best. Not judgement, but the gospel of the grace of God was the immediate result of the murder of the Lord Jesus. When Jehoram was about to slay Elisha, God declared His glad tidings concerning deliverance and plenty; when men had actually slain His beloved Son, God declared the glad tidings with which we are blessedly familiar in the gospel. Moreover, the city in which the dreadful deed was committed was to have the message first of all (Lk. 24:17). Truly there is none so good and gracious as our God!

## The Four Lepers

---

It is most remarkable, the persons who first experienced the goodness of God to the starving people of Samaria—four lepers! These poor creatures were sitting at the entering in of the gate in the last stage of exhaustion and misery. They felt (indeed, they said as much one to another) that if they pressed their way into the city, it was but to die of famine; if they remained where they were, death was certain; but one course seemed open to them, to cast themselves upon the mercy of the Syrians. “If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die” (2 Ki. 7:3, 4). It was the counsel of despair. As regards those within, they were outcasts; and as regards those without, they were enemies. Yet these were the men to whom first of all Jehovah showed His salvation.

We are reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:26-30. In this gospel day, it is not the wise, the mighty, and the noble who are called, but God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base and despised, yea, and the things which are not, in order that no flesh may glory in His presence. In His grace He loves to show mercy to the helpless and hopeless, to the lost and undone. By so doing He makes it abundantly plain that His salvation is altogether of grace alone. Behold the poor Samaritan lepers venturing forth in the twilight in the direction of the Syrian camp! Hope and fear alternated in their breasts when they reached the enemy’s tents; to their utter astonishment they found no man there. Their dread foes were gone! Who had scattered them! Men? No! It was God. The victory was absolutely His. He had caused the Syrians to hear a great noise, as of the rushing of chariots and horsemen. Both from the north and the south the noise came. Panic stricken, they concluded that the King of Israel had hired against them the Hittites and the Egyptians. Caught as they supposed, between two armies, they fled by the only road that seemed open to them—eastward across the Jordan. When the matter was investigated, the road to the river was found strewn with garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast from them in their flight. But Jordan rolled between Israel and their foes.

Jordan is to us a type of the death of Christ. By His death all our foes have been vanquished forever. Sin has been expiated, and the power of Satan and of death has been shattered. The death of Christ, like Jordan of old, stands between us and all that was against us. Our God loves to say to those who have no might, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (Ex. 14:13).

It only remained for the poor lepers to enjoy the fruits of Jehovah’s great victory. Even so it is with us, both now and evermore. The lepers “went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.” Their deep need was thus fully met. First, they “did eat and drink.” Every poor sinner who comes to God comes famished, like the prodigal of Luke 15, for a Christless world is a hungry place for all who have to do with it. But the call of grace runs thus: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price”

(Isa. 55:1). The fattened calf is not too good, in God's account, wherewith to feast the sinner who believes.

The lepers found raiment also. Likely enough they were in rags. Our very righteousnesses are likened in Scripture to "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6); what then are our sins? But with joy we hear the Father's voice, saying, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him" (Lk. 15:22). The best robe is Christ. In Him the believer stands, justified for ever. The apostle, who knew by experience the difference between the righteousness that is wrought by human effort, and that which is of God by faith, spurned the one because of the surpassing excellence of the other (Phil. 3:9).

But the lepers also gathered gold and silver. Not only was their present urgent need met, but their future was thus made sure. Never again would they be paupers, dependent upon the charity of their fellows. If the raiment speaks to us of "the gift of righteousness," the gold and silver suggests "the abundance of grace" that accompanies it for us (Rom. 5:17). God enriches for eternity those whom He receives. It is not the manner of men to enrich either transgressors whom they may pardon, or beggars whom they may relieve, but such is the amazing grace of God. With all the blessing of Christ He endows His own forever. No wonder the apostle exclaimed, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Being now filled and satisfied, the four men began to think of others. They said one to another, "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." Accordingly they arose and reported the matter to the porter of the city, and presently the news reached the king himself. Those whom God has blessed have a deep responsibility resting upon them. Do we realize that the world is perishing for lack of the knowledge that we possess? The four lepers felt they dare not settle down to the enjoyment of their abundance and leave others to their fate.

How do we feel about this? Sometimes it happens that the saints who are the best fed are poorest workers. They would prefer endless Bible readings to a vigorous gospel campaign. Is this right? Peter and John were so profoundly convinced of the importance of the facts of the gospel that when they were told to proclaim them no more, they replied, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). As well bid the sun to cease its shining and the river its flowing as tell such men to be quiet. In 2 Corinthians 4:13, Paul and Timothy give as their reason for preaching: "We believe, and therefore speak." Paul was possessed of a special divine commission, as we know, but he does not mention it in the passage quoted. Every Christian should be able to say the same words. Brethren, do we really believe? Are the mighty facts of Christianity just articles of a creed with us, or have they indeed taken possession of our souls? Do we believe that "Christ died for the ungodly?" Do we believe that "God raised Him from the dead?" Do we believe that "through this Man is now proclaimed the forgiveness of sins?" If so, let us not "hold our peace." This day is a day of good tidings.

The king was skeptical when the news was brought to him; he suspected a stratagem on the part of the enemy in order to gain possession of the city. Though Elisha had distinctly stated in his hearing that "tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria," he yet hesitated to believe it when it came about. It seemed really too good to be true. This character of unbelief, however regrettable, is pardonable, elsewhere would any of us stand! In how many things do we hesitate to accredit the

Word of our God! How frequently we fail to plant the foot of faith firmly upon that which He has spoken! Much of Scripture is treated by us as almost too good to be true. This is exactly where the two disciples stood who poured out their tale of disappointment on the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24). They did not openly reject the story of the women that the Lord was alive, but their faith faltered in the acceptance of it.

Far different was the unbelief of the nobleman upon whose hand the king leaned when Elisha uttered his prophecy of grace. Though it was prefaced by "thus saith Jehovah," the man said to the prophet, "Behold, if Jehovah would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be?" This was positive contempt. He absolutely flouted the Word of Jehovah. The doom of the scorner is certain in all ages. Accordingly, Elisha pronounced sentence upon him thus: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Alas! so it happened. Within twenty-four hours, as the prophet foretold, plenty prevailed in Samaria once more, "according to the word of Jehovah" (2 Ki. 7:16). But the solemn part of his prophecy was also as punctually fulfilled. So great was the rush for the food that it was necessary to appoint someone to supervise the administration of it. This office was allotted to the scornful lord, who was simply trampled to death by the hungry people.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). His judgments are as sure as His favors. No word of His can ever fall. The scornful lord found Elisha's words literally true: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Very similarly did the Lord Jesus warn the unbelieving men of His own time: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Lk. 13:28). Awful thought! They see others blessed, and themselves outside of it for eternity.

It is the fashion in our day to speak with contempt of the judgement of God. The judgement throne and the lake of fire have been practically eliminated from the textbooks of Christendom. But let all sceptics beware, whether religious or irreligious. God's Word stands true, in spite of all their unbelief.

## The Returned Shunammite

---

Let us adopt the Revised Edition's rendering of 2 Kings 8:1, for it will help us in the understanding of the passage: "Now Elisha had spoken unto the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn, for Jehovah hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." The incident was thus earlier in time than the doings recorded in chapter 7. Whenever it was, the departure of the Shunammite from the land of Israel took place by divine command through the instrumentality of Elisha. A time of trouble was approaching: "And surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Such was Jehovah's care for the pious Shunammite that He sent her away beforehand. Is it not good to have to do with God? The emigration of this family was thus on an altogether different principle from that of Elimelech and Naomi (Ruth 1). Their move was just a matter of human expediency, and great sorrow was the result. The true line for us all is indicated in our Lord's words in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Behold the hungry One in the wilderness, possessed of power to supply His need, yet refusing to act without a word from God! If we could but wait in times of perplexity our God may be trusted not to fail us, and He will give the suited words of guidance in His own time Saul lost his kingdom through a little impatience in an emergency (1 Sam. 13:11-14).

Observe that the trouble was limited— "seven years." He who sits upon the throne will never suffer the reins of government to be seized by the enemy. His controlling hand measures everything that must needs fall upon His own, and the enemy is powerless to exceed that measure. Thus the sufferings of the elect during the great tribulation are for 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6), and Satan could not make it 1,261 were he ever so desirous. When he sought the ruin of Job he was only allowed to afflict him step by step as prescribed by God. "Times and laws" (religious institutions) may be given into his hand, but not God's people (Dan. 7:25).

When the Shunammite returned from her seven years exile she appealed to the king for the restoration of her house and land, and she obtained it really through the instrumentality of her son, the story of whose restoration to life so deeply interested the king. She is thus a picture of Israel, away from the land during the present dearth, but yet to possess all things again in virtue of the dead and risen Christ. In that happy day they will say, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). It will be to them as life from the dead.

Gehazi happened to be near at the moment of the Shunammite's appeal to the king. The hand of God was in this. The man was actually relating her own story. Jehoram was just then in the humour to be entertained; thus he said to Gehazi, "Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done" (2 Ki. 8:4). He was not seeking divine instruction from this one-time servant of Jehovah, but (as we have said) entertainment. In like manner many in Christendom today, who

would refuse a plain talk about the realities of eternity, would have no objection to discuss preachers and their doings. If Jehoram had sought such talk from John the Baptist, or Paul the Apostle, he would have heard such words concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come” as would have made him quiver in his shoes (Acts 24:25). But Gehazi was useless for such work now. He had been associated with the testimony of God committed to Elisha, but he was, alas! out of it, and could only dwell upon the past. For him the present was a spiritual blank. Oh, the sorrow of it, and the danger that his case suggests for us all! Our God have mercy upon us!

Money was his ruin. How very solemnly does the apostle warn us concerning this peril in 1 Timothy 6. He distinguishes between those who desire to be rich (vv. 9-11) and those who are rich (vv. 17-19). Those who desire to be rich expose themselves to fearful danger, and those who are already rich have a great responsibility resting upon them in view of the coming day.

Scripture presents to us a number of spiritual wrecks. Amongst them are the old prophet of 1 Kings 13, and Demas. We need not raise questions as to the salvation of such persons, for it is not the point before the mind of the Spirit. The point is that, through paltering with the world, they lost their testimony for God in the present scene. Any of us may do the same. In that case, how solemn will be our manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ! The Lord keep us all walking in humility before Him!

## Ministers of Wrath

---

When Elijah made his complaint against Israel at Horeb three persons were named to him by Jehovah as the executors of His will upon the guilty nation—Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha (1 Ki. 19:15-17). Of these Elisha was brought forward first with his wonderful ministry of grace. This is so like our God. Had Israel possessed eyes to perceive it, Elisha's service amongst them was the divine interlude between the sentence and the execution of the judgement. It was for Israel to say whether the sentence should take effect or not; for Jehovah is ever willing to turn aside the threatened stroke when men really humble themselves before Him. This is His declared principle of action in Jeremiah 18:7-8, and we get an illustration of it in Jehovah's dealings with Nineveh in the time of Jonah.

Elisha's ministry of grace was practically fruitless. Israel sinned more and more. The time had come therefore for the sword to be unsheathed. Accordingly we have the ministers of wrath appointed—Hazael, in 2 Kings 8:7-15; and Jehu, in 2 Kings 9:1-10.

When Elisha visited Damascus, King Benhadad, who was sick, sent Hazael to him to inquire if he should recover of his disease. Possibly the merciful deeds described in 2 Kings 5 and 2 Kings 6:22-23 had given the prophet favor in the eyes of the Syrian monarch, if only for a season. Like Naaman, he was prepared to pay largely for any benefit he might receive, and so he sent the man of God "a present of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden." That God is not a trader, but a giver (and a very generous giver) seems a fact exceedingly difficult for men's minds to grasp. In every dispensation men are disposed to barter with God—so much money or labor for so much blessing.

When Hazael came before him with his message Elisha realized that a fateful moment had arrived for Israel. Hence, after he had informed his visitor that though there was no real reason why the sick man should not recover, but as a matter of fact he would not do so because Hazael was destined to be king over Syria, he wept. All the barbarities attendant upon war rose up before his mind, and though he knew Israel richly deserved the chastening rod, he loved the people, and mourned over their impending desolation.

When the weeping prophet told Hazael what he would do to the children of Israel in burning their strongholds, slaying their young men with the sword, and massacring their women and children, the Syrian exclaimed in amazement, "What, is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" Hazael is not the only person apparently incapable of realizing all the evil of which flesh can be guilty. It is likely that he had never hitherto perpetrated such enormities, and so he recoiled from the terrible suggestions. But the result proves that when he found himself in the place of power he committed all the ferocious deeds of which Elisha warned him. It has been truly said that many of us are harmless only because our position in society does not permit us to be otherwise.

Perhaps some of our readers have not yet learned the hopeless evil of flesh—their own flesh. To such it may be staggering to find the offensive things mentioned in Colossians 3:5 described as

“your members.” Or again, it may be painful to ponder the horrible list of the works of the flesh as given in Galatians 5:19-21. The poor, shocked heart is apt to exclaim, “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?”

Let us note it well, there is no evil of which flesh is not capable. It met its end in judgement before God in the cross of Christ, and they that are Christ's have, by their acceptance of the divine sentence, crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts (Gal. 5:24). Henceforward for us confidence in flesh is impossible. Christ is all.

However startled Hazael might be by the prophet's announcement, in the sequel he did everything that was predicted of him. First, on his return to Damascus he murdered his master in his bed and usurped his throne; then during many years he waged pitiless war with both Israel and Judah, inflicting frightful suffering upon the people. The following passages chronicle Hazael's destructive work: 2 Kings 8:28-29; 10:32-33; 12:17-18; 13:3-7, 22-24. But all the anguish and ruin might have been averted had God's rebellious people humbled themselves before Him.

## The Lesson of the Arrows

---

It is remarkable perhaps that so evil a person as Joash, King of Israel, should visit Elisha upon his death bed, yet so it was (2 Ki. 13:14-19). He seems to have had some respect for the man of God, as Herod at a later date respected John the Baptist, though quite unwilling to conform his ways to his teaching. The sight of the stricken prophet brought tears to the eyes of the king, and he exclaimed, "Oh my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" A truly wonderful thing for a sovereign to say of a humble subject, possessed neither of wealth nor power. But the king rightly felt (and wicked though he was, he could not but acknowledge it) that the presence and prayers of such a man as Elisha was a valuable asset to his nation. The king was right, and the same principle applies today. Who can estimate the priceless value to the British nation of the presence and prayers of God's saints at this tremendous crisis! When the history of earth is fully known it will be found that Britain owes much to the Christians in her midst. But men of time and sense cannot be expected to understand this; with them "men, money, and munitions" are all in all.

The dying prophet sought to turn the king's mind towards Jehovah as the only true Deliverer of his people. Israel was being sorely harassed at that time by the depredations of Hazael, King of Syria. Elisha bade Joash take bow and arrows. He would teach him by a parable. The prophet put his hands upon the hands of the king. The prophet's hands are suggestive of the power of God, without which all human efforts are in vain. Both John in Patmos (Rev. 1:17) and Daniel at the river Hiddekel (Dan. 10:18) were strengthened when the Lord's right hand was laid upon them.

"Open the window eastward," said Elisha. If the shut door of 2 Kings 4:4 speaks of the soul's seclusion with God, the opened window of 2 Kings 13:17 speaks of the soul's expectation from God. Oh, that we all knew more experimentally of these things! Daniel opened his window when he prayed daily towards Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). "Shoot," said the prophet, and the king shot. The interpretation was then given: "The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance, and the deliverance from Syria; for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." Joash had reached a critical moment in his history, and in the history of his kingdom, had he been able to perceive it. The very suggestion that blessing and deliverance from his dreaded foes was signified in the arrows should have prepared him to act worthily at the next stage. Alas, for him, and for man everywhere and always! God always so willing to bless, and man always so blind to his true advantage!

Elisha next bade the king take up the arrows and smite upon the ground. "And he smote thrice, and stayed." Oh, the pity of it! Need we wonder that the man of God was wroth with Joash? "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (v. 19). The man by his slackness had limited the deliverance of his people. God gave him as much as he had faith for but no more. "And Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, took again out of the hand of Benhadad, the son of Hazael, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz, his father, by war; three times did Joash beat him, and

recovered the cities of Israel” (v. 25).

What a lesson is here for us all! We have to do with a God who is boundless in resources, and who delights to bless His people, yet so poor are our thoughts and expectations that we limit Him continually. So little satisfies us. So slow are we, so lacking in spiritual energy, to go in boldly, and “possess our possessions.” Would that there were among us more of that holy yearning which filled the soul of the apostle when he wrote, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfected, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14).

Elisha might well be angry with Joash, as Nehemiah with the faulty Jews of his day (Neh. 13:25). Lack of faith in the one case, and unholy alliances in the other, dishonored God, and hindered the blessing of His people. Similar holy indignation (though not perhaps so vigorously expressed as by Nehemiah) is not unsuitable for our time also.

## Life Out of Death

---

We have now reached the end of the gracious ministry of Elisha, with all its instructive lessons for the men of his own day, and for us also. “And Elisha died, and they buried him.” But a remarkable thing happened a little later. “The bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet” (2 Ki. 13:20-21).

How wonderful are the ways of God! Contact with the dead prophet restored life to the dead. Even so will it be with Israel at the end. In one of His many characters the Lord Jesus is the Prophet like unto Moses, unto whom Israel should have hearkened when He came amongst them in grace (Deut. 18:18-19). Both Peter in Acts 3:22-23, and Stephen in Acts 7:37, urged this upon the people after His departure. National scattering and death have come upon them as the fruit of their rejection of Him. But Israel will yet come into contact with the Prophet like unto Moses. In the tremendous crisis which seems near at hand, compared with which the Moabite invasion was a trivial matter, Israel will be led into touch with the Christ who died. National revival will be the result, likened over and over again in Scripture to life from the dead (Ezek. 37:1-14; Dan. 12:1-2; Hosea 6:1-2; Rom. 11:15).

Upon the same principle has God dealt with us who now believe in the Saviour. Contact with Him as the One who was slain has brought life to us who once were dead in trespasses and sins. It is labour in vain to proclaim Him to the spiritually dead as the pattern Man and the model Preacher, whose teaching all should follow. Nothing of this will meet the sinner’s need. Expiation is wrought by blood alone, and life—eternal life—can only be our portion as the fruit of death. This is what the Lord taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, and which many, even of His disciples, declared was “a hard saying” (John 6:60). The saying is no less hard for carnal religionists of the twentieth century, but the true believer delights to say, “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

But we may carry the lesson still further. If Christ has through death become fruitful in life to others; in the same way may Christians become fruitful also. So the Lord Himself tells us in John 12:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” The language here is purposely abstract. In its first application the reference is to the Lord Himself, but in its more general application it refers to Christians also. We are all grains of wheat, and if God’s garner is to be filled at the end, every grain must be fruitful and multiply. After the pattern of the parent plant each grain must fall into the ground and die. He leads the way in the path that all should follow.

It is the practical application of death to ourselves. In God’s account we have all died with Christ, and our life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). This has to be practically applied daily if we would be fruitful for God. We see this exemplified in the devoted apostle. Hear him in 2 Corinthians 4:11: “We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be

made manifest in our mortal flesh.” The result for others comes out in the following verse: “So then death worketh in us, but life in you.” In so far as the man Paul was put out of sight, and Christ manifested in his words and ways, blessing followed for those to whom he spoke. How is it with us? Are we spiritually fruitful? Are other grains of wheat being produced as the result of our presence in the world! Alas! how many heads must be bowed in shame when such questions are raised! Personal obtrusiveness in preaching, and fleshly indulgence in living, renders so much of our testimony null and void. God ever has had use, and still has use, for those who are willing to hide themselves in death that Christ may be magnified. Life out of death is the great lesson of the ages taught everywhere in the Word of God. May both reader and writer learn the lesson well.

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
  - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**