

THE LIFE OF ELISHA

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A biblical study of the prophet Elisha's life and ministry, examining his mentorship under Elijah and the spiritual lessons of servant leadership in faithful service to God.

8 Chapters

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2. The Days of Elijah and Elisha

The Days of Elijah and Elisha

Elisha served God in a very difficult day and I believe the circumstances surrounding his call, his testing and the incidents we find in his life will be an encouragement to us in our day when we too find ourselves in difficult times, not so much the miraculous things that he did, but rather the features that we see coming to light in Elisha. Elisha came onto the scene in a very abrupt manner. We do not read anything of his boyhood, who his parents were or how he was brought up. We understand he served as a prophet for 55 years, which is a considerable time, and he was faithful to the Lord in the midst of varying circumstances. Perhaps the greatest honour that was given to Elisha was that he was mentioned by the Master Himself in Luke 4:1-44 in terms of honour and dignity.

Elisha lived in conditions that were far from encouraging. A great division had taken place amongst the people of God. It is a very sad thing that when we read the history of the ten tribes that not one good king reigned over them. Thank God in Judah there were some good kings who did right in the sight of the Lord. Elisha's predecessor, Elijah, served his God in the midst of very trying conditions in the ten-tribed northern kingdom before a king and a queen who hated him, and with the nation largely given over to the worship of Baal. There was not much to encourage him. He did not even know that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). It was a great encouragement to learn that there were seven thousand who had never bowed the knee, but it was very sad that not one of them ever came out in public witness to support Elijah. Here we have a picture of 2 Timothy when it says "the Lord knoweth them that are his" (2:19). It is a very sad thing when only the Lord knows them. We should all be known as people who are genuinely here for the Lord in the circumstances in which we are found. So although the Lord had to open Elijah's eyes and say 'Elijah, you are not the only man, there are seven thousand who have been faithful', I think it is right to say that he was the only man who stood out publicly in the face of all that was evil and declared openly that he was on God's side; a courageous prophet indeed. He got discouraged, as I suppose most servants of the Lord do, due to a lack of results and one's own inadequacy. All this kind of thing presses upon the Lord's servants, and it did upon Elijah so much so that he says "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life" (1 Kings 19:4). In other words he said 'Lord, I am finished. I want to go. I have served my God, I have served my day and generation. I have had enough'. 'All right', says God, 'I will take you at your word'. So we find God here saying 'I want you to go and anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat. He will take your place. You can go but I will still carry on the testimony.' God always carries on His work. It has been aptly said that God buries His servants and carries on His work. So it was with Elijah, he was set aside, and Elisha fills up the position.

3. The Character of Elijah

The Character of Elijah In the call of Elisha we see the ungrudging character of Elijah. It is a lovely sight to see when we see a lack of envy amongst the Lord's servants in relation to each other. Elijah does not look upon Elisha as an upstart, but ungrudgingly, according to the command of the Lord, he goes and puts his mantle upon Elisha. And as far as we can see from the narrative he gives him every encouragement to take up this service for the Lord, so when the call of God came through Elijah to Elisha we find this wonderful attitude of lack of envy or jealousy. I believe this comes out distinctly in the life of the New Testament servant, Paul. Oh, how he commended the service of others. Timothy? Paul said he was a man after his own heart, he knew no man so like-minded as Timothy (Php 2:20). Epaphroditus? Oh, this man was ready to give his life (Php 2:30), and there are many others (e.g. Romans 16:1-27). As he writes his epistles, unjealously he commends others for their work for the Lord. This is a good lesson for us all, not to be marked by any spirit of envy in relation to the work of others, but rather to commend what we see. So very often we put aside the service of others because of something that we see in the servant, and we discount all that is worthwhile and all that is valuable. Paul did not do that. Paul commended the servants of the Lord for what he saw.

Having briefly considered Elijah we now want to look at Elisha following in his footsteps. So if we were to write a heading over our simple message this evening it would be:- 'The servants choice, the servants call, and the servants testing'.

4. The Choice of Elisha

The Choice of Elisha

"And the Lord said unto [Elijah] Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." (1 Kings 19:15-16)

God chose Elisha, and God does not make any mistakes when He calls His outstanding servants. He has called us all, every one of us, and we are all small compared to those who have gone before, serving the Lord, but there is something for us all to do in our generation. Elisha was an outstanding servant of the Lord. There are more references to Elisha as a man of God than any other (31 times), far more than either Elijah (7 times) or Moses (6 times). The term "man of God" comes to light when things are difficult. So Elisha, the man of God, is chosen by God to serve in Elijah's place, it was a divine choice. Now we find this all through the Bible. God has the right to choose, after all, it is His work. So very wisely and carefully He chooses His servants for a particular purpose. When the Lord Jesus Christ was here He chose twelve special disciples and also another seventy, and sent them out two by two. He chose them carefully. They did the work He wanted them to do and His choice was vindicated. 'Oh,' you say, 'they were a poor lot! they made so many mistakes. They all forsook Him and fled at the time of His greatest need.' That is true, but before we criticise them let us all take a look at ourselves. The point is this however, that after the Lord went on high and the Holy Spirit was sent down, oh, how wonderfully they served the Lord, what faithfulness, diligence and sacrifice they showed, and if we are to believe tradition (and there is no reason to disbelieve it) each one laid down his life for the Lord with the exception of John, who died at a very old age in exile. Even Judas Iscariot was chosen for a specific purpose. They laid down their lives willingly in sacrifice for their Master, and it takes a lot of courage and faithfulness to do that. So the Lord was vindicated in His choice of the twelve. When we come to the Acts chapter 1 we find two men who were short-listed by the disciples at that time to take the place that was vacated by Judas Iscariot in his unfaithfulness, and a lot is drawn. They did not make the choice in an arbitrary fashion. They did not only say 'We will draw lots and the winner of the lot will be the one we will choose', they also prayed. They asked the Lord to support them in this matter. They knew that the Lord knew the hearts. Outwardly these two brothers had the same qualifications, having been with the Lord from the time He was baptised until the time He died and went back to glory. They had all the qualifications, but God knew the heart, and so they asked God to choose the one to fill up the space, and the Lord made the choice. One was chosen and the other put aside. This is always right; the Lord knows best. In Acts 6:1-15 we have the choosing of people to look after the administration in the church at Jerusalem in relation to the widows. Certain qualifications were required and the choice was made, the service was completed, and as far as we know, the problem was resolved. In Acts 15:25-26 we find the church making a decision, choosing two men to go along with Paul and Barnabas in connection with another company of believers in another part of the world. It says they were men who had "hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". In all cases qualifications were attached to the choice. When Paul sent Titus to Crete to choose elders there he told him not to

look for the men who were most influential, the best educated people, the richest people or the people with the best standing in the world, he told him to choose people with the best spiritual qualities, people who could be relied upon to do the required service. So this question of choice is one that is associated with quality and this is very important in times of great difficulty.

Now we come to ourselves; has God chosen us? Without a shadow of a doubt He has. This is one very important choice that we can all take to our hearts this evening and rejoice in it because before ever time began, before ever the world existed, God chose us in Christ for the greatest possible blessing. In Ephesians 1:1-23 Paul unfolds this wonderful choice of God, describing how He chose us in His sovereign love and grace that we might be with Him eternally in sonship's dignity for His praise and glory and for His blessing for all eternity. Dear brethren, this is a wonderful thing. He knew us each one by name before we ever existed and He chose us in His own sovereign choice and will. When we come to 1 Corinthians 1:1-31 we find another kind of choice. "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty" (v.27). God takes up the weak instrument in order to testify to the outside world that in His power those weak instruments can overcome for His name and for His glory. I believe this is what we find illustrated in Elisha, the son of Shaphat. He, a weak instrument, had to face the king, had to face those who were lukewarm and had to face those who were enemies. In himself he was a weak instrument, but in the power of God it was another story. He was an instrument in the hand of God to overcome the enemies of the truth. God chose Elisha for this, and I think that we can say humbly God has also chosen us for this, not to occupy a place like Elisha, a man of God in dignity and power and wonderful miracles performed through him, but in our humble situations, wherever we are at home, amongst our neighbours, at school, in business, wherever we are found, I believe that God has chosen us that in our weakness might be demonstrated His power so that there might be a testimony for Him. You might say 'What use am I?' That is a common place statement. Many great servants in the Scriptures have said that. Jeremiah said "Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak; for I am a child" (Jeremiah 1:6), Moses was most reluctant to perform the service that God had in mind for him (Exodus 4:1; Exodus 4:10), Jonah, also, ran away (Jonah 1:3). In all these cases there was a great deal of reluctance, but when God takes hold of His servant He forms him and moulds him to His will so that He can do great things through the servant's weakness, and it must always be so. The moment we begin to think that we are able to do this work ourselves we are heading for a fall. However, Elisha was chosen by God and we are very thankful for the way he reacted to the call.

"So [Elijah] departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah cast his mantle upon him." (1 Kings 19:19)

Elijah did not find Elisha sitting down enjoying himself or having a snooze in the heat of the day, he found a very industrious man, plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. I think this is a good thing to see in the Lord's servants. We see this all through the Bible, that God chooses men of action, men of industry, men who can do things. There are many instances of this. Take the Lord calling the fishermen. What were they doing? Were they sitting chatting about their exploits at sea and the large catches of fish they had? I come from a fishing village and when you see some fishermen congregated together it is very likely that this is what they are talking about, their boats, their nets and their catches. But the Lord called the fishermen as they were mending their nets (Matthew

4:21, Mark 1:19). They were industrious, they were busy, they were concerned about the well-being of the nets in view of catching more fish. When God called Moses he was occupied with tending sheep (Exodus 3:1). David was a very industrious and reliable man (1 Samuel 17:34-37; 1 Samuel 22:14). So we could go on. God called this man, a man of industry, a man who was concerned about his daily calling, and performed it in a correct manner. Many, many great men of God have been called from very, very active lives to serve the Lord; they proved themselves in their secular calling, and then they proved themselves in the calling of God. Oh, when there is so much to do, it requires much energy to follow out the Lord's will in the midst of difficulties and opposition. So Elisha is found with the twelve yoke of oxen and is carrying out his daily calling according to God. Also, I believe that this little incident would indicate to us that he was a man who was deeply concerned about the work of God. He was not plowing with an unequal yoke, but instead he was plowing with something that is commended by God (Deuteronomy 22:10). Now I think this is a very important thing that in our lives, without necessarily being engaged in some particular service for the Lord, we should be governed by the word of God. You see, if we become habitually governed by the word of God, it is very easy to be submissive to it when God makes a special claim upon our allegiance. I think the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews presents this that those who are feeding upon strong meat are those who have their senses exercised habitually to discern between what is right and what is wrong. So I think the fact that Elisha is plowing with twelve oxen indicates that he is the kind of man who can be relied upon, he was industrious and his life was governed by the word of God. In short, he was an ideal man to serve the Lord. And so Elijah casts his mantle upon him.

5. The Call of Elisha

The Call of Elisha

"And [Elisha] left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." (1 Kings 19:20-21)

Elisha immediately knew what this act of Elijah involved; it meant he was being called to the service of God. I suppose Elijah's mantle would be the hairy garment that he wore that was indicative of his being a prophet of God. This was the way Elijah was identified. 'What kind of man was he?' said the king. 'He was a man with a hairy garment' was the reply. 'Ah,' said the king, 'It is Elijah the Tishbite. That was the man of God. That was the prophet of God' (2 Kings 1:7-8). This mantle was thrown upon Elisha and immediately he knew that he was called of God. There was no reluctance or hesitation. He said he was prepared to forsake his father and mother, prepared to forsake his secular calling and he was ready to follow Elijah, and he did. Now I think this is a very wonderful attitude. How easy it is to reason, how easy it is to say 'Well, I am not qualified for this kind of thing. I have no credentials to give me the right to take up this service.' It is very easy to turn away; maybe too the sense of sacrifice is too great. But Elisha showed no hesitation. This is a wonderful picture of this man. It does not mean that he set his father and mother aside, oh no, the Scriptures are plain that we are to honour our father and mother, we are to respect those natural ties (Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-2). God honours them and we ought to honour them also. That is not the point. Here was a claim that God was placing upon him that was far greater than any earthly tie. God was virtually saying to Elisha 'Now, Elisha, I want your time, I want your service, I want you and if my claim comes along with a claim from your parents, my claim is paramount, my claim is first'. Elisha is prepared to face that. God also said 'Elisha, you are not going to have any time to spend on anything else I want all your time to spend in this service that I have called you for'. And Elisha is prepared to do that so he killed the oxen and he burned the implements of service. In other words, as we say, he 'burned his boats'. His old life was finished, at an end. A new life was starting for him and that life involved his time, his talents and everything about him and he is now thoroughly devoted to the interests of the Lord.

So, dear brethren, we have to ask ourselves, is this our attitude to the service of the Lord? We are not all called upon to leave our secular calling, we are not even called upon to actually leave our parents, but we are called upon to answer to the claims of the Lord when He makes a claim upon us. When there is some particular call for some particular service then it is right that this should be listened to and we should serve Him accordingly, and do it without any hesitation or reluctance. I know it is easy to say that, but it is a right thing to say because the Lord Himself indicated this in Luke 14:1-35, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (v.26). Again, it

does not mean that we forsake our mother and father and do not show them the respect that we ought to show them, it does not mean that at all, the Lord is simply saying 'My claims come first'. Oh, dear brethren, what a wonderful position it is to be in at all times and to say 'I have the things of God at heart and His things come first in my life, and my whole life is geared to this, the plans I make, what I do, what I say, where I go, my whole outlook in life is governed by this that I belong to God'. I am perfectly sure that we would all be in a healthy condition spiritually if this were true of us in every day of our lives. So Elisha showed how ready he was to answer to God's claims, "he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him". We might have said, 'Well, Elisha has been called by God to fill Elijah's place and now we find Elisha is ministering to Elijah! If I were called to fill his place I am going to start right now.' 'No,' says God, 'first there are a few lessons to be learned. You have some experiences to go through, and there is no-one better to teach you than Elijah. Just you go along with Elijah'. So Elisha went along and ministered to him. He was in the place of a subordinate servant, and he was prepared to accept this place. We find this attitude with the young men all through the Scriptures, Joshua along with Moses (Exodus 24:13), Timothy along with Paul (1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2), and we could quote other cases where the young go along with the old and they learn from them in their spiritual experience and in spiritual maturity. Now this is a great challenge for us who are older. Do we in any way influence the young in the right direction? That is a very solemn thing. We should have sufficient spiritual maturity and power to influence the younger brethren into a pathway of devotedness to God. The truth is, dear brethren, if we are not in it ourselves we cannot influence others to be in that pathway. We have to have the power and the spiritual influence to direct others. Nobody could doubt that Elijah was such a one. How courageous, how faithful, and how obedient he had been, and in times of trial and stress and danger he had represented God and had followed God faithfully. Such a man was spiritually qualified to help this young man. So Elisha went along with Elijah. I do not know what they talked about when they were together. I am sure that Elisha would have plied him with some questions as to the great experiences that he had had on mount Carmel, and with Ahab and Jezebel, and all sort of things of that character, and talking with this man of God he would learn many things that would stand him in good stead when he was in the place of responsibility and representation.

6. The Testing of Elisha

The Testing of Elisha

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el." (2 Kings 2:1-2)

We have first this divine choice, Elisha was chosen by God, and then he was called by God, through Elijah, and how readily he answered to it. Now comes the test. This is always a problem. We think of the call of God (and we are very thankful that we are called of God), but very often when the testing time comes our faith gives way, the difficulties are too great, the problems are too many, and we wonder if we have stepped out on the right pathway, if we have done what is right. God tests us, and it is right that He should. You think of the Master Himself, He was thirty years in obscurity before He served for three and a half years in public. That is a good ratio. There is more of an iceberg under the water than is showing above it, and perhaps our lives should be similar, that is, there should be more devotedness in private in view of our public service. The first thirty years of the Lord's life is shrouded in obscurity before He stepped out in public service for God; and oh, how wonderful those years were! We get an idea of their worth when the Lord Jesus was at the Jordan and the heavens were opened upon Him and God declared His delight in His well-beloved Son. Was it just for that moment? No, I believe those thirty years of obscurity were revealed to us in this one great statement, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". In those thirty years everything was pleasurable to God although hidden from our eyes. Then followed three and a half years where the Lord walked here in public witness to God. Oh, how wonderful that six days before the Lord Jesus died, God could say again, "This is my beloved Son, hear him". This is God's testimony to His own beloved Son. So I believe the testing time comes, as it did in the life of the Lord, where, immediately after the Father's delight was expressed in Him He was tested of Satan for forty days in the wilderness. So we are not surprised if we are tested by difficulties and trials and oppositions so that God might prove us to be reliable servants. I believe, dear brethren, that the more often we are faithful in private, in secret, there will be more indication in our public lives for God.

Briefly now we will look at this incident in 2 Kings 2:1-25. There are four places mentioned here: Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and Jordan. Elijah and Elisha are in Gilgal and Elijah said to Elisha "You stay here, I am going to move on a little further". Elisha replied 'No, this is what I have desired, this is why I am called, I am going to follow you'. And they went to the next place and the same things were said. And so they go through the four until they came to the end and then we find the wonderful evidence that the mantle of Elijah had definitely fallen upon Elisha, and he was able to perform a mighty act of power that indicated that God was with Elisha just as He had been with Elijah. I believe these four places represent principles that ought to govern us if we, in our day, want to follow the Lord.

What does Gilgal represent? There came a moment in the history of the nation of Israel when they arrived at Gilgal (Joshua 5:1-15). All the males who were there were all the new generation, all those who had come out of Egypt having perished because of their unfaithfulness, save two, Joshua and Caleb. Now this new generation had to enter into God's land, this being God's purpose for them, but not as uncircumcised persons, as they were at that time, they were to be circumcised at Gilgal, and then enter into the land as circumcised persons. This was to remind them of God's covenant with Abraham. So at Gilgal they were circumcised. This signified that they were no longer just like ordinary persons, they were persons who belonged to God through covenant. They were persons who belonged to this great line of promise and blessing, and as such were the true representatives of God. Gilgal represents the cutting off of the flesh, that is, the reproach of Egypt. There is a great deal of ministry in the New Testament that helps us to understand this. Oh, if there is anything that hinders us in our service for God it is the flesh! Oh, what a wicked thing it is, pride, anger, envy. We read all about these things in Galatians 5:17-21, and indeed, in all Paul's epistles. What an awful thing the flesh is! Paul encourages us to see that at the cross of Jesus the flesh was condemned in all its evil features and was put aside, and in the power of the Spirit, believers today are enabled to live for Christ, to follow God, and to do the things that are pleasing to Him. So what Elijah was really saying to Elisha was 'Now look Elisha, are you prepared to stay here at Gilgal or are you prepared to answer to the principles regarding the destruction of the flesh? Are you prepared to move on with me?' And Elisha was prepared to deal with these problems, he was prepared to enter into the principle regarding the destruction of the flesh and, in the power of that, move on to the next step whatever it might be. So, dear brethren, this is one thing we must all learn if we are going to serve God effectively in whatever place He puts us, that is, we can place no reliance on the flesh, no reliance whatsoever. We cannot serve in our own strength, we cannot serve as men of the world serve, we must serve in the power of a judged flesh, we must be prepared to put it aside and answer to the claims of God. Gilgal is a very important place for us to be to learn these lessons and, having learnt them, to move on for the glory of God. Elisha was prepared to learn these lessons and he was prepared to move on, and he did so.

Then they came to Bethel. Bethel represents the house of God. Jacob, in Genesis 28:1-22, had a wonderful vision that made him wake up and say "How dreadful (or, awesome) is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (v.17). I believe Bethel represents just that, the presence and the holiness of God. Elijah was saying in principle to Elisha, 'Stay here. Are you prepared to learn the lessons that are involved in Bethel, and having learned them, move on?' And Elisha replied 'Yes, I am going to learn these lessons and move on. I am not going to stay here. I am not going to be held up by refusing to learn these things, I am going to learn them and move on.' Oh, how wonderful it is if we serve with this in mind, that it is God whom we serve. How we ought to behave ourselves in the house of God! Oh, what lessons are to be learned! What a vast subject it is to learn how to behave ourselves in the house of God, to have God's presence regulating our lives, our thoughts, whatever we do or say. What a lesson to learn. Elisha was prepared to learn it, and having learned it, to move on, and he did, and they came to Jericho.

"And Elijah said unto [Elisha], Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And [Elisha] said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to

Jericho." (2 Kings 2:4)

What does Jericho represent? When the children of Israel went over Jordan and into the land, standing to thwart their progress was the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27). It was no use bypassing it. If we read in our history books about the days before modern warfare, castles were very, very important in the defence of one's country. Round about the border and coastline where we live there are castles galore because these were the places where the English came up and bothered the Scots, and the Scots too went down and bothered the English. They were there and they could not be bypassed. It was no good an army invading Scotland and saying 'We will not bother about these castles', because from the castles would come out companies of soldiers and harass the communication lines of the invading army, and so they had to be overcome. So it was in Israel's history, Jericho, a walled city, stood right across the path and it had to be overcome. The ark was carried around it, the priests blew the trumpets and then the walls fell down, and so Jericho was overcome. But what does it represent? We believe that cities in Scripture represent what is good sometimes, especially in Jerusalem, but very, very bad in other senses, being a compact system of administration against God. That is the world. That is exactly what the world is, a compact system without God, energised by Satan, the power of this world in opposition to God. The New Testament speaks about Satan in two different ways, as "the prince of this world" (John 14:30), and as "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). As the prince (or ruler) of this world he has his power and influence in politics, in business, and in all the affairs of men in a general sense. He makes his presence and influence felt in such a way that it militates against the spread of the truth. Now I know that nine people out of ten would say 'You are talking nonsense', but this is what the Bible tells us. Satan is the ruler of this world. As the god of this world he has his influence in all the religious affairs of this world, in all the different faiths that are in opposition to the truth of God. Sad to say, his influence has even infiltrated into that which we call Christendom. The power of Satan is now making itself felt in a very distinctive way in the spread of obnoxious doctrines that bring down the glory of Christ, that bring down the truth of God, that challenges the authenticity of the Scriptures and in a thousand ways we find his power bringing down the truth. Satan is the god and prince of this world. But we are particularly concerned about Jericho as representing the world in opposition to the people of God, and how well we know it. If we waste our time in the things of this world how soon our spiritual strength goes. So Elijah said to Elisha, 'Now you tarry here at Jericho', at the place where the world's power and domination is seen. But Elisha replied that he would overcome that, and move on. Remember poor Demas who forsook Paul "having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10), and when he left Paul he left the vessel whom God was using for the spread and maintenance of the truth. He said 'I would rather have the world'. How many have we seen going back to the world? Oh, what a sad thing when a Christian gives up his testimony and would rather have the world - the world of business, the world of entertainment, the world of fame, the world of advancement, it does not matter what shape it takes, if it is the world, and we seek after it, it will deprive us of all strength and energy in serving the Lord. Elisha said 'I am going to move on from Jericho, having learnt the lessons that Jericho represented.' And so they came to the Jordan.

"And Elijah said unto [Elisha], Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And [Elisha] said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on..... And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were

divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground." (2 Kings 2:6; 2 Kings 2:8)

'Will you tarry at the Jordan, Elisha?' 'No', he said, 'I am going to learn the lessons that are to be found at Jordan'. But what are the lessons? The children of Israel came to the Jordan and they were told to wait there and when the ark began to move they were to follow the ark but were to keep a reverential distance of two thousand cubits. When the ark moved through the Jordan, as the priests' feet touched the water, the water flowed back. The priests went over on dry land bearing the ark, and the children of Israel followed two thousand cubits behind (Joshua 3:1-17). This represents for us our death with Christ, this being the teaching of the epistle to the Colossians. Paul says there in chapter 3 "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (vv.1-2). The truth can be easily illustrated in the forty days when the Lord Jesus Christ as a man out of death, spoke to His disciples. He no longer had any interest in this world, He never appeared in it publicly, He did not go out and testify in the villages and streets as He had before, He was finished with His public presentation, He was bound for glory. In a few days He was going to ascend back to His Father, He was finished entirely with all that was down here. All the earthly relationships had gone forever, He was a Man who was bound for heaven. That is exactly what Colossians teaches us. Oh, dear brethren, that it might be true of us! Elisha said 'I am moving on.' And he went on, having learnt that lesson, and the two of them went on together talking.

How well Elisha answered to the test. Three times he was told to go back, but every time he said 'No, I am going to go on'. That is resolution. That is determination. He might easily have said 'Well, the man of God has told me to tarry here. I will do what he says'. It might have been an easy way out. 'Ah, no', he said, 'I have been called, I have been chosen. I feel the dignity, the responsibility, and I am going to go on and fulfil what the Lord desires of me.' Dear brethren, let us have this determination to go on. It is so easy for us to give up, not necessarily to stop coming to the meetings, not necessarily in our outward profession as a Christian, but how easy it is to give up in spirit, and say 'What is the use?' We are to have the energy that faith provides, that the Spirit of God provides, to do what we can, to help the testimony at the present time in its weakness and fight the opposition against it. Oh, may it be so, that we may be those that are marked by this spiritual determination. It is very interesting to notice that there are two other persons in the Bible told to go back, and they said the same. One is Ruth. Naomi said to her "Turn away, my daughters, go your way..... Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her own people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law" (Ruth 1:12; Ruth 1:15). 'No,' Ruth said, 'I am steadfastly minded to go on', "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17). Oh, the determination that marked Ruth! Then there was Ittai the Gittite who was told by David, 'Ittai, you go back, I am in reproach, there is no future here for you Ittai, go back.' 'No,' he replied, 'Wherever my lord the king goes there will I be found' (2 Samuel 15:19-22). There was determination to go on. Oh, dear brethren, let us go on. It is well worthwhile. May we do so for His name's sake.

7. The Double Portion granted to Elisha

The Double Portion granted to Elisha

Elisha asked for a hard thing from Elijah. Elijah said, 'You will get it on one condition, and that is that you keep your eye fixed upon me and if you see me ascending into the heavens then your request will be granted to you'. Well, the time came when Elijah was caught up. Oh, what a wonderful translation! Elisha was watching carefully and he saw Elijah being caught up and received the double portion of Elijah's spirit. Then he said 'I have this double portion, and I am going to see how it works.' Elisha wanted to experience the truth and reality of this wonderful gift that had been given to him (a double portion of Elijah's spirit) for himself before he ever went out in public service. So just as Elijah smote the river Jordan and was able to walk over on dry land, so Elisha took the mantle of Elijah and smote the Jordan and the river went back as Elisha too walked over on dry land. This was an incident in the life of Elijah and Elisha, but we believe it has a lesson for us today. We do not want to be imaginative, we just want to follow out these two or three things that are mentioned, and just see how we can fit them in to New Testament teaching that we might get the gain of them.

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." (2 Kings 2:9) In other words Elijah asked Elisha 'What do you want? What is nearest to your heart?', and of course Elisha asked him for a double portion. Now this matter of Christians making requests is a very, very important thing. The Lord Jesus said often in His ministry "Ask, and ye shall receive" (John 14:13-14; John 15:16; John 16:23-24). I believe that that was carried out to the letter. In the early days of the church's history when the apostles, utterly dependent upon their Lord for power in their service, cried aloud to Him in prayer, He answered them. I believe, by extension, that it applies to us too, that if there are matters connected with our witness and testimony in this world we can cry aloud to the Lord and get the help and blessing that is necessary. I do not think it means that any prayer that we utter to the Lord is going to be answered; I do not believe that for one moment. I am sure that every Christian here knows what it is to ask the Lord for help and blessing for himself and others and, for the moment, prayers have not been answered, but this is something that we must learn, we must learn what is the Lord's will. I have heard people say that we should not qualify our prayers by saying 'If the Lord will', we should demand of the Lord - oh, what a fallacy! This is presumption of the highest possible kind. I remember our Master, bowed down in the garden, saying "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). I believe every prayer of every Christian should be qualified by this statement, 'If it is Thy will'. So this matter of requesting is a very important thing. We need to have spiritual discernment to ask the right kind of things. Nothing pleases the heart of God more than to hear us praying in relation to His own glory, as centred in Christ, and made known in the power of the Spirit. The two prayers of Paul in Ephesians 1:1-23; Ephesians 3:1-21 are beautiful examples of prayers by a spiritually minded man. Do we find in them anything of Paul's difficulties, his trials, his sorrows, or the opposition to him? No, we

find Paul praying in those prayers for the upbuilding and benefit of the saints, for the glory of Christ, for the glory of God. What wonderful requests. But to come back to our incident in connection with Elijah and Elisha, it is perfectly permissible for us to pray for things that stand related to our witness here in this world, and we cannot ask enough as far as this is concerned. God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask what I shall give thee" (2 Chronicles 1:7). Oh, my friend, I often feel that this is one of the most difficult things for us to answer, God saying to any man, 'If you ask me what you want most I will give it to you'. What a challenge! What would we ask for? I think it is perfectly obvious that we would ask for what was nearest to our hearts. Solomon said "Give me now wisdom and knowledge that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this, thy people, who are so great?" (v.10) He wanted this in relation to God's people, and God was so pleased with that request that He said, "Wisdom and knowledge are granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour" (v.12). He would give more than wisdom, He would give him all the things that he did not ask for, the things that are nearest to a man's heart. There are many requests like this, not for personal gain, not for fame, not to make oneself important, but praying earnestly in relation to the needs of the people of God. I do not think for one moment that Elisha wanted a double portion of Elijah's spirit just to make much of himself, not for a moment. I believe he was really anxious to serve the people of God just as Elijah had done, and, in fact, in a greater way because he wanted a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

I think it is right to say that when we read the Bible we find that succeeding generations lessen in spiritual power. When things are set up by God there is power and prosperity and strength, but then, as generations succeed, things seem to diminish. I feel that Elisha was saying 'I do not want to be any less than Elijah (not for any pride), I want to maintain the testimony that this dear man has maintained, and I will require a double portion of his spirit to do it. I require help and strength to continue this wonderful testimony that he rendered'. That is a worthy thing to pray for today, dear brethren, that God would give us power, faithfulness, devotedness and energy, that we might be enabled to maintain what has been handed down to us. Those who have gone before in courage and faithfulness and devotedness to the Lord maintained things for His glory, and very often in self sacrifice. We are responsible now to maintain those things and hand them on to others if the Lord should not come soon. So you see it requires a great deal of spiritual energy, wisdom, faithfulness and power. Paul said to Timothy "The things that thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). And so the testimony is carried on in power and blessing. What a responsibility to receive from the hands of others, those precious, holy, eternal things that have been made known.

"And [Elijah] said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." (2 Kings 2:10)

We find in Scripture that some of the things that are really worthwhile are things that are hard things. In John 6:1-71 the Lord Jesus said "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (v.63). The disciples said "This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?" (v.60). and "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (v.66). I am sure that they felt 'Well, we are wonderful people. We have a wonderful teacher. He is going to restore the glories of Israel. All the energy that we can impart in this service is going to make things work', but the Lord was saying 'The flesh can profit you

nothing. Do not think for one moment that in your power and in your energy you are going to achieve anything. I only have the words of eternal life. The words that I speak unto you are spirit and life. If you listen to my teaching and appropriate it then you are really going to know what eternal life is'. What did he say? "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (v.53). They did not understand that all this glorious blessing was bound up in the Person of the Lord and in the appropriation of His death. It was a hard saying and so many walked no more with Him.

Peter, in his writings, said "our beloved brother Paul..... hath written unto you..... speaking of these things in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:15-16), but Peter did not leave Paul, he did not say 'I am leaving Paul and his ministry because I cannot understand it'. I heard recently of some young people who said 'We are not going to go back to the meetings any more. We cannot understand. The Lord's supper does not seem to provide anything for us. We do not get anything out of the meetings, the Bible readings are too deep, we do not understand and so we are stopping going.' Could you imagine that happening in university, that the students, when they enrol and hear a lecture by a professor, saying, 'We have stopped going to the university because we do not understand'. The thing is ludicrous! How could they ever make progress? If we give up because we do not understand we will never make progress. Peter said that Paul wrote things "hard to be understood" but he carried on. The Spirit of God would teach and unfold these hard things. There has to be a diligent acquiring of the truth. 'Hard to understand?' Paul was speaking of things that had never been revealed before, a Man in the glory of God, the body of Christ here upon earth, the body united to Him in the power of the Spirit; things hard to be understood indeed. Dear brethren, if things are hard to be understood, let us pursue them until we get to know. Do not give up. There are many, many things that I do not understand in the Scriptures (and I have been reading them for a very long time now), but I keep on hoping that someday they will be opened up to me. Oh, there is so much to learn. So Elijah said to Elisha "It is a hard thing that you have asked, Elisha. Now you watch carefully, if you see me ascending you will get what you asked for". So Elisha watched carefully and saw Elijah being caught up to heaven and he received the double portion.

Now what is the double portion? When Christ ascended into glory the Holy Spirit was sent down into the life and bodies of the believers. He indwelt them. This is the great distinctive teaching of the present dispensation. There is a living Man in the glory of God who represents the people of God continually, and there is a divine Person, coequal with the Father and the Son who indwells the bodies of the believers and represents them in all their affairs upon earth. There is an Advocate in glory and an Advocate upon earth: a wonderful, wonderful blessing. The word for "Comforter" in John 14:26 is the same word as the Advocate of 1 John 2:1. So we are represented in glory and we are represented upon earth, and that by divine Persons. Now this is the real spring and power of the enjoyment of all Christian blessing and the power for all Christian testimony. If we do not understand this then we are missing the very best. Here are the essentials of the present Christian dispensation; and it is a very wonderful thing to take account of. If I see a Man at the right hand of God I realise that victory has been accomplished over death, the purpose of God has been secured in a Man, and He is the guarantee that every thought of God will be fulfilled. If I take account of the Holy Spirit indwelling me, I realise that I have a power to rise above every opposition that might face me as I seek to follow out the truth of God in this world. I think that is a

wonderful double portion, a wonderful provision for every believer at the present time. I suggest to you, dear brethren, that this is an application that can stand the test of Scripture. This man Elisha, from this moment onwards, would be faced with many difficulties, many trials, and, thank God, many blessings too. This double portion of Elijah's spirit that he received would be his sustaining power in all that he sought to do and enjoy. So we think of it in relation to ourselves, this is a double portion that we have for every step of the journey and for the enjoyment of all that God has given to us.

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horseman thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan." (1 Kings 2:11-13)

I feel that there is a very close connection between the double portion and Elisha rending his clothes in two pieces. Two in Scripture always indicates an adequate witness; one verse can prove this, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1). Indeed, no charge was to be held against an elder unless there were two witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). Here we have a man who gives a witness to the fact by rending his own garments in two pieces that all that Elijah represented in the past is finished, and in the power of this double portion that he received by putting on Elijah's mantle he is now striding forth in that energy. What a lesson for us, dear brethren! I believe the thing that we learn least of all is that our own flesh is of no use whatsoever in the things of God. We learn many other things before we learn that. It is a very difficult lesson for us to learn, but it is something that we must learn if we want to be true to the Lord because the flesh will always intrude itself into that which belongs to the Lord, it is that kind of thing, it is in hatred and rebellion against God. The Bible says that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8), it is impossible, so if any bit of flesh intrudes into our service for God then, in that measure, the things of God are affected. So I believe Elisha rending his own garment in two pieces was his way of saying 'I am finished with that life. I want to be in this new life'. Oh, dear brethren, that we might learn this in a deeper fashion. In baptism we are giving an expression to that kind of thing. We have been baptised to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and by baptism we are giving a witness that we are finished with what we were before and that we desire to walk in newness of life. What a test for us all, and yet this is the pathway we all have to tread if we are going to be here for the Lord's glory.

"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 Kings 2:14)

Elisha said 'I have this double portion, I am in the position that Elijah was in, I now want to do the things that he did', and so he took Elijah's mantle and smote the river Jordan and walked over on dry ground. So we today have to put into practice the things that we have learned. I am sure that this lies at the root of much of our weakness, that we learn many things but we fail to make them work, we acquire a great deal of knowledge but we seldom rise to the height that God would have us in experience. This is a wonderful lesson to learn. Elisha made his knowledge work. It was an

experience with him. We might say that before ever he went out in public service he determined to prove for himself that God, the God of Elijah, still existed and was there to help him. I remember reading the life of the founder of the China Inland Mission, Hudson Taylor, and he said 'Before ever I go out to China I must prove for myself the power of prayer. I cannot possibly go out there to serve the Lord unless I know that God answers prayer'. I advise you to get that book if you have not read it before, it is called 'The growth of the soul'. It is a thrilling, establishing book. That dear man, in many difficult circumstances, waited upon God, prayed to God, and proved God so that when he went out to China he was going out in the value of a proved experience, and when difficulties came along it was simply a normal matter with him to refer the matter to God because he knew he would get the answer that was consistent with God's will. George Muller of Bristol was another man who really proved God in prayer. Someone said to him 'Mr Muller, you have a marvellous faith.' 'No,' he replied, 'I have not. I have got the same faith that you have; only I make it work'. And how he made it work! What a man of faith! I suppose most of us would be very much concerned if we were responsible for a few children in our home and we sent them to bed, perhaps with a bite of supper, but with not a bite to give them for their breakfast the next morning. That would be a test of faith, but think of five to six hundred children to feed in the morning and no food. That man of God, with his companions, just got down on his knees and referred the matter to the Lord in the constant hope that everything would be all right, and it always was, not one child ever went without his or her meal. God answers believing faith.

I believe that this is what Elisha here represents, smiting the waters for himself, seeing it work and in the confidence that such an experience brought, striding forth in testimony for God. This is a wonderful lesson for us. This is something worthwhile for us to follow; not simply for the sake of something miraculous, oh, no, dear brethren, but as it applies to the will of God in our lives, this is what matters. Let us not be desirous of seeking miraculous things to make much of ourselves. There is a man in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, Simon the sorcerer (chap.8) who wanted this kind of thing. He wanted to be someone to demonstrate divine power operating, and that is simply out as far as the Christian testimony is concerned. But we do want to experience answers to prayer in relation to our testimony and the will of God. We must lay hold of the truth that there is a Man in the glory of God and the Spirit of God indwells us. These are the requisites for the real experience with God in this world.

8. The Service of Elisha to Men

The Service of Elisha to Men

"And the men of [Jericho] said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters: there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake." (2 Kings 2:19-22)

We said earlier that Jericho is a type of the world, and so it is, but it was also a cursed city. In Joshua's day when it was raised to the ground Joshua said "Cursed be the man before he Lord, who riseth up and buildeth this city, Jericho; he shall lay the foundation of it in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Joshua 6:26), and there came the time when a man rebuilt the city of Jericho and he lost his firstborn and his youngest (1 Kings 16:34); the curse of Joshua was fulfilled. This is why we say that Jericho is a type of the world under the curse, having nothing for God, being a place of death and barrenness. Yet here is the man of God in this place, and the inhabitants came to him and said 'There is something wrong with the water. The situation is good, we are in a fine place, but the water is bad'. Now we cannot possibly say, if we are applying this to ourselves, that we can make the world a better place to live in; that is not the call of the Christian. So occupation with politics or reformation or anything of that kind of thing in relation to men of the world is a waste of time for a Christian. He knows the world is doomed, going on to judgment and he cannot make the world a better place to live in; but what he can do is to preach the gospel, what he can do is to live Christ, and in the measure in which people's consciences are affected and they are brought to God, in that measure the world is certainly made a better place, but we can never alter the fixed character of this world because it is doomed, it is judged, and one day the judgment will be exacted on it. So what does this represent? There is a hymn that we sometimes sing which I feel is applicable here:

"The river of Thy grace,
Through righteousness supplied,
Flows o'er the barren place
Where Jesus died."

Perhaps that is not the exact quotation, but it is near enough. How wonderful to see this flowing water that is available for all for blessing and fruitfulness in the midst of a cursed scene. I believe that in the first application it would be our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who overcame the evil, the One who brought in life and blessing, the One who was indeed the Sent One of God to bring all this in for the blessing of those concerned. It did not change the character of Jericho, but oh, the blessing that it brought into the world (I mean, in figure). The Lord Jesus Christ coming into the world, dying on the cross, rising from the dead and then giving people the opportunity to get saved

has never altered the character of the world; but what a difference it has made! We would not be here tonight if it had not been for those streams of living water flowing into our souls. We would not be refreshed in our spirits apart from that stream of living water. That, I believe, would be the primary application.

Secondly, I believe it would refer to ourselves. Thinking of the details, what was the use of trying to heal the waters at the place where they were running because up from the source was coming a bubbling of water all the time that was contaminated in some way? It was no good putting the salt into the stream. It was the source that had to be corrected. That is very true of ourselves. Reformation is no good, we have to get to the source of things to get right with God, and once done, new creation comes in, and because new creation is there there is the power and preservative against evil, i.e. the salt, and what a difference that makes to the stream of water. We can think of ourselves in this sense. Scripture would suggest that this is an application. The Lord Jesus, at the end of the great day of the feast, stood up and said "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water..... this spoke he of the Spirit" (John 7:37-39). So a believer is looked upon as a person through whom and in whom living waters are flowing out to those who are in need. So we can think of ourselves being set right, our sins are gone, we are a new creation in Christ, having nothing contaminated about us whatsoever, and the salt that is in us is the preservative against evil. It is this that produces this living stream in this world. Thank God for the testimony of real believers in this world. The Lord Jesus said "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), a preservative against the spread of corruption. 2 Thessalonians tells us the "he who now letteth (or, hinders) will let until he be taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:7), that is the Holy Spirit, we believe. There is "what withholdeth" (2 Thessalonians 2:6), that is, we believe, the church of God. The church of God in the world today is the great barrier against the inroads of evil. Evil and corruption are rapidly spreading, but think of what it would be without the influence of the people of God! What an awful scene! You might say 'Well, my testimony is very weak'. We all feel this, but thank God, we in no way support the corruption, the wickedness and vile things that are in this world; we keep clear of these things, we try to support what is pure and holy and good, and we endeavour in the power of the Spirit to be a blessing to those who are around. From that moment onwards, although the character of Jericho was unchanged, in the midst of Jericho there was a constant stream of living, pure water. Thank God, as far as the testimony of the church is concerned, this will be maintained until the very end. I do not mind if you disagree with that application, but at least be occupied with something that is worthwhile. I am perfectly sure that what I have been saying, as it applies to ourselves, is the truth. If you think of any other application then I will be very glad to hear it.

9. The Service of Elisha to God

The Service of Elisha to God

"And king Jehoram..... sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses. And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah went, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them." (2 Kings 3:6-10)

2 Kings chapter 3 is a very sad and solemn chapter. We find here a very unholy alliance between the king of Edom, the king of Israel and the king of Judah. The king of Israel was already identified with the king of Edom, that should have been a loud, loud voice to Jehoshaphat. Imagine someone belonging to the nation of Israel, who recognised God as the only true God, and yet for his own personal advantage identifying himself with a man who was an idolater and who represented one of the great enemies of Israel. Then the king of Israel said 'Ah, we will get help; we will send for the king of Judah'. So he sent word to the king of Judah, and the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, said "I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses". Basically, it is perfectly true, they were both of the nation of Israel, they belonged to the same nation and in this sense they could trace their genealogy back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but there was something that was being ignored, the nation of Israel was divided. The ten northern tribes formed the northern kingdom, the two southern tribes occupied Jerusalem; and God was with the two tribes. The ten tribes went into idolatry and got worse and worse and from Dan to Beer-sheba there was the evidence of idolatry, a hateful thing to God. Here was something that at this particular moment was being ignored. It was all right to say 'Yes, we are all the same, we all belong to the same nation', that was true, but there was something being ignored that was very significant. The ten tribes had revolted, had forsaken the true centre Jerusalem and had set up golden calves and worshipped them. Here was something that they could not possibly overlook. For Jehoshaphat to say 'We are all the same' was very, very wrong, they were not the same because a division had taken place and there were things that had to be adjusted and until they were adjusted it was utterly wrong for Jehoshaphat to be connected with the king of Israel.

"Jehoshaphat said, Is there not a prophet of the Lord that we may inquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him." (2 Kings 3:11-12 a)

Jehoshaphat had to acknowledge that the word of God was with Elisha, and when the king of Israel spoke to the prophet Elisha said "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother..... As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look

towards thee, nor see thee" (vv.13-14). Then he says "Fetch me a minstrel" (v.15). I would like to give a word on that sometime, if the Lord will help me. That sounds very, very attractive; it is something to lift our hearts up, something to set us rejoicing. When the minstrel came and played, the hand of the Lord was upon Elisha and he was able to make a prophecy that indicated that there might be a temporary victory (3:18) but in the end it would be disaster (8:12); and it was. What I feel this lesson indicates to us, dear brethren, is that it might be very easy to take a stand and say 'Well, we are all Christians; we all belong to the Lord Jesus. 'That might be very true in one sense, but what are we going on with, what do we represent? I think it is a very sad thing today that we have to take account of this fact that there is much connected with the name of Jesus that is an abomination to His glory and we cannot possibly in truth and in faithfulness be identified with it. In a daily newspaper a few months ago I read the account of an evangelical conference. In that conference (remember we are talking about persons who claim to be Christians) the largest proportion of them were in favour of Sunday entertainment - drinking, and all sorts of earthly amusements. This was a report (if I am speaking wrongly, then the paper is wrong), and a large proportion of the clergy were also in favour of these things. Would we be in favour of this, dear brethren, to be occupied with Sunday entertainment? Would we be in favour of alcohol? Would we be in favour of these things? Surely not. We are all Christians, but surely we would desire to be separate from these things. And if these persons avowedly say 'This is the way we want to travel', we would have to reply 'If you want to travel that way you cannot take me with you; I am not going. I do not want to walk that way'. I believe this is the lesson that this thing would indicate to us. The king of Judah, the king of Israel and the king of Edom, all together on the same ground and ignoring the rights of God. I am sure that this is the lesson that 2 Timothy would also teach us, that if there are real Christians (we are not denying the fact that they are real Christians) who hold doctrines and practices that are a dishonour to the Lord we must separate from them. This is what 2 Timothy says. If we want to be vessels to honour, to be meet for the Master's use, we cannot walk together with such.

I believe Elisha, in his faithfulness to the Lord, indicated that as far as he was concerned he had no time for the course of the king of Israel. He was concerned for the truth of God as it was represented in the king of Judah, but he was far beneath the level. So I find that here is the uncompromising attitude of Elisha that was seen in Elijah coming to light when there were those (oh, what a sad thing) professing Israelites falling down to Baal. Elijah stood out against them and stood for his Lord and what a wonderful victory he acquired. So here we find Elisha in the spirit of Elisha making the same stand. I believe this faithfulness is what is required of us too, dear brethren, faithfulness to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. May it be so for His name's sake.

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