

2 Kings

INTRODUCTION

First and 2 Kings were originally one unbroken book, which formed a sequel to 1 and 2 Samuel. The composers of the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX) divided the work into "3 and 4 Kingdoms" (1 and 2 Sam. were "1 and 2 Kingdoms"). The title "Kings" is derived from Jerome's Latin translation (the Vulgate) and is appropriate because of the emphasis of these books on the kings who reigned during these centuries.

The Book of 2 Kings takes up recording the historical events of God's people where the Book of 1 Kings leaves off. However, 2 Kings is more than just a compilation of the politically important or socially significant happenings in Israel and Judah. In fact, it is not as detailed a history as might be expected (three hundred years in only twenty-five chapters). Instead, 2 Kings is a selective history, one with a theological purpose. Therefore, the author selects and emphasizes the people and events that are morally and religiously significant. Second Kings presents God as the Lord of history. From history, this book establishes God's providential working in and through the lives of His people for His redemptive purpose. It demonstrates the necessity of obedience to God's covenant and the painful consequence of disobedience. Therefore, the Book of 2 Kings is not to be viewed as mere history, but as theology and lessons from history.

Second Kings picks up the tragic history of the "divided kingdom" with Ahaziah on the throne of Israel, while Jehoshaphat is ruling in Judah. As with 1 Kings, the narrative is difficult to follow. The author switches back and forth between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, tracing their histories simultaneously. There were nineteen regents (rulers) in Israel, all of them bad. In Judah, there were twenty rulers, only eight of them good. Second Kings records the last ten kings in Israel, and the last sixteen rulers in Judah. Some of these twenty-six regents are only mentioned in a few verses, while whole chapters are devoted to others. Major attention is directed to those who either serve as a model of uprightness, or to those who illustrate why these nations eventually collapsed.

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to 2 Kings, Larry D. Powers)

2 Kings 1:1-4

"Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab" (2 Kings 1:1). In fulfillment of Balaam's prophecy (Num. 24:17), David had conquered the Moabites so that they became his "servants" (2 Sam. 8:2), and they continued in subjection to the kingdom of Israel until the time of its division, when their vassalage and tribute were transferred to the kings of Israel, as those of Edom remained to the kings of Judah—the tribute which the Moabites rendered unto the king of Israel being "a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams with their wool" (2 Kings 3:4). But after the death of Ahab they revolted. Therein we behold the divine providence crossing Ahaziah in his affairs. This rebellion on the part of Moab should be regarded in the light of "when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:17)—but when our ways displease Him, evil from every quarter menaces us. Temporal as well as spiritual prosperity depends entirely on God's blessing. When any behave ill to us it should make us at once examine our conduct toward God. To make His hand more plainly apparent, He frequently punishes the wicked after the similitude of their sins. He did so to Ahab's son. As he had turned from the Lord, Moab was moved to rebel against him.

What has just been pointed out concerns the *governmental* dealings of God and illustrates an important principle in His "ways" with a nation: by which we mean, it treats of that which relates to time and not to eternity, to the workings of Divine providence and not to the sphere of salvation. Nations as such have only a temporal existence, though the individuals which comprise them have an eternal destiny. The prosperity or adversity of a nation is determined by its attitude and conduct toward God: directly so by those who have His living Oracles in their hands, indirectly so with the heathen—in their case being determined by their conduct toward His people. The Old Testament supplies us with so many examples of this that he who runs may read. The attitude of a nation towards God is to be gauged not so much by the general deportment of its people as by the character of its governors or government. The two are of course intimately related, for where a majority of the subjects are pious, they will not tolerate wickedness in high places, and on the other hand, when those who lead and rule set an evil example, it cannot be expected that those who follow will excel them in righteousness. Whatever be the particular form of government in a country, or whichever party be in power, it is the character and enactments of its executives that are the deciding factor, for they are the ones holding the positions of chief responsibility in the sight of God.

In avowedly "Christian" countries like Great Britain and the U.S.A., it is the churches which regulate the pulse of the nation. They act as the "salt" upon the corporate body, and when their ways please the Lord, He gives them favor in the eyes of those round about them. When the Holy Spirit is unhindered, His power is manifested, not only in calling out the elect, but in subduing sin in the non-elect and by causing the machine of state to support godliness, as was more or less noticeably the case a hundred years ago. But when error comes into the churches and discipline is relaxed, the Spirit is grieved and His power is withheld, and the evil effects of this become more and more apparent in the country by a rising tide of lawlessness. If the churches persist in a downward course, then the Spirit is quenched and "Ichabod" is written over them, as is the case today. Then it is that the restraining hand of God is removed and an orgy of licentiousness comes in. Then it is the government that becomes an empty tide, for those in power have no power except what the people have delegated to them, and therefore they act in accord with the depraved desires of the masses. This then is ever the order: turning from the true God, turning to false gods, and then the disturbance of the peace—either social revolution or international war.

Ahaziah "served Baal and worshipped him and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel." The Lord God is a jealous God, jealous of His truth, jealous of His honor, and when those calling themselves His people turn unto other gods, His wrath is kindled against them. How many false gods have been worshipped in Christendom during the last few decades! What a travesty of the divine character has been set forth by the major portion of Protestantism—a "god" whom no one fears. What a mangling of the Gospel has there been in the "orthodox" sections of Christendom, whereby "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4), has displaced the Christ of Holy Writ. Little wonder that, in the inevitable reaction, the multitudes have made gods of mammon and pleasure and that the nation puts its trust in its armed forces instead of the arm of the Lord. Here and there was an Elijah who raised his voice in testimony to the living God and in denouncing modern forms of Baal worship, but who gave ear to them? Certainly not the churches, for they closed their pulpits against them so that, like the Tishbite of old, they were forced into isolation and virtual retirement; and now it seems their last task before God calls them hence is to pronounce sentence of death upon the whole apostate system.

"And provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel. . . Then Moab rebelled against Israel." Though those two statements are separated by the ending of the first book of Kings and the beginning of the second, yet the connection between them is too obvious to be missed. It is the connection of cause and effect, the latter making manifest the former. For many years Moab had been tributary to Israel but now it threw off the yoke. And have we not lived to witness a similar thing with the British Empire? One country after another has severed ties with Britain and become independent. The Bible is no defunct book recording historical events of the remote past, but a living book, enunciating vital principles applicable to every age and describing things as they are today. History repeats itself, not only because human nature is fundamentally the same in all ages, but also because the "ways" of God, the principles of His government, remain unchanged. As the Lord God was provoked by Ahaziah, so He has been provoked by the churches, the politicians and the people of Great Britain, and as His anger was evidenced by His moving Moab to seek her independence, so His displeasure is now seen in His causing one dependency after another to break away from the "Mother country."

"And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick" (v. 2). First, we would note that this verse opens with the word "And," which appears to intimate the king's response or rather lack of response to what is recorded in the previous verse. What is *not* found here is solemn and informative, revealing as it does the character of Ahaziah. There was no turning to the Lord for guidance and help. There was no humbling of himself before God and inquiring why this disturbance had entered his realm. Nothing happens by chance, and the curse causeless does not come (Prov. 26:2), therefore the king's duty was to fast and pray and ascertain what it was that had displeased the Lord. No, we take that back: it would have been downright mockery for him to have done any such thing. There was no need to inquire of the Lord: the king knew quite well what was wrong—he was serving and worshipping Baal, and until his idols were abolished it would be nothing but play-acting, a pious farce, for him to call upon the name of the Lord. Does the reader agree? Does he? Does she? If not, carefully re-read this paragraph. If you concur, is not the application to our own national situation clearly apparent? Unspeakably solemn—yes; indescribably awful—yes. But if we face facts, things as they really are, the conclusion is unescapable.

Let us call attention to another factor which is absent from verse 2. Ahaziah not only failed spiritually but naturally too. What ought to have been his reaction to this revolt of Moab? Why, to have dealt with it with a firm hand and nipped it in the bud. That was obviously his duty as king. Instead he followed the line of least resistance and devoted himself to pleasure. Instead of taking his place at the head of his army and putting down this rebellion by force, he seems to have luxuriated in the palace. Must we not say in such circumstances, that God had given him up to a spirit of madness! He shrank in cowardly fear from the camp and the dangers of the field, and leaving Moab to do as she pleased, without attempting her re-subjugation, led a life of self-indulgence. Perhaps he recalled the fate which had so recently overtaken his father on the battlefield and decided that "discretion is the better part of valor." But there is no escaping the hand of God when He is determined to smite: we are just as liable to meet with an "accident" in the shelter of our home as if we were exposed to the deadliest weapons on the battlefield.

"And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick." Here was where mercy was mingled with justice: here was where "space for repentance" was granted the idolatrous king. O how long-suffering is God! Ahaziah's fall did not prove immediately fatal, though it placed him on a bed of sickness, where he had opportunity to "consider his ways." And how often the Lord deals thus, both with nations and with individuals. The Roman empire was not built in a day, nor was it destroyed in a day. Many a blatant rebel against Heaven has been pulled up suddenly in his evil career. An "accident" overtook him, and though it may have deprived him of a limb, yet not of his life. Such may have been the experience of someone who reads these lines. If so, we would say to him with all earnestness, to redeem the time that is now left you. You might now be in hell, but God has given you a further season (brief at the most) to think of eternity and prepare for it. O that His goodness may lead you to repentance! Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart. Throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and be reconciled to Him, for how shall you escape the everlasting burnings if you neglect His so-great salvation?

"And he sent messengers and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease" (v. 2). First, God had crossed him in his affairs, and then He smote him in his body. We have called attention to what this evil king did not do, now we turn to consider the course which he actually followed. Neither of those judgments softened him, and having lived without God in prosperity, so in adversity he despised His chastening hand. Saul in his extremity had inquired of a witch, only to hear of his immediate doom. So Ahaziah now had recourse to the demon-gods of the heathen. He was evidently uneasy at the present state of his health, so sent some of his servants to ascertain of an idolatrous oracle whether or no he should recover from this affliction—proof that his soul was in a worse state than his body. The "Baalim" was a general epithet for the false gods, each having his own peculiar office and district, hence the distinguishing titles of Baal-zebub, Baal-peor, Baal-zephon, Baal-berith. "Baal-zebub" was the idol of Ekron, a city of Philistia, a country noted for "sooth-sayers" (Isa. 2:6).

This "Baal-zebub" signifies "The lord of a fly or flies," probably because, since their country was infested with flies (as modern travelers still report), they supposed he protected them from the diseases which they spread. In Matthew 12:24 we find our Lord terming Beelzebub (the Greek form of spelling) "the prince of the demons," which intimates that under various names and images evil spirits were actually worshipped as gods by the heathen—as is plainly stated in 1 Corinthians 10:20: "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to *demons* and not to God." It would appear that at the time of Ahaziah the priests of Baal had through their incantations of evil spirits acquired celebrity for their knowledge of future events, much as the oracle of Delphi was held in high repute in Greece some years later. Believing that the idol at Ekron could foresee and foretell things to come, Ahaziah paid him homage. The exceeding sinfulness of such practices is placed beyond dispute by such passages as Leviticus 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Chronicles 10:13. Thus those who consult fortune-tellers, astrologers and "spiritualists" are guilty of a fearful sin, and expose themselves unto the powers of evil.

"When a king of Israel sent to inquire of a heathen oracle, he proclaimed to the Gentiles his want of confidence in Jehovah: as if the only nation favored with the knowledge of the true God had been the only nation in which no God was known. This was peculiarly dishonorable and provoking to Jehovah" (Thomas Scott). The action of Ahaziah was indeed a deliberate and public rejection of the Lord, a defiant choice of those ways which had called down the wrath of Heaven upon his father. It could not pass unnoticed, and accordingly He who is King of kings, as well as the God of Israel, specifically calls him to account. Elijah was sent to meet the king's messengers as they went speeding on their way from

Samaria, with the announcement of certain death: But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?" (v. 3). Nothing escapes the observation of Him with whom we have to do. His eyes are ever upon all the ways of men, whether they be monarchs or menials: none are too high or independent to be above His control, and none are too low or insignificant to be overlooked by Him. All we do or say or think is perfectly known to the Lord, and in that Day we shall be called upon to render a full account.

But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron" (v. 3). The Hebrew is more expressive and emphatic than the English: "Is it because there is no God, none in Israel" that you turn for information to the emissaries of Satan? Not only had the true and living God made Himself known to Israel, but He was in *covenant relationship* with them. This it is which explains "the angel of the Lord" addressing Himself to Elijah on this occasion, emphasizing as it did that blessed relationship which the king was repudiating—it was the Angel of the Covenant (Ex. 23:23, etc). As such, Jehovah had given clear demonstration of Himself to Ahaziah in his own lifetime.

"Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die" (v. 4). Having reprov'd the awful sin of Ahaziah, the servant of God now pronounces judgment on him. Here then was the last and solemn task of Elijah, to pass the capital sentence upon the apostate king. Unto the widow of Zarephath God had made him "the savor of life unto life," but unto Ahab and now to his son he became "the savor of death unto death." Varied indeed are the tasks assigned unto the ministers of the Gospel, according as they are called upon to comfort God's people and feed His sheep, or warn the wicked and denounce evildoers. Thus it was with their great Exemplar: both benedictions and maledictions were found on His lips; though most congregations are far more familiar with the former than the latter. Yet it will be found that His "Blesseds" in Matthew 5 are balanced by an equal number of "Woes" in Matthew 23. It should be duly noted that those "woes" were uttered by the Lord Jesus at *the close* of His public ministry, and though the end of the world may not be at hand (no one on earth knows) yet it seems evident that the end of the present "order" of things, "civilization," is imminent, and therefore the servants of Christ have a thankless task before them today. O that grace may preserve them "faithful unto death"!

(Elijah, Arthur W. Pink)

Morally, politically and spiritually what has changed for the United Kingdom and the United States since this was written over 50 years ago.

2 Kings 1:5-8

"And Elijah departed" (2 Kings 1:4). At his Master's bidding, the prophet had gone forth to meet the servants of Ahaziah and delivered what the Lord had commissioned him, and had sent them back with this message to their king, and then took his leave of them. His departure was not for the purpose of concealing himself but to return to his communion with God. It was to "the top of a hill" (v. 9), that he retired: typically it spoke of moral separation from, and elevation above, the world. We have to betake ourselves to "the secret place of the Most High"—and this is not to be found near the giddy and bustling crowds—if we are to "abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1); it is from the mercy seat *His* voice is heard speaking (Num. 7:89). On a previous occasion we have seen Elijah making for the mountaintop as soon as his public work was completed (1 Kings 18:42). What an object lesson is there here for all the servants of Christ: when they have delivered their message, to retire from the public eye and get alone with God, as their Savior before them was wont to do. The "top of the hill" is also the place of observation and vision: O to make spiritual observatories of our private rooms!

There is nothing in the sacred narrative which indicates the nationality of these messengers of Ahaziah. If they were Israelites they could scarcely be ignorant of the prophet's identity when he so suddenly accosted them and so dramatically announced the doom of their master. If they were foreigners, imported from Tyre by Jezebel, they were probably ignorant of the mighty Tishbite, for some years had elapsed since his last public appearance. Whoever they were, these men were so impressed by that commanding figure and his authoritative tone, so awed by his knowledge of their mission and so terrified by his pronouncement, that they at once abandoned their quest and returned to the king. He who could tell what Ahaziah thought and said could evidently foretell the outcome of his sickness: they dared not proceed on their journey to Ekron. That illustrated an important principle. When a servant of God is energized by an ungrrieved Spirit, his message carries conviction and strikes terror into the hearts of his hearers: just as Herod "feared" John the Baptist (Mark 6:20), and Felix "trembled" before Paul (Acts 24:25). But it is not talking to the wicked about the *love of God* which will produce such effects, nor will such conscience-soothers be owned of Heaven. Rather is it those who declare, as Elijah of Ahaziah, "Thou shalt surely die."

"And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back?" (v. 5). It must have been both a surprise and a shock to the king when his servants returned unto him so quickly, for he knew that sufficient time had not elapsed for them to have journeyed to Ekron in Philistia and back again. His question expresses annoyance, a reprimand for their being remiss in discharging his commission. Kings in that day were accustomed to

receive blind obedience from their subjects, and woe be unto those who crossed their imperial wills. This only serves to emphasize the effect which the appearance and words of Elijah made upon them. From the next verse we learn that the prophet had bidden them, "Go turn again unto the king that sent you" and repeat my message unto him. And though their so doing meant placing their lives in jeopardy, nevertheless they carried out the prophet's order. How they put to shame thousands of those professing to be the servants of Christ who for many years past have studiously withheld that which their auditors most needed to hear and criminally substituted a message of "Peace, peace" when there was no peace for them, and that in days when a faithful proclamation of the truth had not endangered their persons. Surely these messengers of Ahaziah will yet rise up in judgment against all such faithless time-servers.

And they said unto him, "There came a man up to meet us and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die" (v. 6). From their omission of his name and by referring to Elijah simply as "a man" it seems clear that these messengers of the king were ignorant of the prophet's identity. But they had been so overawed by his appearance and the solemnity of his manner, and were so convinced his announcement would be verified, that they deemed themselves warranted in abandoning their journey and returning to their master. Accordingly they delivered a plain straightforward account of what had occurred and faithfully reported Elijah's pronouncement. They knew full well that such a message must prove most unwelcome to the king, yet they made no attempt to alter its tone or soften it down. They shrank not from telling Ahaziah to his face that sentence of death had gone out against him. Again we say, How these men put to shame the temporizing, cowardly and pew-flattering occupants of the pulpit. Alas, how often is more sincerity and fidelity to be found among open worldlings than in those with the highest spiritual pretensions.

And he said unto them, "What manner of man was he which came up to meet you and told you these words?" (v. 7). No doubt the king was fairly well convinced as to who it was that had dared to cross their path and send him such a message, but to make quite sure he bids his servants describe the mysterious stranger: what was his appearance, how was he clothed, and in what manner did he address you? How that illustrates one of the chief traits of the unregenerate: it was not the *message* which Ahaziah now inquired about, but the *man* who uttered it—yet surely his own conscience would warn him that no mere man could be the author of such a message. And is not this the common tendency of the unconverted: that instead of taking to heart *what* is said, they fix their attention on *who* says it. Such is poor fallen human nature. When a true servant of God is sent and delivers a searching word, people seek to evade it by occupying themselves with his personality, his style of delivery, his denominational affiliation—anything secondary as long as it serves to crowd out that which is of supreme moment. Yet when the postman hands them an important business letter they are not concerned about his appearance.

And they answered him, "He was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins" (v. 8). We do not regard this as a description of his person so much as of his attire. Concerning John the Baptist, who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), it is recorded that he "had his raiment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins" (Matthew 3:4). Thus we understand that the outward garment of Elijah was made of skins (cf. Heb. 11:37), girded about by a strip of undressed leather. That the prophets had some such distinguishing garb is clear from Zechariah 13:4, by the false prophets assuming the same in order to beguile the people: "a garment of hair to deceive." In that era when instruction was given to the eye as well as the ear, by symbols and shadows, that uncouth dress denoted the prophet's mortification to the world, and expressed his concern and sorrow for the idolatry and iniquity of his people, just as the putting on of "sackcloth" by others signified humility and grief. For other references to the symbolic meaning of the prophet's dress and actions compare 1 Kings 11:28-31; 22:11; Acts 21:10, 11.

"And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite" (v. 8). There could be no mistake: the king knew now who it was that had sent such a solemn message to him. And what effect was produced upon him? Was he awed and humbled? Did he now bewail his sins and cry unto God for mercy? Far from it. He had learned nothing from his father's awful end. The severe affliction under which he was suffering softened him not. Even the near approach of death made no difference. He was incensed against the prophet and determined to destroy him. Had Elijah sent him a lying and flattering word, that had been acceptable, but the truth he could not bear. How like the degenerate generation in which our lot is cast, who had rather be bombed to death in places of amusement than be found on their faces before God. Ahaziah was young and arrogant, not at all disposed to receive reproof or endure opposition to his will, no matter from what quarter it proceeded, no, not even from Jehovah Himself. The message from Elijah, though in God's name and by His express command, enraged the monarch beyond measure, and instantly he resolves on the death of the prophet, though he had done nothing more than his duty.

(Elijah, Arthur W. Pink)

Is the message in most of our churches today "peace, peace" or is it repent, if not "thou shalt surely die" in your sins? Who is responsible for the message; the people or the preacher?

2 Kings 1:9-18

"Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and behold, he sat on the top of a hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down" (v. 9). Ahaziah was at no loss to find wicked men ready to execute the most desperate and impious orders. This company of soldiers went forth promptly to seize the Lord's servant. They found him sitting composedly upon an eminence. The spirit of the captain evidenced that his heart was thoroughly in his task, for he insolently addressed Elijah as "thou man of God," which was by way of derision and insult. It was as though he had said, Thou claimest Jehovah as thy Master, we come to thee in the name of a greater than he: King Ahaziah says, Come down! Fearful effrontery and blasphemy was that! It was not only an insult to Elijah, but to Elijah's God, an insult which was not suffered to go unchallenged. How often in the past have the wicked made a mock at sacred things and turned the very terms by which God designates His people into epithets of reproach, sneeringly dubbing them "the elect," "saints," etc. That they do so no longer is because the fine gold has become dim; godliness is no more a reality and a rebuke to the impious. Who would think of designating the average clergyman a "man of God?" Rather does he wish to be known as "a good mixer," a man of the world.

"And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty" (v. 10). There was no personal vindictiveness in the terrible reply of Elijah, but a consuming zeal for the glory of God, which had been so blatantly insulted by this captain. The king's agent had jibed at his being a "man of God," and now he should be furnished with summary proof whether or not the Maker of heaven and earth owned the prophet as His servant. The insolence and impiety of this man who had insulted Jehovah and His ambassador should meet with swift judgment. "And there came down fire from heaven and consumed him and his fifty" (v. 10). Sure sign was this that Elijah had not been actuated by any spirit of revenge, for in such a case God had not responded to his appeal. On an earlier occasion the "fire of the Lord" had fallen upon and consumed the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38), but here it falls on sinners who had slighted that sacrifice. So shall it again be when "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:7, 8).

Surely so manifest an interposition of God would serve as a deterrent, if not to the abandoned king yet to his servants, so that no further attempt would be made to apprehend Elijah. But no: "Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly" (v. 11). It is hard to say which, on this occasion, was the more remarkable, the madness of the wounded Ahaziah when the report of the awful event reached him, or the presumption of this officer and his soldiers. This second captain took no warning from what had befallen the first and his soldiers. Was the calamity which overtook them attributed to chance, to some lightning or fireball happening to consume them, or was he recklessly determined to brave things out? Like his predecessor he addressed the prophet in the language of insulting derision, though using more peremptory terms than the former: "Come down quickly." See once more how sin hardens the heart and ripens men for judgment. And who maketh thee to differ? To what desperate lengths might the writer and the reader have gone if the mercy of God had not interposed and stopped us in our mad career! O what praise is due unto sovereign grace which snatched me as a brand from the burning!

And Elijah answered and said unto them, "If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty" (v. 12). Proof had already been given that Jehovah was omniscient, (v. 4), now they should know He is omnipotent. What is man in the hands of his Maker? One flash of lightning and fifty-one of His enemies become burnt stubble. And if all the hosts of Israel, yea the entire human race, had been assembled there, it had needed no other force. Then what folly it is for him whose breath is in his nostrils to contend with the Almighty: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker" (Isa. 45:9). Some have blamed Elijah for destroying those men, overlooking the fact that he could no more bring down fire from heaven than they can. Elijah simply announced on these occasions what God had Himself determined to do. Nor was it to please the prophet that the Lord acted, or to gratify any vindictive passion in Himself, but to show forth His power and justice. It cannot be said the soldiers were innocent, for they were performing no military duty, but openly fighting against Heaven as the language of the third captain indicates. This has been recorded as a lasting warning for all ages, that those who mock at and persecute God's faithful ministers will not escape His punishment. On the other hand, those who have befriended them shall by no means lose their reward.

"And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty" (v. 13). What fearful obstinacy is there here. Deliberately hardening his heart, Ahaziah strengthened himself against the Almighty and makes one more attempt to do the prophet harm. Though on his death-bed, and knowing the divine judgment which had befallen two companies of his soldiers (as v. 54 intimates), yet he persists in stretching forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed, and exposes to destruction another of his captains with his body of men. And why is this? Because "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live" (Eccl. 9:3). In view of such unerring declarations, and with such examples as Pharaoh, Ahab and Ahaziah before us, we ought not to be in the least surprised or startled by what we see and read of what is taking place in the world today. Saddened and solemnized we should be, but not staggered and nonplussed.

"And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight" (vv. 13, 14). This man was of a different disposition from the two who had preceded him: even in the military forces God has a remnant according to the election of grace. Daring not to attempt anything against Elijah, he

employed humble submission and fervent entreaties, with every expression of respect. It was an affecting appeal, a real prayer. He attributed the death of the previous companies to its true cause and appears to have had an awful sense of the justice of God. He owns that their lives lay at the prophet's mercy and begs they may be spared. Thus did Jehovah provide not only for the security but also the honor of Elijah, as He did for Moses when Pharaoh had threatened to put him to death (Ex. 11:8). The appeal of this captain was not in vain. Our God is ever ready to forgive the humble suppliant, how ever rebellious he may have been, and the way to prevail with Him is to bow before Him.

And the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, "Go down with him: be not afraid of him" (v. 15). This clearly demonstrates that Elijah waited for the divine impulse and was entirely guided by it in the former instances of severity. Neither God nor His servant could have any pleasure in taking away the lives of those who approached them in a becoming manner. It was to punish them for their scorn and impiety that the others had been slain. But this captain came with fear and trembling, not with ill-will to the prophet nor contempt for his Master. Accordingly he found mercy and favor: not only were their lives preserved, but the captain succeeds in his errand—Elijah shall go with him to the king. Those who humble themselves shall be exalted, whereas those who exalt themselves shall be abased. Let us learn from Elijah's example to deal kindly toward those who may have been employed against us, when they evidence their repentance and entreat our clemency. Mark it was "the angel of the Lord" who again addressed the prophet: but what a test of his obedience and courage! The Tishbite had greatly exasperated Jezebel and her party, and now her reigning son must have been furious at him. Nevertheless he might safely venture into the presence of his raging foes seeing that the Lord had bidden him do so, with the assurance, "Be not afraid." They could not move a finger against him without God's permission. God's people are quite safe in His hands, and faith may ever appropriate the triumphant language of Psalm 27:1-3.

"And he arose and went down with him unto the king" (v. 15), readily and boldly, not fearing his wrath. He made no objection and indicated no fear for his safety: though the king was enraged and would be surrounded by numerous attendants, he committed himself to the Lord and felt safe under His promise and protection. What a striking instance of the prophet's faith and obedience to God. But Elijah did not go to confront the king until bidden by the Lord to do so, teaching His servants not to act presumptuously by recklessly and needlessly exposing themselves unto danger: but as soon as He required it he went promptly, encouraging us to follow the leadings of Providence, trusting God in the way of duty and saying, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6).

And he said unto him, "Thus saith the Lord," etc. (v. 16). Elijah now repeats to the king, without any alteration, what he had said to his servants. Without fear or mincing the matter, the prophet spoke God's word plainly and faithfully to Ahaziah; in the name of Him in whose hands are both life and death, he reprov'd the monarch for his sin and then pronounced sentence on him. What an awful message for him to receive: that he should go from his bed to hell. Having discharged his commission, the Tishbite departed without molestation. Enraged as were Jezebel and her party, the king and his attendants, they were as meek as lambs and as silent as statues. The prophet went in and out among them with perfect safety, receiving no more harm than Daniel when cast into the lions' den, because he trusted in God. Let this cause us to go forth firmly but humbly in the discharge of our duty. "So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken" (v. 17).

(Elijah, Arthur W. Pink)

On a former day Jezebel's message made the prophet flee; but now he does not hesitate to pass through the crowded streets of the capital and to enter the palace of the king. Elijah was dwelling in the secret place of the Most High and standing before Jehovah, as aforetime. His faith was able to avail itself of the panoply of God. He quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, and out of weakness was made strong. Let us admire the loving forbearance of God who restores the wavering ones, brings them up from the grave, holds them as stars in His right hand, Rev. 1:16, and uses them once more in his glorious service. (F. B. Meyer) **What was the angel's message to Elijah before he went to speak to Ahaziah?**

1 Kings 1:15

Why did Jesus in Luke 9:51-56 rebuke His disciples for wanting to call down fire "just as Elijah did" unto those who did not receive them?

2 Kings 2:1

The departure of Elijah from this world was even more striking and remarkable than had been his entrance upon the stage of public action, yet the supernatural character of his exit was but the fitting finale to such a meteoric (dramatic) course. No ordinary career was his, and no commonplace end to it would have seemed suitable. Miracle had attended him wherever he had gone, and a miracle brought about his departure from this scene. He had ministered during stormy times; again and again did he call down divine judgments upon the heads of evildoers, and at the last a "whirlwind" carried him away from this earth. In answer to his prayer "the fire of the Lord" had fallen upon Mount Carmel, and again on those who sought to take his life, (2 Kings 1:12), and at the close "a chariot of fire and horses of fire" parted him asunder from Elisha. At the beginning of his dramatic career he declared, "The Lord God of Israel, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1),

and at its conclusion he was mysteriously rapt into His immediate presence without passing through the portals of death. Before looking more closely at that startling exit, let us briefly review his life, summarize its principal features, and seek to mark its leading lessons.

The life of Elijah was not the career of some supernatural being who tabernacled among men for a brief season: he was no angelic creature in human form. It is true that nothing is recorded of his parentage, his birth or early life, but the concept of any super human origin is entirely excluded by that expression of the Holy Spirit's, "Elijah was a *man*, subject to like passions as we are" (Jas. 5:17). He, too, was a fallen descendant of Adam harassed by the same depraved inclinations, subject to the same temptations, annoyed by the same devil, meeting with the same trials and oppositions as both writer and reader experience. Yet did he trust in the same Savior, walk by the same faith, and have all his needs supplied by the same gracious and faithful God as it is our privilege to do. A study of his life is particularly pertinent today, for our lot is cast in times which closely resemble those which he encountered. Varied and valuable are the lessons which his life illustrated and exemplified, the chief of which we have sought to point out in this book. Our present task is to summarize the leading points among them.

1. *Elijah was a man who walked by faith and not by sight*, and walking by faith is not a mystical or nebulous thing but an intensely practical experience. Faith does more than rest upon the bare letter of Scripture: it brings the living God into a scene of death, and enables its possessor to endure by "seeing Him who is invisible." Where faith is really in exercise, it looks beyond distressing and distracting circumstances and is occupied with Him who regulates all circumstances. It was faith in God which enabled Elijah to sojourn by the brook Cherith, there to be fed by the ravens. The skeptic supposes that faith is mere credulity (gullibility) or a species of religious fanaticism, for he knows not of the sure foundation on which it rests. The Lord had told His servant, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there," and the prophet "judged Him faithful who had promised," and therefore he was not put to confusion. And that is recorded for our encouragement. Faith looks beyond the promise to the Promiser, and God never fails those who trust alone in Him and rely fully upon Him.

It was faith which had moved Elijah to sojourn with the desolate widow of Zarephath, when she and her son were at the point of starvation. To natural instincts it seemed cruel to impose himself upon her, to carnal reason it appeared a suicidal policy. But Jehovah had said "I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee there" and the prophet "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief." Ah, faith looks to and counts upon the living God with whom nothing is too hard. Nothing, my reader, honors God so much as faith in Himself, and nothing so dishonors Him as our unbelief. It was by faith that Elijah returned to Jezreel and defied the lion in his den, telling Ahab to his face his impending doom, and announcing the awful judgment which would surely come upon his wife. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:57): Elijah heard, believed and acted. Yes, acted, for a faith without works is but a dead and worthless one. Obedience is nothing but faith in exercise, directed by the Divine authority, responding to the Divine will.

2. *Elijah was a man who walked in manifest separation from the evil around him*. Alas, the policy prevailing in Christendom today is to walk arm in arm with the world, to be a "goodmixer" if you wish to win the young people. It is argued that we cannot expect them to ascend to the spiritual plane, so the only way for the Christian to reach and help them is by descending to theirs. But such reasoning as "Let us do evil that good may come" finds no support in the Word of God, but rather emphatic refutation and condemnation. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14), "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11), are the peremptory demands. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4)—as true in this twentieth century as in the first, for it is never right to do wrong. God has not called His people to "win the world to Christ": rather does He require them, by their lives, to witness against it.

Nothing is more marked about Elijah than his uncompromising separation from the abounding evil all around him. We never find him fraternizing with the people of his degenerate day, but constantly reproving them. He was indeed a "stranger and pilgrim" here. No doubt many considered him selfish and unsociable, and probably charged him with assuming an "I am holier than thou" attitude. Ah, Christian reader, you must not expect mere religionists, empty professors, to appreciate your motives or understand your ways: "the world knoweth us not" (1 John 3:1). God leaves His people here to witness for Christ, and the only way to do that is to walk with Christ. Thus we are bidden to "go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13): we cannot walk with Christ except we be where His Spirit is—outside the apostate mass, apart from all that dishonors and disowns the Lord Jesus; and that inevitably involves "bearing His reproach."

3. *Elijah was a man of marked elevation of spirit*. Possibly that expression is a new one to some of our readers, yet its meaning is more or less obvious. That which we make reference to was symbolized by the fact that the prophet is seen again and again "on the mount." The first mention of him (1 Kings 17:1), tells us that he was "of the inhabitants of Gilead," which was a hilly section of the country. His memorable victory over the false prophets of Baal was upon mount Carmel. After his slaughter of them at the brook Kishon, and his brief word to the king, we are told that "Ahab went up to eat and drink" whereas Elijah "went up to the top of Carmel" (18:42)—which at once revealed their respective characters. When the Lord recovered him from his lapse we read that he "went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (1 Kings 19:8). After he had delivered his message to Ahaziah, it is recorded, "behold, he sat on

the top of a hill" (2 Kings 1:9). Thus Elijah was markedly the man of the mount. Now there is a mystical or spiritual significance in that, apparent unto an anointed eye, which we have termed elevation of spirit.

By elevation of spirit we mean heavenly-mindedness, the heart being raised above the poor things of this world, the affections being set upon things above. This is ever one of the effects or fruits of walking by faith, for faith has God for its object, and He dwells on high. The more our hearts are occupied with Him whose throne is in heaven, the more are our spirits elevated above the earth. The more our minds are engaged with the perfections of Him who is altogether lovely, the less will the things of time and sense have power to attract us. The more we dwell in the secret place of the Most High, the less will the baubles (play things) of men charm us. The same feature comes out prominently in the life of Christ: He was preeminently the Man of the Mount. His first sermon was delivered from one. He spent whole nights there. He was transfigured upon "the holy mount." He ascended from the mount of Olives. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles" (Isa. 40:31)—their bodies on earth, their hearts in heaven.

4. *Elijah was a mighty intercessor.* Let it be pointed out that none but one who walks by faith, who is in marked separation from evil around him, and who is characterized by elevation of spirit or heavenly-mindedness, is qualified for such holy work. The prevalency of Elijah's intercession is recorded not only for our admiration but emulation. Nothing is more calculated to encourage and embolden the Christian in his approaches to the throne of grace than to mark and recall how frail mortals like himself, unworthy and unprofitable sinners, supplicated God in the hour of need and obtained miraculous supplies from Him. God delights for us to put Him to the test, and therefore has He said, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Wondrously was that exemplified in the life of Elijah, and so should it be in ours too. But we shall never have power in prayer while we give way to an evil heart of unbelief, or fraternize with religious hypocrites, or while we are absorbed with the things of time and sense. Faith, fidelity and spirituality are necessary qualifications.

In answer to the intercession of Elijah the heavens were shut up for three years and a half, so that it rained not at all. This teaches us that the supreme motive behind all our supplications must be the glory of God and the good of His people—the chief lessons inculcated by Christ in the family prayer. It also teaches that there are times when the servant of God may request his Master to deal in judgment with his enemies. Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies. There are times when it is both right and necessary for a Christian to ask God to bring down His chastening rod on His backslidden and wayward people. We read that Paul delivered unto Satan certain ones who had made shipwreck of the faith that they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20). Jeremiah called on the Lord to "Pour out Thy fury upon the heathen that know Thee not, and upon the families that call not on Thy name" (10:25). The Lord Jesus interceded not only for "His own," but also against Judas and his family (Ps. 109).

But there is a brighter side to the efficacy of Elijah's intercession than the one contemplated in the preceding paragraph. It was in answer to his prayer that the widow's son was restored to life (1 Kings 17:19,22). What a proof was *that* that nothing is too hard for the Lord: that in response to believing supplication He is able and willing to reverse what unto sight seems the most hopeless situation. What possibilities to trustful and importunate prayer does that present! Man's extremity is indeed God's opportunity—to show Himself strong on our behalf. But let it not be forgotten that behind the prophet's intercession there was a higher motive than the comforting of the widow's heart: it was that his Master might be glorified—vindicated in the claims made by His servant. Ah, that is so important, though generally overlooked. Christian parents reading this section are most desirous that their children should be saved, and pray daily for that end. Why? Is it only that they may have the comforting assurance their loved ones have been delivered from the wrath to come? Or, is it that God may be honored by their regeneration?

It was in response to Elijah's intercession that the fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. Here, too, his petition was based on the plea for the Lord to vindicate His great and holy name before the vast assembly of His vacillating people and the heathen idolaters: "let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36). As we pointed out in an earlier chapter, that "fire of the Lord" was not only a solemn type (foreshadow) of the Divine wrath smiting Christ when bearing the sins of His people, but it was also a dispensational foreshadowing of the public descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost attesting God's acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son. Thus the practical lesson for us is believingly to pray for more of the Spirit's power and blessing, that we may be favored with further manifestations of His presence with and in us. That we are warranted in so making request is evidenced by that word of our Lord, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). Pray for faith to lay hold of that promise.

So, too, it was in answer to the prophet's intercession that the terrible drought was ended: "He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (Jas. 5:18). The spiritual meaning and application of that is obvious. For many years past the churches have been in a parched and languishing condition. This was evident from the varied expedients they resorted to in the attempt to "revive" and strengthen them. Even where carnal means were not employed with the object of attracting outsiders, religious "specialists" in the form of "successful evangelists" or "renowned Bible teachers" were called in to aid in extra meetings—as sure a sign of the churches' ill-health as the summoning of a doctor. But artificial stimulants soon lose their efficacy, and unless his health is restored by ordinary means, leave the patient worse than before. So it has been with the churches, until their dry and dead condition is apparent even to

themselves. Yet, unless the end of the world be upon us, showers of blessing will yet descend (though possibly in different parts of the earth than formerly), and they will come (at their appointed time) in answer to Elijah's prayer!

5. *Elijah was a man of intrepid courage*, by which we mean not a natural bravery but spiritual boldness. That distinction is an important one, yet it is rarely recognized. Few today seem capacitated to discriminate between what is of the flesh and what is wrought by the Spirit. No doubt the prevailing habit of defining Bible terms by the dictionary rather than from their usage in Holy Writ, adds much to the confusion. Take for example the grace of spiritual patience: how often is it confounded with an even and placid temperament, and because they possess not such a natural disposition, many of the Lord's people imagine they have no patience at all. The patience of which the Holy Spirit is the Author is not a calm equanimity which never gets irritated by delays, nor is it that gentle graciousness which bears insults and injuries without retaliation or even murmuring—rather is that much closer akin to *meekness*. How many have been puzzled by those words, "Let us run with patience the race set before us" (Heb. 21:1)? They create their own difficulty by assuming that "patience" is a passive rather than an active grace.

The "patience" of Christians is not a passive virtue but an active grace, not a natural endowment but a supernatural fruit. It signifies endurance: it is that which enables the saints to persevere in the face of discouragements, to hold on his way despite all opposition. In like manner, Christian "courage" is not a constitutional endowment but a heavenly endowment: it is not a natural quality but a supernatural thing. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth (a guilty conscience filling them with terror), but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). He who truly fears God is fearless of man. That spiritual courage or boldness has shone forth in many a weak, timid, shrinking woman. Those who would have trembled at the prospect of walking alone through a cemetery on a dark night, shrank not from confessing Christ when a fiery death was the certain sequel. The boldness of Elijah in denouncing Ahab to his face, and in confronting single-handed his army of false prophets, must not be attributed to his natural constitution but ascribed to the operations of the Holy Spirit.

6. *Elijah was a man who experienced a sad fall*, and this also is recorded for our instruction: not as an excuse for us to shelter behind, but as a solemn warning to take to heart. Few indeed are the recorded blemishes in Elijah's character, yet he did not attain to perfection in this world. Remarkably as he was honored by his Master, yet sin had not been eradicated from his being. Strikingly, it was in his faith and courage he failed, for he took his eye off the Lord for a brief season and then fled in terror from a woman. What force does that give to the exhortation, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12)! We are just as dependent upon God for the maintenance of our spiritual graces as we are for the bestowment of them. But though he fell, Elijah was not utterly cast down. Divine grace sought him, delivered him from his despondency, restored him to the paths of righteousness, and so renewed him in the inner man that he was as faithful and courageous afterward as he had been formerly.

7. *Elijah was a man who had a supernatural exit from this world*. As this will be the subject of the next section, we will not now anticipate our remarks thereon.

(Elijah, Arthur W. Pink)

We tend to look at Elijah as a superhero but James tells us in James 5:17, "Elijah was a man, subject to like passions as we are." **What godly qualities did Elijah have despite having the same depraved human nature as we have?**

2 Kings 2:2-11

After Elijah's interview with king Ahaziah we read no more of him till we come to the closing scene of his earthly career, but from the hints conveyed by the divine record in 2 Kings 2 we gather that his last days here were not idle ones. If not engaged in anything spectacular and dramatic, he was employed in doing what was good and useful. It would seem that both he and Elisha not only instructed the people in private but also founded and superintended seminaries or schools of the prophets in various parts of the land. By training them to read and teach the Word of God, those young men were prepared for the ministry and to carry on the work of reformation in Israel, and therein the prophets were well employed. Such sacred activity, though less striking to the senses, was of far greater importance, for the effect produced by witnessing supernatural wonders, though stirring at the time, soon wears away, whereas the truth received in the soul abides forever. The time spent by Christ in training the apostles produced more lasting fruit than the prodigies He performed in the presence of the multitudes.

Elijah had now almost finished his course. The time of his departure was at hand, how then does he occupy his last hours? What does he do in anticipation of the great change impending? Does he shut himself up in a cloister that he may not be disturbed by the world? Does he retire to his chamber that he may devote his last moments to devout meditation and fervent supplication, making his peace with God and preparing to meet his Judge? No, indeed, he had made his peace with God many years before and had lived in blessed communion with Him day after day. As for getting ready to meet his Judge, he had not been so mad as to postpone that all-important task till the last. He had, by divine grace, spent his life in walking with God, in performing His bidding, in trusting in His mercy, and in experiencing His favor. Such a man is always getting ready for the great change. It is only the foolish virgins that are without oil when the Bridegroom comes. It is only the worldling and ungodly who put off preparation for eternity till their last moments.

"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19): out of the ground was man's body taken, and because of sin, unto the ground it shall revert. More than three thousand years had passed since that sentence was pronounced against the fallen race, and Enoch had been the only person who was exempted from it: why he, rather than Noah, Abraham, Samuel, should have been so honored we know not, for the Most High does not always deign to give a reason in explanation of His conduct. He ever does as He pleases, and the exercise of sovereignty marks all His ways. In the saving of souls—exempting sinners from merited condemnation and conferring unmerited blessings—He divideth "to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:11), and none can say Him nay. Thus it is in connection with those whom He spares from the grave. Another was now on the point of being transported bodily to Heaven, but why such peculiar honor should be conferred upon Elijah rather than any other of the prophets we cannot say, and it is idle to speculate.

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" (2 Kings 2:1). That the prophet had received previous notification of the Lord's gracious intention to give him a supernatural exit from this world appears by his conduct in going from place to place by divine direction. "Gilgal" marked the starting-point of his final journey, and most suitably so. It had been the first stopping-place of Israel after they crossed the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan (Joshua 4:19). It was there the children of Israel pitched their camp and set up the tabernacle. It was there they had "kept the passover" and "did eat of the old corn of the land" instead of the manna on which they had so long been miraculously fed (Joshua 5:10-12). And Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel" (2:2). Various conjectures have been made as to why Elijah would have Elisha now part company with him: that he wished to be alone, that modesty and humility would hide from human eyes the great honor to be bestowed upon him, that he would spare his companion the grief of final departure, that he would test the strength of his attachment and faith—we incline to this last.

And Elisha said unto him, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they went down to Bethel (v. 2). When first called by Elijah he had declared, "I will follow thee" (1 Kings 19:20). Did he really mean it? Would he cleave to the prophet unto the end? Elijah tried his faith, to determine whether his avowal was actuated by a fleeting impulse or if it were a steadfast resolution. Elisha had meant what he said, and refused now to forsake his master when given the opportunity to do so. He was determined to have the benefit of the prophet's company and instruction as long as he could, and clave to him probably in hope of receiving his parting blessing. "So they went down to Bethel," which means "the house of God." This was another place of hallowed memory, for it was the spot where Jehovah had first appeared unto Jacob and given him the vision of the mystic ladder. Here the "sons of the prophets" at the local school came and informed Elisha that the Lord would remove his master that very day. He told them he knew that already, and bade them hold their peace (v. 3), for they were intruding.

And Elijah said unto him, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho" (v. 4). As the Savior "made as though He would have gone further" (Luke 24:28), when putting to the proof the affection of His disciples on the way to Emmaus, so the prophet told his companion to "tarry ye here," at Bethel—the place of such sacred memories. But as the two disciples had "constrained" Christ to abide with them, so nothing could tempt Elisha to forsake his master. "So they came to Jericho," which was on the border of the land from which Elijah was departing. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" And he answered, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace" (v. 5). The force of this seems to be: What is the use of clinging so tenaciously to your master? He will be taken from you on the morrow, why not stay here with us! But like the great apostle at a later date, Elisha "conferred not with flesh and blood," but adhered to his resolution. Oh, that like grace may be granted both writer and reader when tempted to follow not the Lord fully.

And Elijah said unto him, "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan" (v. 6). Much ground had now been covered; was Elisha tiring of the journey or would he continue to the end? How many run well for awhile and then grow weary of well-doing? Not so Elisha. And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And they two went on (v. 6). How that reminds us of Ruth's decision: when Naomi bade her, "Return thou after thy sister-in-law," she replied, "Intreat 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" (1:16). "And they two went on," leaving the school of the prophets behind them. The young believer must not suffer even happy fellowship with the saints to come in between him and his own individual communion with the Lord. How richly Elisha was rewarded for his fidelity and constancy we shall see in the sequel.

"And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan" (v. 7), probably because they expected to witness Elijah's translation into heaven, a favor, however, which was granted only to Elisha. Nevertheless they were permitted to witness a remarkable miracle: the dividing asunder of the waters of Jordan so that the prophet and his companion passed over dryshod. How the *sovereignty of God* is displayed everywhere! The multitudes witnessed Christ's miracle of multiplying the loaves and the fishes, but not even all of the twelve beheld His transfiguration on the mount. It had pleased God to make these young prophets acquainted with the supernatural exit of His servant from this world, yet they were not permitted to be actual spectators of the same. Why, we know not, but the fact remains, and from it we should take instruction. It illustrates a principle which is revealed on every page of Holy Writ and is exemplified all through history: that God makes distinction not only between man and man but also between His saints, between one of His servants and another, distributing His favors as it pleases Him. And when any dare to challenge His high sovereignty, His answer is, "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?" (Matthew 20:15).

"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" (v. 8). This dividing of the Jordan was a fitting prelude to the prophet's rapture on high. As Matthew Henry pointed out, it was "the preface to Elijah's translation into the heavenly Canaan, as it had been to the entrance of Israel into the earthly Canaan" (Joshua 3:15-17). Elijah and his companion might have crossed the river by ferry, as other passengers did, but the Lord had determined to magnify His servant in his exit from the land, as He had Joshua in his entrance thereto. It was with his *rod* Moses had divided the sea (Ex. 14:16), here it was with his *mantle* Elijah divided the river—each the insignia or badge of his distinctive office. That there is a deeper meaning and broader application to this remarkable incident scarcely admits of a doubt. The "Jordan" is the well-known figure of death: Elijah is here a type (foreshadow) of Christ, as Elisha is to be regarded as representative of all who cleave to and follow Him. Thus we learn that a safe and comfortable way through death has been provided for His people by the Lord Jesus Christ.

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," v. 9. Here is proof that Elijah had been *testing* his companion when he bade him "tarry" at the previous stopping places, for certainly he had not offered such an invitation as this had he been contravening (contradicting) his express desire. The prophet was so pleased with Elisha's affection and attendance that he determined to reward him with some parting blessing. And what a testing of his character was this, "Ask what I shall do for thee"! One of the Puritans has called attention to the significance of Elijah's "*before* I be taken from thee," for it had been useless for Elisha to invoke his master afterward. 'He was not to be prayed unto as a "mediator of intercession" as Papists blasphemously teach concerning saints and angels.' Christ is the only one in heaven who intercedes for God's people on earth. How attentively we need to read the language of Holy Writ: that single word 'before' gives the tie to one of the cardinal errors of Rome.

And Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (v. 9). Here was his noble answer to Elijah's "What shall I do for thee?" Rising above both the lusts and sentiments of the flesh, he asked not anything nature might have coveted, but that which was spiritual, seeking not his own aggrandizement but the glory of God. We do not think he asked for something superior to what his master had enjoyed, but a portion "double" that which was communicated to the other prophets. He was to take Elijah's place on the stage of public action: he was to be the leader of "the sons of the prophets" (as v. 15 intimates), and therefore he wished to be equipped for his mission. Rightly did he "covet earnestly the best gifts": he asked for a double portion of the spirit of prophecy—of wisdom and grace, of faith and strength—that he might be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

And he said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing" (v. 10). Elisha had asked not for riches or glory, wisdom or power, but for a double portion of the spirit that rested on and wrought through his master. In terming it "a hard thing" Elijah appears to have emphasized the great *value* of such a bestowment: it was as though he said, That is much for you to expect. We regard Matthew Henry's comment as a pertinent one: "Those are best prepared for spiritual blessings that are most sensible of their worth and their own unworthiness to receive." Elisha felt his own weakness and utter insignificance for such a work as that to which he was called, and therefore he desired to be qualified for his eminent office. "Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it should be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so" (v. 10). This is very blessed: his request would be granted and he was to know it by the sign mentioned: a sight of Elijah's translation would be the proof that his request was agreeable to the will of God and a pledge of his desire being gratified: but in order thereto his eye must continue fixed upon his master! Chronologists reckon that the ministry of Elisha lasted at least twice the length of his predecessor's and apparently he wrought double the number of miracles.

The grand moment had arrived. Elijah had fully discharged the commission God had given him. He had preserved his garments from being spotted by the apostate religious world. Now his conflict was over, his course run, his victory won. He had no home or resting place here, so he pressed onward to his heavenly rest. "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" (v. 11). It is to be carefully noted that God did not send His chariot for Elijah while he was in Samaria. No, the land of Israel was polluted and Ichabod was written over it. It was on the far side of Jordan, in the place of separation, that this signal honor was conferred upon the prophet. As the souls of the saints are conveyed to Paradise by the angels (Luke 16:22), so we believe it was by celestial beings, the highest among them, that Elijah was taken to heaven. "Seraphim" signifies "fiery," and God is said to make His angels "a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4), while "cherubim" are called "the chariots of God" (Ps. 68:57 and cf. Zech. 1:8; 6:1). "Elijah was to remove to the world of angels, and so angels were sent to conduct him thither" (Matthew Henry), that he might ride in state and triumph to the skies like a conqueror.

In the translation of Elijah we have clear testimony to the fact that there is a reward for the righteous. Often this appears to be flatly contradicted by the experiences of this life. We behold the wicked flourishing like the green bay tree, while the child of God has a bare temporal subsistence; but it shall not always be thus. Elijah had peculiarly honored God in a day of almost universal apostasy, and now God was pleased highly to honor him. As he had taught men, at the constant hazard of his life, the knowledge of the only true God, so he would now teach them by his being taken alive into heaven that there is a future state, that there is a world beyond the skies into which the righteous are admitted, where they shall henceforth dwell with God and all the angelic hosts in glory everlasting. Future bliss shall infinitely compensate present sacrifices and sufferings: he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Elijah's supernatural exit from this world also

demonstrated the fact that the human body is capable of immortality! It could not witness to the truth of resurrection, for he never died; but his corporeal removal to Heaven furnished indubitable evidence that the body is capable of being immortalized and of living in celestial conditions.

In the translation of Elijah we see how much better are God's ways than ours. In an hour of despondency the prophet had wanted to leave this world before God's time had come for him to do so, and by a way far inferior to that which He had appointed: under the juniper tree he had requested that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life" (1 Kings 19:4). Had he been granted his desire, how much he had lost! How much better than to be taken away by death in a fit of impatience! And this is recorded for our instruction, pointing as it does a lesson we all need take to heart. It is the part of wisdom to leave ourselves and all our affairs in God's gracious hands, trusting Him fully and being willing for Him to use His own measures and methods with us. We are certain to sustain serious loss if we determine to have our own way: "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:15). The mature Christian will assure his younger brethren that today he thanks God for refusing the answers he once craved. God denies thy request now because He has ordained something better for thee.

In the translation of Elijah we have both a pledge and a type of the supernatural exit from this world which every child of God experiences. In the course of these chapters we have pointed out again and again that though in certain respects the character and career of Elijah was an extraordinary one, yet in its broad outlines he is to be regarded as a representative saint. Thus it was in connection with the final event. No ordinary departure from this world was his, and vastly different from the common end to earthly existence experienced by the wicked is that of the righteous. Death as the wages of sin has been abolished for the redeemed. For them physical dissolution is but the body being put to sleep: as for the soul it is conveyed by angels into God's immediate presence, (Luke 16:22), which is certainly a supernatural experience. Nor shall all God's people even "sleep" (1 Cor. 15:22). That generation of them alive on the earth at the return of the Savior shall have their bodies "changed," that they may be "fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21), and shall be caught up together with the resurrected saints to "meet the Lord in the air," (1 Thess. 4:17). Thus a supernatural exit from this world is assured to all the ransomed hosts of God.

(Elijah, Arthur W. Pink)

What does Elijah's supernatural exit demonstrate?

2 Kings 2:12-14

That which occupies the central and dominant place in what the Spirit has been pleased to record of the life of Elisha is the miracles performed by and connected with him. Far more miracles were wrought by him or were granted in answer to his prayers than any other of the Old Testament prophets. In fact the narrative of his history consists of little else than a record of supernatural acts and events. Nor need this at all surprise us, though it is strange that so few seem to grasp its implication and significance. The character of Elisha's mission and ministry was in thorough keeping with Israel's condition at that time. The very fact that these miracles were needed indicates the state into which Israel had fallen. Idolatry had held sway for so long that the true and living God was no longer known by the nation. Here and there were individuals who believed in the Lord, but the masses were worshipers of idols. Therefore by means of drastic interpositions, by awe-inspiring displays of His power, by supernatural manifestations of His justice and mercy alike, God forced even the skeptical to recognize His existence and subscribe to His supremacy.

It is fitting here that we should make a few remarks upon the reason for and meaning of miracles. Prophecy and miracles partake of much the same nature. Prophecy is really an oral miracle, and miracles are virtually prophecies (forthtelling of God) in action. As God sends forth one of His prophets only in a time of marked declension and departure of His people from Himself, so miracles were quite unnecessary while the sufficiency of His Word was practically recognized. The one as much as the other lies entirely outside the ordinary line or course of things, neither occurring during what we may term normal times. Which of the patriarchs, the priests, or the kings performed any miracles? How many were wrought during the lengthy reign of Saul, David, or Solomon? Why, then, were so many wonders done during the ministry of Elijah and still more so during that of Elisha?

The mission and ministry of Elisha was the same in character as that which God did in Egypt by the hand of Moses. There Jehovah was unknown: entirely so by the Egyptians, largely so by the Israelites. The favored descendants of Abraham had sunk as low as the heathen in whose midst they dwelt, and God, by so many remarkable signs and unmistakable interventions, brought them back to that knowledge of Himself which they had lost. Unless the Hebrews in Egypt had been thoroughly convinced by these displays of divine power that Moses was a prophet sent from God, they never would have submitted to him as their leader. How reluctantly they owned his authority on various occasions! So also in the conquest of Canaan, God wrought four miracles in favor of His people: one in the water, in the crossing of Jordan; one in the earth, in throwing down the walls of Jericho; one in the air, in destroying their enemies by hail; and one in the heavens, by slowing the course of the sun and the moon. Thereby the nations of Canaan were furnished with clear proof of Jehovah's supremacy, that the God of Israel possessed universal dominion, that He was no local deity but the Most High reigning over all nature.

But, it may be asked, how do the miracles wrought by Christ square with what has been said above? Surely they should present no difficulty. Pause and ask the question, Why did He work miracles? Did not His teaching make clearly evident His divine mission? The very officers sent to arrest Him had to acknowledge, "Never man spake as this man." Did not the spotless holiness of His life make manifest the heavenliness of His person? Even Pilate was forced to testify, "I find no fault in Him." Did not His conduct on the cross demonstrate that He was no imposter? The centurion and his fellows owned, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). Ah, but men must be left without the shadow of an excuse for their unbelief. The whole world shall have it unmistakably shown before their eyes that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than "God manifest in flesh." The Gentiles were sunk in idolatry; Judaism was reduced to a lifeless formality and had made void the Word of God by traditions. Therefore did Christ reveal the wisdom and power of God as none other before or since by a series of miracles which warranted His saying, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

Thus it will be seen that there is another characteristic which links closely together prophecy and miracles: the character of the times in which they occur supply the key both to their implication and their significance. Both of them may be termed abnormalities, for neither of them are given in the ordinary course of events. While conditions are relatively decent, God acts according to the ordinary working of the laws of creation and operations of His providence. But when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a more apparent and noticeable standard against him, coming out more into the open and obliging men to take cognizance of Him. But there is this difference: the one intimates there is a state of grievous departure from God on the part of His people; the other indicates that the knowledge of the true and living God has publicly disappeared, that He is no longer believed in by the masses. Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies.

The missions of Elijah and Elisha form two parts of one whole, the one supplementing the other, though there was a striking contrast between them. Therein we have an illustration of the spiritual significance of the number two. Whereas one denotes there is no other, two affirms there is another and therefore a difference. That difference may be for good or for evil, and therefore this number bears a twofold meaning according to its associations. The second that comes in may be for opposition or for support. The two, though different in character, may be one in testimony and friendship. "The testimony of two men is true" (John 8:17 and cf. Numbers 35:30). Thus two is also the number of witnesses, and the greater the contrast between the two witnesses the more valuable their testimony when they agree therein. Hence it is that all through the Scriptures we find two persons linked together to present a contrast: as in such cases as Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau; or two bearing witness to the truth: as Enoch and Noah, Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, Naomi and Ruth, Ezra and Nehemiah, the sending forth of the apostles by twos (Mark 6:7 and cf. Revelation 11:3).

This linking together of two men in their testimony for God contains valuable instruction for us. It hints broadly at the twofoldness of truth. There is perfect harmony and unity between the two great divisions of Holy Writ, yet the differences between the Old and New Testaments are apparent to every thoughtful reader of them. It warns against the danger of lopsidedness, intimating the importance of seeking to preserve the balance. The chief instruments employed by God in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century were Luther and Calvin. They took part in a common task and movement, yet how great was the difference between the two men and the respective parts they were called upon to play. Thus with Elijah and Elisha: there are manifest parallels between them, as in the likeness of their names, yet there are marked contrasts both in their missions and their miracles. It is in the observing of their respective similarities and dissimilarities that we are enabled to ascertain the special teaching which they are designed to convey to us.

At first glance it may appear that there is a much closer resemblance than antithesis between the two men. Both of them were prophets, both of them dwelt in Samaria, and they were confronted with much the same situation. The falling of Elijah's mantle upon Elisha seems to indicate that the latter was the successor of the former, called upon to continue his mission. The first miracle performed by Elisha was identical with the last one wrought by his master: the smiting of the waters of the Jordan with the mantle, so that they parted asunder for him (2 Kings 2:8, 14). At the beginning of his ministry Elijah had said unto Ahab king of Israel, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1). And when Elisha came into the presence of Ahab's son he also declared, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand" (2 Kings 3:14). As Elijah was entertained by the widow of Zarepath and rewarded her by restoring her son to life (1 Kings 17:22), so Elisha was entertained by a woman at Shunem (2 Kings 4:8-10) and repaid her by restoring her son to life (2 Kings 4:35-37).

Striking as the points of agreement are between the two prophets, the contrasts in their careers and works are just as vivid and certainly more numerous. One appeared suddenly and dramatically upon the stage of public action, without a word being told us of from whence he sprang or how he had previously been engaged; but of the other the name of his father is recorded, with an account of his occupation at the time he received his call into God's service. The first miracle of Elijah was that for the space of three and a half years there should be neither dew nor rain according to his word, whereas the first public act of Elisha was to heal the springs of water (2 Kings 2:21, 22) and to produce an abundance of water (2 Kings 3:20). One of the most noticeable features of Elijah's life was his loneliness, dwelling apart from the apostate masses of the people; but Elisha seems to have spent most of his life in the company of the prophets, presiding over their schools. The different manner in which their earthly careers terminated is even more marked: the one was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, and the other fell sick in old age and died a natural death.

The principal contrast between the two prophets appears in the character of the miracles wrought by and connected with them. The majority of those performed by Elijah were associated with death and destruction, whereas by far the greater of those attributed to Elisha were works of healing and restoration. If the former was the prophet of judgment, the latter was the prophet of grace; if the course of one was fittingly closed by a "whirlwind" removing him from this scene, a peaceful dove would be the more appropriate emblem of the other. Elisha's ministry consisted largely of divine interpositions in a way of mercy, interventions of sovereign goodness, rather than judicial dealings. He commenced his mission by a miracle of blessing, healing the death-dealing springs of water. What immediately followed was the establishing of his authority, the symbol of his extraordinary office. The work of Elijah was chiefly a protest against evil, while the work of Elisha was an almost continuous testimony to the readiness of God to relieve the distressed and respond to the call of need wherever that call came from a contrite and believing heart.

Unto many it may seem really astonishing that a ministry like that of Elisha should immediately follow after Elijah's, for in view of the desperate defiance he encountered we would naturally suppose the end had been reached, that the patience of God was at last exhausted. But if we take into account what has been before us above on the significance of miracles, we shall be less surprised. As we have pointed out, a state of general infidelity and idolatry forms the historical background, and thus is the reason for and purpose of His breaking through the darkness and making Himself manifest to a people who are God's, but know Him not. Now since God is "light" (1 John 1:5), that is, the ineffably holy one, it necessarily follows that when revealing Himself He will do so as the hater and punisher of sin. But it is equally true that God is "love" (1 John 4:8), that is, the infinitely benevolent one, and consequently when appearing more evidently before the eyes of His creatures, it is in wondrous works of kindness and benevolence. Thus we have the two sides of the divine character revealed in the respective ministries of Elijah and Elisha: deeds of vengeance and deeds of mercy.

While their two missions may certainly be considered separately, yet Elisha's ministry should be regarded primarily as the complement of Elijah's. The two, though dissimilar, make one complete whole—and only subordinately a thing apart. On the one hand Elijah's mission was mainly of a public character; on the other, Elisha's was more in private. The former had to do principally with the masses and those who had led them astray, and therefore his miracles consisted chiefly of judgments, expressive of God's wrath upon idolatry. The latter was engaged mostly with the Lord's prophets and people, and consequently his acts were mainly those of blessing, manifestations of the divine mercy. The comforting and assuring lesson in this for Christians today is, that even in a season of apostasy and universal wickedness, when His rod is laid heavily upon the nations, the Lord will neither forget nor forsake His own, but will appear unto them as "the God of all grace." Things may become yet worse than they are now. Even so the Lord will prove Himself to be "a very present help" to His people.

Coming now to the subordinate viewpoint and considering Elisha's career as the sequel to Elijah's, may we not find in it a message of hope in this dark, dark hour. Those with any measure of spiritual discernment cannot fail to perceive the tragic resemblance there is between the time in which Elijah's lot was cast and our own sad day. The awful apostasy of Christendom, the appalling multiplication of false prophets, the various forms of idolatry now so prevalent in our midst, and the solemn judgments from heaven which have been and are being visited upon us and the blatant refusal of the multitudes to pay any heed to them by mending their ways, all furnish an analogy which is too plain to be missed. There is therefore a real temptation to conclude that the end of all things is at hand—some say an end of the age, others the end of the world. Many thought the same when Napoleon was desolating Europe and again in 1914-18 but they were wrong, and it is quite likely that they who think the same today will have their conclusions falsified. There is at least a warning for us here: Elijah was followed by Elisha! Who can tell what mercy God may yet show to the world?

We must be on our guard against missing the consolation which this portion of Scripture may contain for us. The darkest night is followed by the morning's light. Even if the present order of "civilization" is doomed to destruction, we know not what favors from God await this earth in generations to come. Of necessity there will be a time when this world and all its works will be burned up, and that event may be very near. On the other hand that event may be thousands of years away. If such be the case, then black as is the present outlook and blacker it may yet become, yet the clouds of divine judgment will again disperse and the Sun of righteousness arise once more with healing in His wings. More than once the times of Elijah have been substantially duplicated even during this Christian era, yet each time they were followed by an Elisha of mercy. Thus it may be again, yea will be unless God is now on the point of bringing down the curtain upon human history.

Very little indeed seems to have been written upon the life of Elisha, yet this is not difficult to account for. Though there is almost twice as much recorded about him than his predecessor, his history is not given in one connected piece or consecutive narrative. Rather it is disjointed, the current of his life being crossed again and again by references to others. The scattered allusions to the prophet's career do not lend themselves so readily to biographical treatment as do the lives of Abraham, Jacob, or David. Why is this? For there is nothing meaningless in Scripture; perfect wisdom directs the Holy Spirit in every detail. May it not be that we have a hint here of the method which will be followed by the Lord in that era which will possibly succeed the period of Christendom's history foreshadowed by Elijah's life? May not the broken and disconnected account of Elisha's deeds presage the form God's dealings will take in a future generation: that instead of being a regular stream they will be occasional showers of blessing at intervals?

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

Compare and contrast Elijah's ministry with that of Elisha's.

What was the significance of Elisha dividing the waters of the Jordan?

2 Kings 2:15-18

"And they said unto him, behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley" (2 Kings 2:16). Two things must be borne in mind in connection with this request, lest we be too severe in our criticism of those who made it. First, these young prophets had known that Elijah was to be removed from Elisha that day, as is clear from their words to him on a former occasion: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" (2 Kings 2:5). As to how they had learned of this, we cannot be sure; nor do we know how full was their information. Yet it seems clear they knew nothing more than the general fact that this was the day which would terminate the earthly career of the renowned Tishbite.

Second, we are told, "And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two [Elijah and Elisha] stood by the Jordan"(2 Kings 2:7). Here again we cannot be certain what it was or how much they actually saw. Perhaps, some are ready to exclaim, if they were definitely on the lookout, they must have seen the remarkable translation of Elijah, for the "chariot of fire and the horses of fire" in midair would surely have been visible to them. Not necessarily. Probably that "fire" was very different from any that we are acquainted with. Moreover we must bear in mind that on a later occasion "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha," yet his own personal attendant saw them not until the prophet asked, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17)! We are therefore inclined to believe that as these young prophets watched, Elijah suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from their view, without their actually seeing his miraculous translation to heaven. Consequently they felt that something unprecedented and supernatural had taken place, and they ascribed it to a divine intervention, as their reference to "the Spirit of the Lord" intimates.

Though they must have realized that an event quite extraordinary had occurred, yet they were uneasy, fearful that something unpleasant had befallen their teacher. They were deeply concerned, and veneration and love for Elijah prompted their petition. Let us seek to put ourselves in their place and then ask, Would we have acted more intelligently? At any rate, was their request any more foolish than Peter's on the mount of transfiguration when he said to Christ, "If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matthew 17:4)! Moreover it should be observed that they did not rashly take matters into their own hands, but respectfully submitted their request to Elisha. Before criticizing them too harshly let us make sure that our hearts are as warmly attached to God's servants as theirs, and that we are as troubled over their departure as they were.

Elisha tersely refused their request. "Ye shall not send." But why did he not explain to them the uselessness of such a quest, by informing them exactly what had happened to Elijah? Probably because he concluded that if the Lord had intended them to know of His servant's miraculous exit from this scene, He would have opened their eyes to behold what he himself had been permitted to see. Not all of the twelve witnessed Christ's transfiguration either. Moreover, is there not a hint here as to why this privilege had been withheld from them, in the statement that "they stood to view afar off"? Not so Elisha, who followed his master fully. It is only those who "draw near" that enjoy the highest privileges of grace. Finally we may learn from Elisha's reticence that there are some experiences which are too sacred to describe to others. Oh for more of such holy reserve and modesty in this day of curiosity and vulgar intruding into one another's spiritual privacy.

"And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not" (2 Kings 2:17). Let it not be forgotten that up to this time only one individual from all mankind had gone to heaven without passing through the portals of death, and it is very doubtful if the contemporaries of Enoch (or those who lived later) knew of his translation, for the words, "He was not found" (Heb. 11:5) intimate that search was also made for him. Elisha's being "ashamed" means that he felt if he were to continue refusing them they would likely think he was being influenced by an undue desire to occupy Elijah's place of honor. "And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?" (2 Kings 2:18). Now *they* must have felt ashamed. "This would make them the more willing to acquiesce in his judgment another time" (Matthew Henry).

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

Why do you think the prophets pressed Elisha to go and search for Elijah.

2 Kings 2:19-25

At Bethel there was another school of prophets. There Elisha went next, and the scholars welcomed him with all possible respect, but the townsmen were abusive to him. One of Jeroboam's calves was at Bethel; this they were proud

of, and hated those who reproved them. We may suppose it was their usual practice to jeer the prophets as they went along the streets, to call them by some nickname or other, and, if possible, drive them out of their town. Had the abuse done to Elisha been the first offence of that kind, it is probable that it would not have been so severely punished. But *mocking God's messengers, and scoffing at his prophets*, was one of the *crying sins of Israel*, as we find, 2 Chron. 36:16.

The little *youths of Bethel*, the boys and girls who were playing in the streets, went out to meet him, gathered around him and mocked him, as if he had been a fool. *Go on up, you baldhead! Go on up, you baldhead!* It was his character as a prophet that they intended to abuse.

The honor God had crowned him with should have been sufficient to cover his bald head and protect him from their scoffing. These children said as they were taught; they had learned of their idolatrous parents to call foul names and give bad language, especially to prophets. These young cocks, as we say, crowed after the old ones.

Elisha heard their taunts, a good while, with patience; but at length he *turned and looked at them*, to see if a grave and severe look would put them out of countenance, but they *were not ashamed*, and therefore he *called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord*, to punish the dishonor done to God. His summons was immediately obeyed: two bears came out of an adjacent wood, and presently killed forty-two children, v. 24. The prophet must be justified, for he did it by divine impulse. He intended by this to punish the parents and to make them afraid of God's judgments. Let parents, who would have comfort in their children, train them up well. In vain do we look for good from those children whose education we have neglected: and in vain do we grieve for those failures which our care might have prevented.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Is Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" applicable here? What other incidents in the Bible seemed like minor infractions but were dealt with swiftly and resolutely by God.

Gen. 19:26 2 Sam. 6:6-7 2 Chr. 36:16-17 Ps. 105:13-15 John 12:37-40 Acts 5:1-11

2 Kings 3:1-20

In 2 Kings 3 we read, "Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal, that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom" (2 Kings 3:1-3).

"But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel." The Moabites were the descendants of the son which Lot had by his elder daughter. They occupied a territory to the southeast of Judah and east of the Red Sea. They were a strong and fierce people—"the mighty men of Moab" (Ex. 15:15). Balak, who sent for Balaam to curse Israel, was one of their kings. Even as proselytes they were barred from entering the congregation of the Lord unto the tenth generation. They were idolators (1 Kings 11:33). For at least a hundred and fifty years they had apparently paid a heavy annual tribute, but upon the death of Ahab they had decided to throw off the yoke and be fined no further.

"So king Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel" (2 Kings 3:6). There was no turning to the Lord for counsel and help. He was the One who had given David success and brought the Moabites into subjection, and Jehoram should have turned to Him now that they rebelled. But he was a stranger to Jehovah; nor did he consult the priests of the calves, so apparently he had no confidence in them either. How sad is the case of the unregenerate in the hour of need; no divine comforter in sorrow, no unerring counselor in perplexity, no sure refuge when danger menaces them. How much men lose even in this life by turning their backs upon the One who gave them being. Nothing less than spiritual madness can account for the folly of those who "observe lying vanities" and "forsake their own mercies" (Jonah 2:8). Jonah had to learn that lesson in a hard school. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows never learn it, as they ultimately discover to their eternal undoing. Will that be the case with you, my reader?

"And he went and 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?" (2 Kings 3:7). Both Thomas Scott and Matthew Henry suppose that it was merely a political move on the part of Jehoram when he "put away the image of Baal that his father had made." They think this external reformation was designed to pave the way for obtaining the help of Jehoshaphat, who was a God-fearing, though somewhat vacillating, man. The words of Elisha to him in verses 2 Kings 3:13-14 certainly seem to confirm this view, for the servant of God made it clear that he was not deceived by such a device and addressed him as one who acted the part of a hypocrite. Any student of history is well aware that many religious improvements have been granted by governments simply from what is termed "state policy" rather than from spiritual convictions or a genuine desire to promote the glory of God. Only the One who looks on the heart knows the real motives behind much that appears fair on the surface.

"And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses" (2 Kings 3:7). It seems strange that Jehoshaphat was willing to unite with Jehoram in this expedition, for he had been severely rebuked on an earlier occasion for having "joined affinity with Ahab" (2 Chron. 18:1-3). Jehu the prophet said to him, "Shouldest thou

help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:2). How, then, is his conduct to be explained on this occasion? No doubt his zeal to heal the breach between the two kingdoms had much to do with it, for 2 Chronicles 18:1-3 intimates he was anxious to promote a better spirit between Judah and Israel. Moreover, the Moabites were a common enemy, for we learn from 2 Chronicles 20:1 that at a later date the Moabites, accompanied by others, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. But it is most charitable to conclude that Jehoshaphat was deceived by Jehoram's reformation. Yet we should mark the absence of his seeking directions from the Lord on this occasion.

"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, 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. And the king of Israel said, Alas! That the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab" (2 Kings 3:8-10). Note that Jehoram was quite willing for the king of Judah to take the lead, and that he made his plans without seeking counsel of God. The course he took was obviously meant to secure the aid of the Edomites, but by going so far into the wilderness they met with a desert where there was no water. Thus the three kings and their forces were in imminent danger of perishing. This struck terror into the heart of Jehoram and at once his guilty conscience smote him—unbelievers know sufficient truth to condemn them! "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord" (Prov. 19:3). What an illustration of that is furnished by the words of Jehoram on this occasion.

"But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire 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). Here we see the difference between the unrighteous and the righteous in a time of dire calamity. The one is tormented with a guilty conscience and thinks only of the Lord's wrath; the other has hope in His mercy. In those days the prophet was the divine mouthpiece, so the king of Judah made inquiry for one, and not in vain. It is blessed to observe that as the Lord takes note of and registers the sins of the reprobate, so He observes the deeds of His elect, placing on record here the humble service which Elisha had rendered to Elijah. Appropriately was Elisha termed "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 13:14). He was their true defense in the hour of danger, and to him did the three kings turn in their urgent need.

And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother" (2 Kings 3:13). Mark both the dignity and fidelity of God's servant. Far from feeling flattered because the king of Israel consulted him, he deemed himself insulted and let him know he discerned his true character. It reminds us of the Lord's words through Ezekiel, "These men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?" (Ezek. 14:3).

And the king of Israel said unto him, "Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab," as much as to say, "Do not disdain me; our case is desperate."

And Elisha said, "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 toward thee, nor see thee" (2 Kings 3:14). Little do the unrighteous realize how much they owe, under God, to the presence of the righteous in their midst.

"But now bring me a minstrel" (2 Kings 3:15). In view of 1 Samuel 16:23, Scott and Henry conclude that his interview with Jehoram had perturbed Elisha's mind and that soothing music was a means to compose his spirit, that he might be prepared to receive the Lord's mind. Possibly they are correct, yet we believe there is another and more important reason. In the light of such passages as "Sing unto the Lord with the harp;... and the voice of a psalm" (Ps. 98:5), and "Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the LORD" (1 Chron. 25:3 and cf. 1 Chronicles 25:1), we consider that Elisha was here showing regard for and rendering submission to the order established by God. The Hebrew word for "minstrel" signifies "one who plays on a stringed instrument," as an accompaniment to the psalm he sang. Thus it was to honor God and instruct these kings that Elisha sent for the minstrel. "And it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord (cf. Ezekiel 1:3, 3:22) came upon him." The Lord ever honors those who honor Him.

"And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts" (2 Kings 3:16-17). A pretty severe test was this, when all outward sign of fulfillment was withheld. It was a trial of their faith and obedience, and entailed a considerable amount of hard work. Had they treated the prophet's prediction with derision, they would have scorned to go to so much trouble. It was somewhat like the order Christ gave to His disciples as He bade them make the multitudes "sit down" when there was nothing in sight to feed so vast a company, only a few loaves and fishes. The sequel shows they heeded Elisha and made due preparation for the promised supply of water. As Henry says, "They that expect God's blessings must prepare room for them."

The very number of this miracle helps us to apprehend its significance. It was the fourth of the series, and in the language of scripture numerics it stands for the earth—for instance, the four seasons and the four points of the compass. What we have in this miracle is one of the Old Testament foreshadowments that the gospel was not to be confined to Palestine but would yet be sent forth throughout the earth.

Prior to His death Christ bade His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6 and cf. John 4:9); but after His resurrection He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). But there is more here. "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22), and we Gentiles are "their debtors" (Rom. 15:26-27).

Strikingly is this typified here, for it was solely for the sake of the presence of Jehoshaphat this miracle was wrought and that the water of life was made available for the Israelites and the Edomites! Thus it is a picture of the minister of the gospel engaged in missionary activities that is here set forth.

"And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat-offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water" (2 Kings 3:20). This hour was chosen by the Lord for the performing of this miracle to intimate to the whole company that their deliverance was vouchsafed on the ground of the sacrifices offered and the worship rendered in the temple in Jerusalem. It was at the same significant hour that Elijah had made his effectual prayer on Mount Carmel, (1 Kings 18:36), when another notable miracle was wrought. So too it was at the hour "of the evening oblation" that a signal blessing was granted unto Daniel (Dan. 9:21). Typically, it teaches us that it is through the merits of the sacrifice of Christ that the life-sustaining gospel of God now flows unto the Gentiles.

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

Elisha's response when called by the king of Israel assistance was: "What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother" (2 Kings 3:13). **What changed his attitude to help the three kings?**

2 Kings 3:21-27

How easily they were drawn into their own delusions. They saw the water in the valley where the army of Israel encamped, and imagined it was blood (v. 22), because they knew the valley to be dry, and could not imagine it should be water. The sun shone on it, probably the sky was red and lowering, making the water look red, which made them willing to believe, *That's blood*. If the camp was thus full of blood, they conclude, "Certainly the kings have quarreled and they have *slaughtered each other*" (v. 23). *"Now to the plunder, Moab!"*

How fatally they thus ran into their own destruction. They rushed carelessly into the camp of Israel, to plunder it, but were undeceived when it was too late. The Israelites, encouraged by the assurances Elisha had given them of victory, attacked them with the utmost fury, routed them, and pursued them into their own country (v. 24), which they laid waste (v. 25), destroyed the cities, marred the ground, stopped up the wells, felled the timber, and left only the royal city standing, in the walls of which they made great breaches with their battering engines.

In the close of the chapter we are told what the king of Moab did when he found himself reduced to the last extremity. He attempted that which was bold and brave. He got together 700 choice men, and with them sallied out against the entrenchments of the king of Edom, who, being but a mercenary in this expedition, would not, he hoped, make any great resistance if vigorously attacked, and so he might make his escape that way. But it would not do; even the king of Edom proved too hard for him, and obliged him to retreat, v. 26.

This failing, he did that which was brutish and barbarous; he took his own son, his eldest son, who was to succeed him, than whom nothing could be more dear to himself and his people, and *offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall*, v. 27. He intended by this,

(1) To obtain the favor of Chemosh his god, which, being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind.

(2) To terrify the besiegers, and oblige them to retreat. Therefore he did it *on the city wall*, in their sight, that they might see what desperate courses he resolved to take rather than surrender, and how dearly he would sell his city and life.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

How does the king of Moab's calling upon his god differ from calling upon the God of Israel?

2 Kings 4:1-7

Great service Elisha had done for the three kings: to his prayers and prophecies they owed their lives and triumphs. One would have expected that the next chapter would tell us what honors and what dignities were conferred on Elisha for this. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man, Eccles. 9:15. Or, if he had advancement offered him, he declined it: he preferred the honor of doing good in the schools of the prophets over that of being great in the courts of princes. God magnified him, and that sufficed, him—for we have him here employed in working no fewer than five miracles. (Matthew Henry)

"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 the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen" (2 Ki. 4:1). In her sad plight she went to the servant of Jehovah and told him her dire situation. Her husband may have died while Elisha was absent with the kings in their expedition against the Moabites, and thus he was unacquainted with her troubles.

The situation confronting this poor widow was indeed a drastic one. Her human provider and protector had been removed by the hand of death. She had been left in debt and had not the wherewithal to pay it, a burden that would weigh heavily on a conscientious soul. And now she was in immediate danger of having her two sons seized and taken from her by the creditor to serve as bondmen to him. Observe that in the opening words of 2 Kings 4 it is not said, "Now there came a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha" but "there cried a certain woman," which indicates the pressure of her grief and the earnestness of her appeal to the prophet.

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

Was Christ's miracles similar to Elisha's in that they not only showed great wonders but were of practical use for them that were in need?

The prophet asked the woman to borrow as many empty vessels as she could before the miracle of the filling them was performed. **In what ways does Christ ask us to come before Him as "empty vessels."**

2 Kings 4:8-17

Sometimes the Spirit of God has placed two things in juxtaposition for the purpose of comparison that we may observe the resemblances between them; at other times, it is with the object of pointing a contrast, that we may consider the points of dissimilarity. Here it is the latter: note the following antitheses. In the former case the woman's place of residence is not given (2 Ki. 4:1), but here it is (v. 8). The first was a widow (v. 1); this woman's husband was alive (v. 9). The former was financially destitute; this one was a woman of means. The one sought out Elisha; the prophet approached the other. Elisha provided for the former; this one ministered unto him. The widow had "two sons," but the married woman was childless. The one was put to a severe test (vv. 3-4); the other was not.

The place where this miracle was wrought cannot be without significance, for there is nothing meaningless in Holy Writ, though in this instance we confess to having little or no light. The one who was the beneficiary of this miracle resided at Shunem, which appears to mean "uneven." This place is mentioned only twice elsewhere in the Old Testament. First, in Joshua 19:18, from which we learn that it was situated in the territory allotted to the tribe of Issachar. Second, in 1 Samuel 28:4, where we are told it was the place that the Philistines gathered themselves together and pitched in battle array against Israel, on which occasion Saul was so terrified that, after inquiring in vain of the Lord, he sought out the witch of Endor. Matthew Henry tells us that "Shunem lay in the road between Samaria and Carmel, a road which Elisha was accustomed to travel, as we gather from 2:25." It seems to have been a farming district, and in this pastoral setting a lovely domestic scene is laid.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread." Elisha seems to have resided at or near Mount Carmel (2:25, 4:25); but went his circuit through the land to visit the seminaries of the prophets and to instruct the people, which probably was his employment when he was not sent on some special service. "At Shunem there lived a woman of wealth and piety, who invited him to come to her house, and with some difficulty prevailed" (Scott). Several practical points are suggested by this. The minister of the gospel should not be forward in pressing himself upon people, but should wait until he is invited to partake of their hospitality. Nor should he deliberately court the intimacy of the "great," except with the object of doing them good, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16) is one of the rules God has given His people to walk by, and His servants should set them an example in this matter.

And he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old." And he said, "Call her." And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." And she said, "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid." And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her" (2 Ki. 4:14-17). Observe the prophet's humility: in his perplexity, he did not disdain to confer with his servant. He was now pleased to use his interests in the court of heaven, which was far better than seeking a favor from Jehoram. It should be remembered that in Old Testament times the giving of a son to those who had long been childless was a special mark of God's favor and power, as in the cases of Abraham, Isaac, Manoah, and Elkanah. We are not sure whether her language was that of unbelief or of overwhelming astonishment; but having received a prophet in the name of a prophet, she received "a prophet's reward" (Mt. 10:41).

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

How is the Shunammite's plight different from Hannah's in 1 Samuel 1:1-25?

2 Kings 4:18-37

"And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers" (v. 18). The opening clause does not signify that he was now a fully-developed youth, but that he had passed out of infancy into childhood. This is quite obvious from a number of things in the sequel. When he was taken ill, a "lad" carried him back home (v. 19); for some time he "sat on her knees" (v. 20), and later she — apparently unaided — carried him upstairs and laid him on the prophet's bed (v. 21). Yet the child had grown sufficiently so as to be able to run about and be allowed to visit his father in the harvest field. While there, he was suddenly stricken with an ailment, for he said unto his father, "My head, my head" (v. 19). It is hardly likely that this was caused by a sunstroke, for it occurred in the morning, a while before noon. Seemingly the father did not suspect anything serious, for instead of carrying him home in his own arms, he sent him back with one of his younger workers. How incapable we are of foreseeing what even the next hour may bring forth!

How often the Lord's dealings seem strange to us. Hopes are suddenly blighted, prospects swiftly changed, and loved ones snatched away. "All flesh is grass" (Isa. 40:6), "which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven" (Mt. 6:30). Thus it was here. The babe had survived the dangers of infancy, only to be cut down in childhood. That morning, apparently full of life and health, he trotted merrily off to the harvest field; at noon he lay a corpse on his mother's knee. But in her case such a visitation was additionally inexplicable. The boy had been given to her by the divine bounty because of the kindness she had shown to one of God's servants; and now, to carnal reason, it looked as though He was dealing most unkindly with her. A miracle had been wrought in bestowing the child, and now that miracle is neutralized. Yes, God's ways are frequently "a great deep" unto human intelligence. Yet let the Christian never forget that those ways are ever ordered by infinite love and wisdom.

It is indeed most blessed to observe how this stricken mother conducted herself under her unexpected and severe trial. Here, as throughout the whole of this chapter, her moral and spiritual greatness shines forth. There was no wringing her hands in despair, no giving way to inordinate grief. Nor was there any murmuring at Providence, any complaint that God had ceased to be gracious unto her. It is in such crises and by their demeanor under them that the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. We do not say that the former always conduct themselves as the great woman, yet they sorrow not as do others who have no hope. They may be staggered and stunned by a crushing affliction, but they do not give way to an evil heart of unbelief and become avowed infidels. There may be stirrings of rebellion within, and Satan will seek to foster hard thoughts against God, but he cannot induce the true child to curse Him and commit suicide. Divine grace is a glorious reality, and in his measure every Christian is given to prove the sufficiency of it in times of stress and trial.

"And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out" (2 Ki. 4:21). This must be pondered in the light of her subsequent actions if we are to perceive the meaning of her conduct here. There was definite purpose on her part; and in view of what immediately follows, it seems clear that these were the actions of faith. She cherished the hope that the prophet would restore her son to her. She made no preparations for the burial of the child, but anticipated his resurrection by laying him upon Elisha's bed. Her faith clung to the original blessing: God, by the prophet's promise and prayers, had given him unto her, and now she takes the dead child to God (as it were) and goes to seek the prophet. Her faith might be tried even to the straining point, but in that extremity she interpreted the inexplicable dealings of God by those dealings she was sure of, reasoning from the past to the future, from the known to the unknown. The child had been given unto her unasked, and she refused to believe he had now been irrecoverably taken away from her.

That she did act in faith is clear from Hebrews 11:35, for that chapter which chronicles the achievements of faith of the Old Testament saints says that through faith "women received their dead raised to life again." There were but two who did so, and the great woman of Shunem was one of them.

And when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me" (2 Ki. 4:27). We are reminded of the two women who visited the Lord's sepulcher and that He eventually met them saying, "Rejoice! So they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him." (Mt. 28:9). In the case before us, the great woman appears to have rightly viewed Elisha as the ambassador of God, and to have humbly signified that she had a favor to ask of him. In the rebuffing from Gehazi, we see how her faith met with yet another trial. And then the Lord tenderly interposed through His servant and rebuked the officious attendant. The Lord was accustomed to reveal His secrets unto the prophets (Amos 3:7), but until He did so they were as ignorant and as dependent upon Him as others, as this incident plainly shows.

Here was still a further test of faith; the prophet himself was in the dark, unprepared for her startling request. But the Lord has just as good a reason for concealing as for revealing. In the case before us, it is not difficult to perceive why He has withheld from Elisha all knowledge of the child's death; He would have him learn from the mother herself, and that, that she might avow her faith. "Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" (2 Ki. 4:28). Those were powerful arguments to move Elisha to act on her behalf. "As she did not impatiently desire children, she could not think that her son had been given her, without solicitation, merely to become the occasion of her far deeper

distress" (Scott). The second question evidenced that her dependence was entirely upon the word of God through His servant. "However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will deceive us: hope in that will not make us ashamed" (Henry).

"And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her" (2 Ki. 4:30). It is clear from her words that, whatever was or was not the prophet's design in ordering his servant to hurry to where the child lay, she regarded his action as another testing of her faith. She evidently had no confidence in Gehazi, or in Elisha's staff as such. She was not to be put off in this way. Her language was both impressive and emphatic, signifying, "I swear that I will not return home unless you come with me. The situation is desperate; my expectation is in you, Elisha, as the Lord's ambassador, and I refuse to take any no." Here we behold the boldness and perseverance of her faith. Whether there was any unwillingness on Elisha's part to set out on this journey, or whether he was only putting her to the test, we cannot be sure; but such earnestness and importunity won the day and now stirred the prophet to action.

And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, "The child is not awaked" (v. 31). Why Elisha should have had such a man for his personal attendant we know not; yet in view of there being a Judas in the disciples we need not be unduly surprised. First, we see him seeking to officiously thrust away the poor mother when she cast herself at his master's feet (v. 27). Here we note the absence of prayer unto the Lord, and the nonsuccess of his efforts. Later, we find him giving expression to selfish unbelief, a complete lack of confidence in the power of Elisha (v. 43). Finally, his avarice masters him and he lies to Naaman, and is stricken with leprosy for his deception (5:20-27). Thus in the verse before us, we have a picture of the unavailing efforts of an unregenerate minister, and his failure made manifest to others.

"And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, laid upon his bed" (2 Ki. 4:32). In previous paragraphs we have dwelt much upon the remarkable faith of the child's mother. Yet we must not allow it to so occupy our attention as to obscure the faith of the prophet, for his was equally great. It was no ordinary demand which was now made upon him, and only one who was intimately acquainted with God would have met it as he did. The death of this child was not only quite unexpected by him, but must have seemed bewilderingly strange. Yet though he was in the dark as to the reason of this calamity, he refused to accept it as final. The mother had taken her stand upon the divine bounty and kindness, expecting an outcome in keeping with God's grace toward her, and no doubt the prophet now reasoned in the same way. Though he had never before been faced with such a desperate situation, he knew that with God all things are possible. The very fact that the dead child had been placed upon his bed was a direct challenge to his faith, and nobly did he meet it.

"He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD" (v. 33). We are not quite clear whether "them twain" refers to himself and the child or to the mother, and Gehazi, who had most probably accompanied him; but whichever it was, his action in closing the door denoted his desire for privacy. The prophet practiced what he preached to others. In the miracle recorded at the beginning of chapter four, Elisha had bidden the widow "shut the door upon" herself and her sons (v. 4) so as to avoid ostentation, and here Elisha follows the same course. Moreover, he was about to engage the Lord in most urgent and special prayer, and that is certainly something which calls for aloneness with God. The minister of the gospel needs to be much on his guard on this point, precluding everything which savors of advertising his piety like the Pharisees did (see Mt. 6:5-6). Here, then, was the means of this miracle: the unflinching faith of the mother and now the faith of the prophet, expressed in prayer unto his Master—acknowledging his own helplessness, humbly but trustfully presenting the need to Him, counting upon His almighty power and goodness.

"And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, . . . and the flesh of the child waxed warm" (v. 34). The means used by the prophet and the policy he followed are so closely linked together that they merge into one another without any break, the faith of Elisha finding expression in prayer. Considering the extraordinary situation here, how that act of the prophet's serves to demonstrate that he was accustomed to count upon God in times of emergency, to look for wondrous blessings from Him in response to his supplications. He was fully persuaded nothing was too hard for Jehovah and therefore no petition too large to present unto him. The more faith looks to the infinite power and all-sufficiency of the One with whom it has to do, the more is He honored. Next, the prophet stretched himself on the body of the little one, which was expressive of his deep affection for him and his intense longing for the lad's restoration, as though he would communicate his own life and thereby revive him.

Those who are familiar with the life and miracles of Elijah will at once be struck with the likeness between Elisha's actions here and the conduct of his predecessor on a similar occasion. In fact so close is the resemblance between them, it is evident the one was patterned after that of the other—showing how closely the man of God must keep to the scripture model if he would be successful in the divine service. First, Elijah had taken the lifeless child of the Zarephath widow, carried him upstairs, and laid him on his own bed, thereby preventing any human eyes from observing what transpired. Next, he "cried unto the Lord" and then "he stretched himself upon the child" (1 Ki. 17:19-21). In addition to what had been pointed out in the previous paragraph, we believe this stretching of the prophet on the one for whom he prayed signified an act of identification, and it was a proof that he was putting his whole soul into the work of supplication. If we are to prevail in interceding for another, we must make his or her case ours, taking his need or burden upon our own spirit, and then spreading it before God.

"Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro" (2 Ki. 4:35). Let it be noted that even the prayer of an Elisha did not meet with an immediate and full answer. Why then should we be so soon disheartened when heaven appears to be tardy in responding to our crying! God is sovereign in this, as in everything else; by this we mean that He does not deal uniformly with us. Sometimes our request is answered immediately, at the first time of asking, but often He calls for perseverance and persistence, requiring us to wait patiently for Him. We have seen how many rebuffs the faith of the mother met with, and now the faith of the prophet is tested too. It is true that he had been granted an encouragement by the waxing warm of the child's body—as the Lord is pleased to often give us "a token for good" (Ps 86:17) before the full answer is received; but as yet there was no sign of returning consciousness, and the form of the little one still lay silent and inert before him. And that also has been recorded for our instruction.

"Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him" (v. 35). This pacing up and down seems to denote a measure of mental perturbation, for the prophets were "subject to like passions as we are" (Ja. 5:17) and compassed with the same infirmities. But even if Elisha was now at his wit's end, he did not give way to despair and regard the situation as hopeless. No, he continued clinging to Him who is the giver of every good and perfect gift, and again stretched himself upon the child. Let us take this important lesson to heart and put it into practice, for it is at this point so many fail. It is the perseverance of faith which wins the day (see Mt. 7:7).

The marvel of this was nothing less than the quickening of the child, the restoring of "a dead body to life" (2 Ki. 8:5). After the prophet had again stretched himself upon the child, we are told that "the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes" (2 Ki. 4:35). See how ready God is to respond to the exercise of real faith in Himself! In this case neither the mother nor the prophet had any definite or even indefinite promise they could plead, for the Lord had not said the child should be preserved in health or recovered if he fell ill. But though they had no promise, they laid hold of the known character of God. Since He had given the child unasked, Elisha did not believe He would now withdraw His gift and leave his benefactress worse off than she was before. Elisha knew that with the Lord there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Ja. 1:17), and he clung to that. True, it makes prayer easier when there is some specific promise we can claim, yet it is a higher order of faith that lays hold of God Himself.

"And the child opened his eyes" (2 Ki. 4:35). See what a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God is ours! Hopeless as our case may be so far as all human aid is concerned, it is not too hard for the Lord. But we must "ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed," and therefore is it added, "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord" (Jam. 1:6-7). No, rather it is the one who declares with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen 32:26) who obtains his request. What must have been Elisha's delight when he saw the child revive and obtained this further experience of God's grace in answer to his petition, delivering him from his grief! How great must have been his joy as he called for Gehazi and bade him summon the mother, and when he said to her, "Take up thy son!" Blessed is it to behold her silent gratitude—too full for words—as she "fell at his feet," and in worship to God, "bowed herself to the ground." Then, she "took up her son, and went out" (2 Ki. 4:37), to get alone with God and pour out her heart in thanksgiving to Him.

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

What is the character of this woman?

What is the character of Gehazi?

2 Kings 4:38-41

The passage which is before us (2 Ki. 4:38-41) has in it practical instruction as well as spiritual lessons for us, for the Scriptures make known the evils and dangers which are in this world as well as the glory and bliss of the world to come. Elisha was visiting the school of the prophets at Gilgal, instructing them in the things of God. At the close of a meeting he gave orders that a simple meal should be prepared for them; for though he was more concerned about their spiritual welfare, he did not overlook their physical. It was a time of "dearth" or famine, so one went out into the field to gather herbs, that they might have a vegetable stew. He found a wild vine with gourds. Securing a goodly quantity, he returned and shred them into the pot of pottage, quite unconscious that he was making use of a poisonous plant. Not until after the broth was poured out was the peril discovered, for when they began eating the men cried out, "There is death in the pot." How little we realize the many and varied forms in which death menaces us, and how constantly we are indebted to the preserving providence of God.

The effects of the curse which the Lord God pronounced upon the sin of Adam have been by no means confined unto the human family. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Gen 3:17) was part of the fearful sentence, and as Romans 8:22 informs us, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." No matter where one looks, the observant eye can behold the consequences of the fall.

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that what we have alluded to above in the material world suggests that which we find in the religious realm. Among that which is offered for intellectual and spiritual food, how much is unwholesome and vicious. The fields of Christendom have many "wild gourds" growing in them, the use of which necessarily entails "death

in the pot," for fatal doctrine acts upon the soul as poison does upon the body. This is clear from that apostolic declaration, "Their word will eat as doth a canker" or "gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:17), where the reference is to the evil doctrine of heretical teachers. But just as God has mercifully endowed the animals with instincts and man with sufficient natural intelligence to avoid what is physically injurious, so He has graciously bestowed upon His people spiritual "senses" which, if exercised, "discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14). Thus they instinctively warn against unsound writings and preachers, so that "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5).

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

The "wild gourds" put death in the pot (2 Kings 4:38-41). **What are the "wild gourds" in the pot of Christendom today?**

Job 34:2-3 Ps. 141:3-4 Matt. 24:45 Luke 11:39-42 Acts 17:11 2 Cor. 11:4, 13, 14 2 Tim 2:17 1
Thess. 5:21 Heb. 5:14

2 Kings 4:42-44

It seems strange so few have perceived that a miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 4:42-44, for surely a careful reading of those verses makes it evident that they describe the wonder-working power of the Lord. How else can we explain the feeding of so many with such a little and then a surplus remaining? It is even more strange that scarcely any appear to have recognized that we have here a most striking foreshadowment of the only miracle wrought by the Lord Jesus which is narrated by all the four evangelists, namely, His feeding of the multitude from a few loaves and fishes.

"And there came a man from Baal-shalisha." This town was originally called "Shalisha" but the evil power exerted by Jezebel had stamped upon it the name of her false god, as was the case with other places (cf. "Baal-hermon," 1 Ch. 5:23). But even in this seat of idolatry there was at least one who feared the Lord, who was regulated by His law, and who had a heart for His servant. This should be a comfort to the saints in a time of such fearful and widespread declension as now prevails. However dark things may get, and we believe they will yet become much darker before there is any improvement, God will preserve to Himself a remnant. He always has, and He always will. In the antediluvian world there was a Noah, who by grace was upright in his generations and walked with God. In Egypt, when the name of Jehovah was unknown among the Hebrews, a Moses was raised up, who refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. So now there is one here and there as a voice in the wilderness. Though the name of this man from Shalisha is not given, we doubt not it is inscribed in the Book of Life.

The situation which confronted Elisha is one that in principle has often faced God's people. What the Lord gives to one is not to be used selfishly but is to be shared with others. Yet sometimes we are in the position that what is on hand does not appear sufficient for that purpose. My supply may be scanty and the claims of a growing family have to be met. If I contribute to the Lord's cause and minister to His servants and people, may not my little ones go hungry? Here is where the exercise of faith comes in. Lay hold of such promises as Luke 6:38 and 2 Corinthians 9:8; act on them and you shall prove that "the liberal soul shall be made fat" (Pr. 11:25). Especially should the ministers of Christ set an example in this respect; if they be close-handed, it will greatly hinder their usefulness. Elisha made practical use of what was designed as an offering to the Lord, as David did not hesitate to take the "showbread" and give to his hungry men.

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

What lessons can be learned from this account?

2 Kings 5:1-5

Naaman, the Syrian, was stricken with the horrible disease of leprosy—a striking type of the natural man, corrupted by sin, unfit for the presence of a holy God. The most fearful thing of all was that leprosy was incurable by the hand of man. Naaman was quite incapable of ridding himself of his terrible burden. No matter what plan he followed, what attempts he made, no help or relief was to be obtained from self-efforts. (Have you realized the truth of this, in its spiritual application, my reader? There is no deliverance from sin, no salvation for your soul by anything that you can do.) There was no physician in Syria who could effect a cure; no matter what fee Naaman offered, what quack he applied to, none was of any avail. And such is the case of each of us by nature. Our spiritual malady lies deeper than any human hand can reach; our condition is too desperate for any religious practitioner to cure. Man can no more deliver himself, or his fellows, from the guilt and defilement of sin than he can create a world.

Most solemnly was the fact shadowed forth under the system of Judaism. No remedy was provided for this fearful disease under the Mosaic law; no directions were given to Israel's priesthood to make use of any application, either outward or inward. The leper's healing was left entirely to God. All the high priest of the Hebrews could do was to examine closely the various symptoms of the complaint, have the leper excluded from his fellows, and leave him to the

disposal of the Lord. Whether the sufferer was healed or not, whether he lived or died, was wholly to be decided by the Almighty. So it is in grace. There is no possible salvation for any sinner except at the hands of God. There is no other possible alternative, no other prospect before the sinner than to die a wretched death and enter a hopeless eternity unless distinguishing mercy intervenes, unless a sovereign God is pleased to work a miracle of grace within him. It is entirely a matter of His will and power. Again we ask, do you realize that fact, my reader? God is your Maker, and He is the determiner of your destiny. You are clay in His hands to do with as He pleases.

"And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife" (2 Kings 5:2). In one of the many periods in which the name of Jehovah was blasphemed among the heathen, through the unfaithfulness of His ancient people, a little Jewish maid was taken captive by the Syrians. In the dividing of the spoils, she fell into the hands of Naaman the commander of the Syrian forces. Observe the series of contrasts between them. He was a Gentile, she a hated Jew. He was a "great man," she but "a little maid." He was "Naaman," she was left unnamed. He was "captain of the host of Syria," while she was captive in the enemy's territory. But he was a leper; while strange to say, she was made a contributing instrument unto his healing. It has ever been God's way to make use of the despised and feeble, and often in circumstances which seem strange to human wisdom. Let us take note how this verse teaches us a most important lesson in connection with the mysteries of divine providence.

"And had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid." Visualize the scene. One fair morning the peace of Samaria was rudely broken. The tramp of a hostile army was heard in the land. A cruel foe was at hand. The Syrians had invaded the country, and heaven was silent. No scourge from God smote the enemy; instead, he was permitted to carry away some of the covenant people. Among the captives was "a little maid." Ah, that may mean little to us today, but it meant much to certain people at that day. A home was rendered desolate! Seek to enter into the feelings of her parents as their young daughter was ruthlessly snatched from them. Think of the anguish of her poor mother, wondering what would become of her. Think of her grief-stricken father in his helplessness, unable to rescue her. Endeavor to contemplate what would be the state of mind of the little girl herself as she was carried away by heathen to a strange country. Bring before your mind's eye the whole painful incident until it lives before you.

Do you not suppose, dear friend, that both the maid and her parents were greatly perplexed? Must they not have been sorely tried by this mysterious providence? Why, oh why? Must have been asked by them a hundred times. Why had God allowed the joy of their home to be shattered? If the maiden had reflected at all, must she have thought her lot strange. Why was she, a favored daughter of Abraham, now a servant in Naaman's household? Why this enforced separation from her parents? Why this cruel captivity? Such questions she might have asked at first, and asked in vain. Ah, does the reader perceive the point we are leading up to? It is this: God had a good reason for this trial. He was shaping things in His own, unfathomable way for the outworking of His good and wise purpose. Nothing happens in this world by mere chance. A predestinating God has planned every detail in our lives. "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. 31:15). He "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). What a resting place for our poor hearts does that grand truth supply!

It was God who directed that this little maid of Israel should become a member of Naaman's household. And why? That she might be a link in the chain which ended not only in the healing of his leprosy, but also most probably in the salvation of his soul. Here then is the important lesson for us to take to heart from this incident. Here is the light which it casts upon the mysterious ways of God in providence: He has a wise and good reason behind each of the perplexing and heart-exercising trials which enter our lives. The particular reason for each trial is frequently concealed from us at the time it comes upon us; if it were not, there would be no room for the exercise of faith and patience in it. But just as surely as God had a good reason for allowing the happiness of this Hebrew household to be darkened, so He has in ordering whatever sorrow has entered your life. It was the sequel which made manifest God's gracious design; and it is for the sequel you must quietly and trustfully wait. This incident is among the things recorded in the Old Testament "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3). This is surely most striking and blessed. It would have been natural for this young girl to have yielded to a spirit of enmity against the man who had snatched her away from her own home, to have entertained hatred for him, and to have been maliciously pleased that he was so afflicted in his body. The fall not only alienated man from God but it radically changed his attitude toward his fellowmen, evidenced at a very early date by Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Human depravity has poisoned every relationship; in their unregenerate state God's own people are described as "hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). But instead of cherishing ill feelings against her captor, this little maid was concerned about his condition and solicitous about his welfare. Apparently she had been brought up in the nurture of the Lord, and the seeds planted by godly parents now sprang up and bore fruit in her young life. Beautiful is it to here behold grace triumphing over the flesh.

How this little maid puts us to shame! How sinfully have we conducted ourselves when the providence of God crossed our wills and brought us into situations for which we had no liking! What risings of rebellion within us, what complaining at our circumstances. So far from being a blessing to those with whom we came into contact, we were a stumblingblock to them. Has not both writer and reader much cause to bow his head in shame at the recollection of such grievous failures! Was not this child placed in uncongenial circumstances and a most trying situation? Yet there was

neither murmuring against God nor bitterness toward her captor. Instead, she bore faithful testimony to the God of Israel and was moved with compassion toward her leprous master. What a beautiful exemplification of the sufficiency of divine grace! She remembered the Lord in the house of her bondage and spoke of His servant the prophet. How we need to turn this into earnest prayer, that we too may glorify the Lord "in the fires" (Isa. 24:15).

No position would seem more desolate than this defenseless maiden in the house of her proud captors, and no situation could promise fewer openings for usefulness. But though her opportunities were limited, she made the most of them. She despised not the day of small things, but sought to turn it to advantage. She did not conclude it was useless for her to open her mouth, nor argue that an audience of only one person was not worth addressing. No, in a simple but earnest manner, she proclaimed the good news that there was salvation for even the leper, for the very name "Elisha" meant "the salvation of God."

"And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel" (2 Kings 5:4). A very incidental and apparently trivial statement is this, yet being a part of God's eternal truth it is not to be passed over lightly and hurriedly. We are ever the losers by such irreverent treatment of the Word. There is nothing meaningless in that holy volume; each single verse in it sparkles with beauty if we view it in the right light and attentively survey it. It is so here.

First, this verse informs us that the little maid's words to her mistress did not pass unheeded. They might have done so, humanly speaking, for it would be quite natural for those about her—a mere child, a foreigner in their midst—to have paid no attention to her remarks. Even had they done so, surely such a statement as she had made must have sounded like foolish boasting. If the best physicians in Syria were helpless in the presence of leprosy, who would credit that a man of another religion, in despised Samaria, should be able to heal him! But strange as it may seem, her words were heeded.

And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel" (2 Kings 5:5). Here also we must see the hand of the Lord. Had He not worked upon the king too, the message would have produced no effect on his majesty. Why should that monarch pay any attention to the utterance of a kitchen maid? Ah, my reader, when God has a design of mercy, He works at both ends of the line. He not only gives the message to the messenger, but He opens the heart of its recipient to heed it. He who bade Philip take a journey into the desert, also prepared the Ethiopian eunuch for his approach (Acts 8:26-31). He who overcame Peter's scruples to go unto the Gentiles, also inclined Cornelius and his household to be present before God, to hear all things that were commanded him of God (Acts 10:33). "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). Strikingly did that receive illustration here. Yet though God wrought, in the instance now before us, it did not please Him to use the king as an instrument.

"Go now, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel" (2 Kings 5:5). Poor Naaman was now misdirected by the carnal wisdom of his master. The little maid had said nothing about the king of Israel, but had specified the prophet that is in Samaria. It would have been much better for the leper to have heeded more closely her directions; he would have been spared needless trouble. Yet how true to life is the picture here presented. How often is the sinner, who has been awakened to his desperate condition, wrongly counseled and turned aside to cisterns which hold no water! Rarely does a troubled soul find relief at once. More frequently his experience is like that of the old woman in Mark 5:26 who tried "many physicians" in vain before she came to Christ; or like the prodigal son when he "began to be in want" and went and joined himself to a citizen of the far country and got nothing better than "the husks that the swine did eat" (Luke 15:14-18), before he sought his father.

"And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (2 Kings 5:5). It has been computed that the value of these things would be at least seventy thousand dollars today. The Hebrew maid has said nothing of the need for silver and gold; but knowing nothing of the grace of God, Naaman was prepared to pay handsomely for his healing. Again we exclaim, how true to life is this picture. How many there are who think the "gift of God" may be purchased (Acts 8:20)—if not literally with money, yet by works of righteousness and religious performances. And even where that delusion has been removed, another equally erroneous often takes its place: the idea that a heavily-burdened conscience, a deep sense of personal unworthiness, accompanied by sighs and tears and groans, is the required qualification for applying to Christ and the ground of peace before God. Fatal mistake. "Without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1) excludes all frames, feelings, and experiences, as truly as it does the paying of a priest.

(Gleanings From Elisha, Arthur W. Pink)

Comment on A. W. Pink's statement: "The most faithful sermon from the pulpit falls upon deaf ears unless the Holy Spirit operates; whereas the simplest utterance of a child can become effectual through God."

2 Kings 5:6-12

In a previous section we emphasized the secret operations of God in inclining one and another to pay attention to the message of the little Hebrew maid. It was God who gave the hearing ear to both Naaman's wife and the king of Syria.

Perhaps some have thought that such was not the case with the king of Israel! No, it was not. Instead of sharing her (little maid's) confidence and cooperating with her effort, he (king of Israel) was skeptical and antagonistic. Therein we may perceive God's sovereignty. He does not work in all alike, being absolutely free to do as He pleases. He opens the eyes of some but leaves others in their blindness. This is God's high and awful prerogative: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). This is what supplies the key to God's dealings with men and which explains the course of evangelical history. Clearly is that solemn principle exemplified in the previous section, and we should be unfaithful as an expositor if we deliberately ignored it as so many now do.

"And it came to pass when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (2 Kings 5:7). So utterly skeptical was Jehoram that he considered it not worthwhile even to send for Elisha and confer with him. The prophet meant nothing to Israel's unbelieving king, and therefore he slighted him. Perhaps this strikes the reader as strange, for the previous miracles Elisha had wrought must have been well known. One would have thought his restoring of a dead child to life would thoroughly authenticate him as an extraordinary man of God. But did not the Lord Jesus publicly raise a dead man to life? And yet within a few days both the leaders of the nation and the common people clamored for His crucifixion! And is it any different in our day? Have we not witnessed providential marvels, divine interpositions both of mercy and judgment? And what effect have they had on our evil generation? Jehoram's conduct is easily accounted for: "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), and that enmity evidenced itself by his slighting God's accredited servant.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore has thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8). The slighted Elisha pocketed his pride and communicated with the king, rightly concluding that his own feelings were not worth considering where the glory of God was concerned.

Naaman came into the land of Israel, expecting relief from a prophet of the God of Israel, and Elisha would by no means have him go back disappointed, lest he should conclude that Jehovah was like the gods of the nations, and as unable to do good or evil as they were. On the contrary he would have it known that God has "a prophet in Israel" by whom He performed such cures as none of the heathen prophets, priests, or physicians could effect; and which were far beyond all the power of the mightiest monarchs (Scott).

The "counsel of the Lord, that shall stand," whatever devices were in Jehoram's heart to the contrary (Prov. 19:21).

"The righteous are bold as a lion." Elisha not only rebuked the king for his unbelieving fears but summarily gave him instructions concerning Naaman. However unwelcome might be his interference, that deterred him not. The real servant of God does not seek to please men, but rather to execute the commission he has received from on high. It is true that the prophets, like the apostles, were endowed with extraordinary powers, and therefore they are not in all things models for us today; nevertheless the gospel minister is not to cringe before anyone. It is his duty to denounce unbelief and to proclaim that the living God is ever ready to honor those who honor Him and to work wonders in response to genuine faith. As God overruled the king of Syria's misdirecting of Naaman, so He now overcame the skepticism of the king of Israel by moving him to respond to Elisha's demand—thereby demonstrating that the words of the little maid were no idle boast and her confidence in God no misplaced one.

"So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha" (2 Kings 5:9). Naaman before the prophet's abode may be regarded as a picture of the natural man in his sins, not yet stripped of his self-righteousness, nor aware that he is entirely dependent on divine mercy, having no title or claim to receive any favor at God's hand. The fact that he rode in a chariot mitigated his terrible condition not one iota. No matter how rich the apparel that covered his body, though it might hide from human view his loathsome disease, it availed nothing for the removal of it. And as the valuables he had brought with him could not procure his healing, neither can the cultivation of the most noble character nor the performance of the most praiseworthy conduct in human esteem merit the approbation of God. Salvation is wholly of divine grace and cannot be earned by the creature: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6).

However much it might be in accord with the principles and sentiments which regulate fallen human nature, there was surely something most incongruous in the scene now before us. Here was a poor creature stricken with a most horrible disease, and yet we behold him seated in a chariot. Here was one smitten by a malady no physician could heal, surrounded by official pomp. Here was one entirely dependent upon the divine bounty, yet one whose horses were laden with silver and gold. Do we not behold in him, then, a representative not only of the natural man in his sins, but one filled with a sense of his own importance and bloated with pride! Such is precisely the case with each of us by nature. Totally depraved though we be, alienated from God, criminals condemned by His holy law, our minds at enmity with Him, dead in trespasses and sins, yet until a miracle of grace is wrought within and the abscess of our pride is lanced, we are puffed up with self-righteousness, refuse to acknowledge we deserve anything but eternal punishment, and imagine we are entitled to God's favorable regard.

Not only does Naaman here fitly portray the self-importance of the natural man while unregenerate, but as hinted above he also illustrates the fact that the sinner imagines he can gain God's approbation and purchase his salvation. The costly things which the Syrian had brought with him were obviously designed to ingratiate himself in the eyes of the prophet and pay for his cure. Following such a policy was of course quite natural, and therefore it shows what is the native thought of every man. He supposes that a dutiful regard of religious performances will obtain for him the favorable notice of God, that his fastings and prayers, church-attendance and contributing to its upkeep, will more than counterbalance his demerits. Such an insane idea is by no means confined to Buddhists and Romanists but is common to the whole human family. It is for this reason we have to be assured, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Spiritually speaking, every man is bankrupt, a pauper, and salvation is entirely gratis, a matter of charity.

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). This is true alike of the most cultured and the thoroughly illiterate. No amount of education or erudition fits one for the apprehension of spiritual things. Man is blind, and his eyes must be opened before he can perceive either the glory of God and His righteous claims or his own wretchedness and deep needs. Not until a miracle of grace humbles his heart will he take himself to the throne of grace in his true character; not until the Holy Spirit works effectually within him will he come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar.

It is recorded that a famous artist met with a poor tramp and was so impressed with his woebegone appearance and condition that he felt he would make an apt subject for a drawing. He gave the tramp a little money and his card and promised to pay him well if he would call at his house on the following day and sit while he drew his picture. The next morning the tramp arrived, but the artist's intention was defeated. The tramp had washed and shaved and so spruced himself that he was scarcely recognizable!

Similarly does the natural man act when he first attempts to respond to the gospel call. Instead of coming to the Lord just as he is in all his want and woe, as one who is lost and undone, he supposes he must first make himself more presentable by a process of reformation. Thus he busies himself in mending his ways, improving his conduct, and performing pious exercises, unaware that Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"—to take their place in the dust before Him. What we have just been dwelling upon receives striking illustration in the section before us. Instead of sending Naaman directly to Elisha, Benhadad gave him a letter of introduction to the king of Israel; and instead of casting himself on the mercy of the prophet, Benhadad sent a costly fee to pay for the healing of his commander-in-chief. We have seen the futility of his letter—the effect it had upon its recipient; now we are to behold how his lavish outlay of wealth produced no more favorable response from Elisha. Naaman had to learn the humiliating truth that, where divine grace is concerned, the millionaire stands on precisely the same level as the pauper.

And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (2 Kings 5:10). As the representative of Him who deigned to wash the feet of His disciples, the minister of the gospel must not decline the most menial service nor despise the poorest person. Elisha has set us an example of both, for he scorned not to minister to the physical needs of Elijah by washing his hands (2 Kings 3:11), and refused not to help the impoverished widow (2 Kings 4:2). On the other hand, the servant of Christ is to be no sycophant, toadying to those of affluence; nor is he to feed the pride of the self-important. From the sequel it is evident Naaman considered that he, as a "great man," was entitled to deference, and probably felt that the prophet ought to consider a favor or honor was now being shown him. But, officially, Elisha was an ambassador of the King of kings; and with becoming dignity, he let Naaman know that he was at no man's beck and call, though he failed not to inform him of the way in which healing was to be obtained.

And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Here we see no servile obeisance nor owning of the mightiness of Naaman. The prophet did not even greet him, nor so much as go out of his house to meet him in person. Instead, he sent him a message by a servant. Ah, my reader. God is no respecter of persons, nor should His ministers be. Incalculable harm has been wrought in churches by pastors pandering to those in high places, for not only are the haughty injured thereby, but the lowly are stumbled; and in consequence, the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched. God will not tolerate any parading of fleshly distinctions before Him: "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:29) is the unrepealable decision. The most eminent and gifted of this world are due no more consideration from the Most High than the most lowly, for "there is no difference: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22-23). All alike have broken the law; all alike are guilty before the supreme judge; all alike must be saved by sovereign grace, if they be saved at all.

But there is another way in which we may regard the prophet's conduct on this occasion; not only did he maintain his official dignity, but he evidenced personal humility and prudence, having his eye fixed on the glory of God. It is not that he was indifferent to Naaman's welfare. No, the fact that he sent his servant out to him with the needful directions evidenced the contrary. But Elisha knew full well that the all-important thing was not the messenger, but the message. It mattered nothing who delivered the message—himself or his servant; but it mattered everything that the God-given word should be faithfully communicated. Elisha knew full well that Naaman's expectation lay in himself, so like a true "man of God" he directed attention away from himself. What a needed lesson for us in this person-exalting day. How much better would

preachers serve souls and honor their Master if, thus hidden, they occupied them with the gospel instead of with themselves. It was in this self-effacing spirit that Paul rebuked the person-worshipping Corinthians when he said, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" (1 Cor. 3:5). So too our Lord's forerunner who styled himself "the voice [heard but not seen!] of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23).

What was the force of "Go wash in Jordan seven times"? Let us give first a general answer in the words of another.

When Naaman stood with his pompous retinue, and with all his silver and gold at the door of Elisha, he appears before us as a marked illustration of a sinner building on his own efforts after righteousness. He seemed furnished with all that the heart could desire, but in reality all his preparations were but a useless incumbrance, and the prophet soon gave him to understand this. "Go wash" swept away all confidence in gold, silver, raiment, retinue, the king's letter, everything. It stripped Naaman of everything, and reduced him to his true condition as a poor defiled leper needing to be washed. It put no difference between the illustrious commander-in-chief of the hosts of Syria, and the poorest and meanest leper in all the coasts of Israel. The former could do nothing less; the latter needed nothing more. Wealth cannot remedy man's ruin, and poverty cannot interfere with God's remedy. Nothing that a man has done need keep him out of heaven; nothing that he can do will ever get him in. "Go wash" is the word in every case.

But let us consider this "Go wash" more closely and ponder it in the light of its connections. As one stricken with leprosy, Naaman pictures the natural man in his fallen estate. And what is his outstanding and distinguishing characteristic? Why, that he is a depraved creature, a sinner, a rebel against God. And what is sin? From the negative side, it is failure to submit to God's authority and be subject to His law; positively, it is the exercise of self-will, a determination to please myself; "we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). If then a sinner inquires of God's servant the way of recovery, what is the first and fundamental thing which needs to be told him? That self-will and self-pleasing must cease; that he must submit himself to the will of God. And that is only another way of saying that he must be converted, for "conversion" is a turning round, a right about-face. And in order for conversion, repentance is the essential requisite (Acts 3:19). And in its final analysis, "repentance" is taking sides with God against myself, judging myself, condemning myself, bowing my will to His.

Again, sin is not only a revolt against God, but a deification of self. It is a determination to gratify my own inclinations, it is saying, "I will be lord over myself." That was the bait which the serpent dangled before our first parents when he tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit: "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). Casting off allegiance to God, man assumed an attitude of independence and self-sufficiency. Sin took possession of his heart; he became proud, haughty, self-righteous. If, then, such a creature is to be recovered and restored to God, it must necessarily be by a process of humbling him. The first design of the gospel is to put down human pride, to lay man low before God. It was predicted by Isaiah when speaking of gospel times, "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down" (Isa. 2:11). And again, "every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight" (Isa. 40:4); and therefore did our Lord begin His Sermon on the Mount by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). That was the basic truth which the prophet pressed upon Naaman: that he must abase himself before the God of Israel.

"Go wash in Jordan seven times" was but another way of saying to the conceited Syrian, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God . . . Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jam. 4:6-10). Naaman must come down from off his "high horse" and take his proper place before the Most High. Naaman must descend from his "chariot" and evidence a lowly spirit. Naaman must "wash," or "bathe" as the word is often translated, in the waters of the Jordan; not once or twice but no less than seven times, and thus completely renounce self. And the requirement which God made of Naaman, my reader, is precisely the same as His demand upon you, upon me: pride has to be mortified, self-will relinquished, self-righteousness repudiated. Have we complied with this? Have we renounced self-pleasing and surrendered to the divine scepter? Have we given ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5) to be ruled by Him? If not, we have never been savingly converted.

In its ultimate significance, the "Go wash in Jordan seven times" had a typical import, and in the light of the New Testament there is no difficulty whatever in perceiving what that was. There is one provision, and one only, which the amazing grace of God and the wondrous love of His Son has made for the healing of spiritual lepers. It is that blessed "fountain" which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). That holy "fountain" had its rise at Calvary, when from the pierced side of Christ "forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34). That wondrous "fountain" which can cleanse the foulest was provided at the incalculable cost of the crucifixion of Immanuel, and hence the washing in "Jordan" which speaks of a point, beyond which there is no return. Here, then, dear friend, is the evangelical significance of what has been before us. If you have been made conscious of your depravity, ready to deny self, willing to humble yourself into the dust before God, here is the divine provision: a bath into which you may plunge by faith, and thereby obtain proof that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). If by grace you have

already done so, then join the writer in exclaiming, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood... to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:5-6).

The cleansing of Naaman afforded a blessed foreshadowment of the divine mercy reaching out to the Gentiles, for Naaman was not an Israelite but a Syrian. Nevertheless he was made to learn the humbling lesson that if divine grace were to be extended to him, it could only proceed from the God of Abraham. That was why he must wash in the Jordan; the waters of "Abana and Pharpar" (2 Kings 5:12) were of no avail—he must wash in one of Israel's streams. This truth is written boldly across the pages of Holy Writ. The harlot of Jericho was to be spared when her city was destroyed, but it could only be by her heeding the instructions of the two Hebrew spies. The widow of Zarephath was preserved through the famine, but it was by receiving Elijah into her home. The Ninevites were delivered from impending wrath, but at the preaching of Jonah. The king of Babylon received a dream from God, but for its interpretation he must turn to Daniel. To the Samaritan adulteress Christ declared, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Then let us heed the warning of Romans 11:18-25.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

Why was Naaman so upset (2 Kings 5:11) with Elisha's request to have him wash in the Jordan 7 times?

Matt. 18:3

2 Kings 5:13-14

"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper" (2 Ki. 5:11). In his own country he was a person of consequence, a "great man," commander-in-chief of the army, standing high in the favor of the king. Here in Israel the prophet had treated him as a mere nobody, paying no deference to him, employing a servant to convey his instructions. Naaman was chagrined; his pride was wounded, and because his self-importance had not been ministered to, he turned away in a huff. Elisha's "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" was not intended to signify the means of cure, but was designed as a test of his heart, and strikingly did it serve its purpose. It was a call to humble himself before Jehovah. It required the repudiation of his own wisdom and the renunciation of self-pleasing; and that is at direct variance with the inclinations of fallen human nature, so much so that no one ever truly complied with this just demand of God's until He performed a miracle of grace in the soul.

Even the most humiliating providences are not sufficient in themselves to humble the proud heart of man and render him submissive to the divine will. One would think that a person so desperately afflicted as this poor leper would have been meekened and ready to comply with the prophet's injunction. Ah, my reader, the seat of our moral disease lies too deep for external things to reach it. So fearful is the blinding power of sin that it causes its subjects to be puffed up with self-complacency and self-righteousness and to imagine they are entitled to favorable treatment even at the hands of the Most High. And does not that very spirit lurk in the hearts of the regenerate! And it not only lurks there, but at times it moves them to act like Naaman! Has not the writer and the Christian reader ever come before the Lord with some pressing need and sought relief at His hands, and then been angry because He responded to us in quite a different way from what we expected and desired? Have we not had to bow our heads for shame as He gently reproved us with His "Doest thou well to be angry?" (John 4:4). Yes, there is much of this Naaman spirit that needs to be mortified in each of us.

"Behold, I thought" said Naaman. Herein he supplies a true representation of the natural man. The sinner has his own idea of how salvation is to be obtained. It is true that opinions vary when it comes to the working out of detail, yet all over the world fallen man has his own opinion of what is suitable and needful. One man thinks he must perform some meritorious deeds in order to obtain forgiveness. Another thinks the past can be atoned for by turning over a new leaf and living right for the future. Yet another, who has obtained a smattering of the gospel, thinks that by believing in Christ he secures a passport to heaven, even though he continues to indulge the flesh and retain his beloved idols. However much they may differ in their self-concocted schemes, this one thing is common to them all: "I thought." And that "I thought" is put over against the Word and way of God. They prefer the way that "seemeth right" to them; they insist on following out their own theorizings; they pit their prejudices and presuppositions against a "thus saith the Lord." Reader, you perceive here the folly of Naaman, but have you seen the madness of setting your own thoughts against the authority of the living God!

And what was it that this foolish and haughty Syrian "thought"? Why this: "He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." He was willing to be restored to health, but it must be in his own way—a way in which his self-respect might be retained and his importance acknowledged. He desired to be healed, provided he should also be duly honored. He had come all the way from Syria to be rid of his leprosy, but he was not prepared to receive cleansing in the manner of God's prescribing. What madness! What a demonstration that the carnal mind is enmity against God! What proof of the fearful hold which Satan has over his victims until a stronger one delivers them from his enthralling power!

Naaman had now received what the king of Israel had failed to give him—full directions for his cure. There was no uncertainty about the prescription nor of its efficacy, would he but submit to it. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times . . . and thou shalt be clean." But he felt slighted. Such instructions suited not his inclinations; the divine requirement accorded not with the conceits of his unhumiliated heart.

What right had Naaman, a leper, to either argue or prescribe? He was a petitioner and not a legislator; he was suing for a favor, and therefore was in no position to advance any demands of his own. If such were the case and situation of Naaman, how infinitely less has any depraved and guilty sinner the right to make any terms with God! Man is a criminal, justly pronounced guilty by the divine law. Mercy is his only hope, and it is therefore for God to say in what way mercy is to be shown him and how salvation is to be obtained. For this reason the Lord says not only, "Let the wicked forsake his way," but also adds "and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa. 55:7). Man must repudiate his own ideas, abandon his own prejudices, turn away from his own schemes, and reject his own preferences. If we are to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must "become as little children" (Mt. 18:3). Alas, of the vast majority of our fellowmen it has to be said, that they, "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). They "will not come to Christ that they might have life" (John 5:40).

"So he turned and went away in a rage." How true to life; how accurate the picture! The flesh resents the humbling truth of God and hates to be abased. And let us say here for the benefit of young preachers who are likely to read these lines: you must expect some of your hearers to turn from you in anger if you faithfully minister the Word of God in its undiluted purity. It has ever been thus. If the prophets of the Lord incensed their hearers, can you expect your message will be palatable to the unregenerate? If the incarnate Son of God had to say, "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not" (John 8:45), can you expect the truth to meet with a better welcome from your lips? If the chief of the apostles declared, "For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10), do you expect to be popular with them? There is but one way to avoid displeasing your hearers, and that is by unfaithfulness to your trust, by carnal compromise, by blunting the sharp edge of the sword of the Spirit, by keeping back what you know will prove unacceptable. In such an event, God will require their blood at your hand and you will forfeit the approbation of your Master. "So he turned and went away in a rage." In this we may see the final effort of Satan to retain his victim before divine grace delivered him. The rage of Naaman was but the reflection of Satan, who was furious at the prospect of losing him. It reminds us of the case recorded in Luke 9:37-42. A father of a demon-possessed child had sought for help from the apostles, which they had been unable to render. As the Savior came down from the mount, the poor father approached Him and He gave orders, "bring thy son hither." We are told, "And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him" (v. 42). But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. It is frequently thus; the conflict which is waged in the soul is usually worst just before peace is found. Lusts rage, unbelief seeks to wax supreme, the truth of sovereign grace when first apprehended is obnoxious, and to be told our righteousnesses are as filthy rags stirs up enmity. Satan fills the soul with rage against God, against His truth, against His servant. Often that is a hopeful sign, for it at least shows that the sinner has been aroused from the fatal sleep of indifference.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" (2 Ki. 5:13). Let us consider first the surface teaching of this verse. This gentle remonstrance was "a word spoken in season." Had Naaman remained calm and reasonable he would have perceived that what was required of him was simple and safe, and neither difficult nor dangerous. Had the prophet prescribed some laborious and lengthy task, or ordered a drastic operation or painful remedy, probably Naaman would have complied without a murmur. So why not do this when no other sacrifice was demanded of him but the humbling of his pride? "When sinners are under serious impressions, and as yet prejudiced against the Lord's method of salvation, they should be reasoned with in meekness and love, and persuaded to make trial of its simplicity" (Thomas Scott). If it is necessary to rebuke their petulance (insolence) and point out to them the foolishness of their proud reasoning, we should make it evident that our rebuke proceeds from a desire for their eternal welfare.

"My father," they said, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?" Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God" (2 Ki. 5:13-14). "Then went he down." That was something which he had to do; and until he did it, there was no cleansing for him. The sinner is not passive in connection with God's blotting out his iniquities. He has to repent (Acts 3:19), and believe in Christ (Acts 10:43) in order to obtain forgiveness of his sins. It was a voluntary act on the part of Naaman. Previously he had been unwilling to comply with the divine demand, but the secret power of God has worked in him—by means of the pleading of his attendants—overcoming his reluctance. It was an act of self-abasement.

Naaman heeded the Word of God and rendered faith obedience (Rom. 1:5) to it. Repentance is not sufficient to procure cleansing; the sinner must also believe. And this is what Naaman now did. His heart laid hold of the divine promise, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." He believed that "shalt" and acted upon it. Have you done similarly, my reader? Has your faith definitely appropriated the gospel promise, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? If not, you will never be saved until it has. Faith is the indispensable requirement, for without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).

"And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (2 Ki. 5:14). Of course it did. It could not be otherwise, for "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:23). None has ever laid hold of a divine promise and found it to fail, and none ever will.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

How complete was Naahum's cure? Could you say it was as complete as our spiritual healing?

Col. 1:9-13 1 John 1:7

2 Kings 5:15-27

The subject of the foregoing miracle was a heathen idolater; now it is the prophet's own servant. Naaman sought the prophet for relief; the other pursued the relieved one and virtually demanded tribute from him. There we beheld Elisha teaching Naaman the grand truth of the freeness of divine grace; here we see Gehazi casting a dark cloud over the same. In the one Naaman is represented as expressing deep gratitude for his recovery and urging the man of God to receive a present at his hands; now the avaricious Gehazi is portrayed as coveting that which his master so nobly refused. There it was a poor creature healed of his leprosy; here it is one being smitten with that dread disease. There we beheld God's goodness acting in mercy; here we see His severity acting in holy justice. The former closes with the recipient of divine grace returning home as a devout worshiper; the latter ends with a pronouncement of God's curse on the transgressor and on his seed forever.

The one on whom this solemn miracle was wrought is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. He has come before us several times previously, and nowhere was he seen to advantage. First, when the woman of Shunem sought the man of God on behalf of her dead son and cast herself at his feet, "Gehazi came near to thrust her away" (2 Ki. 4: 27), and his master told him to "let her alone." Then the prophet instructed his servant to go before him and lay his staff upon the face of the child (v. 29). Elisha could successfully smite the waters of Jordan with Elijah's mantle because "the spirit of Elijah" rested upon him (2:15); but being devoid of the Spirit, Gehazi found the Prophet's staff of no avail in his prayerless hands (4:31). In 4:43 we beheld his selfishness and unbelief: "What, should I set this before an hundred men" when Elisha was counting upon God to multiply the loaves. Thus his character and conduct is consistent and in keeping with his name which significantly enough means "denier."

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him" (2 Ki. 5:20). It will be remembered that before Naaman left Syria for the land of Samaria that he provided himself with a costly treasure, consisting of "ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (v. 5). No doubt a part of this was designed for traveling expenses for the retinue of servants who accompanied him, but the major portion of it he evidently intended to bestow upon his benefactor. But Elisha had firmly refused to receive anything (vv. 15-16), and so he was now returning home with his horses still laden with the treasure. This was more than the covetous heart of Gehazi could endure, and he determined to secure a portion of it for himself. The honor of Jehovah and the glory of His grace counted nothing with him.

Every word in the above verse repays careful attention. The ominous "but" intimates the solemn contrast between the two miracles. Gehazi is here termed not only "the servant of Elisha" but "of Elisha the man of God"—the added words bring out the enormity of his sin. First, they call attention to the greatness of the privilege he had enjoyed, being in close attendance on so pious a master. This rendered his wicked conduct the more excuseless, for it was not the act of an ignorant person, but of one well instructed in the ways of righteousness. Second, it emphasizes the enormity of his offence, for it reflected seriously on the official character of the one who employed him. The sins of those in the sacred office or of those associated with them are far graver than those of others (Jam. 3:1). But just as Gehazi had no concern for the glory of God, so he cared nothing for the reputation of Elisha.

What has just been pointed out definitely refutes one of the wide-spread delusions of our day, namely, that it is their unfavorable surroundings which are responsible for the degenerate conduct of so many of the present generation: social improvement can only be effected by improving the wages and homes of the poor. And is the behavior of the rich any better? Is there less immorality in the west end of London than in the east? It is drunken and thriftless people who make the slums, and not the slums which ruin the people. God's Word teaches it is "out of the heart" of fallen man (Mk. 7:21-23) and not from his faulty environment that all proceeds which defiles human nature. Nor it is any more warrantable for any person to attempt to throw the blame for his downfall on his being obliged to mingle with evil characters. Gehazi was isolated from all bad companions, placed in the most favorable circumstances, dwelling with a "man of God," but his soul was depraved! While "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ec. 8:11), the gospel and not more social reforms is the only remedy.

Neither his close association with the man of God nor the witnessing of the miracles performed by him effected any change within Gehazi. The state of his heart is revealed by each expression recorded in verse 20 of 2 Kings 5. "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman." Incapable of appreciating the motives which had actuated Elisha, he felt that he had foolishly missed a golden opportunity. Gehazi regarded Naaman as legitimate prey, as a bird to be plucked.

Contemptuously, he refers to him as "this Syrian." There was no pity for the one who had been such a sufferer, and no thankfulness that God had healed him. He was determined to capitalize on the situation: "I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." His awful sin was deliberately premeditated. What was worse, he made use of an impious oath: "As the LORD liveth I will run after him." There was no fear of God before his eyes; instead, he defiantly took His holy name in vain.

"So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?" (v. 21). It is solemn to observe that God put no hindrance in the way of him who had devised evil. He could have moved Naaman to quicken his pace and to outdistance Gehazi. But He did not, an indication that God had given Gehazi up to his heart's lusts. It is ever a signal mark of divine mercy when the Lord interferes with our plans and thwarts our carnal designs. When we purpose doing anything wrong and a providential obstacle blocks us, it is a sign that God has not yet abandoned us to our madness. The graciousness of Naaman in alighting from his chariot and the question he asked gave further evidence of the change which had been wrought in him.

And he said, "All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments" (v. 22). Here we see the wicked Gehazi adding sin to sin, thereby treasuring up to himself wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5). First, his greedy heart cherished a covetous desire; then he deliberately and eagerly (as his "running" shows) proceeded to realize the same; and now he resorts to falsehoods. Liars can tell a plausible tale, especially when asking for charity. The thievish knave pretended it was not for himself, but for others in need that he was seeking relief—ever a favorite device employed by the unscrupulous when seeking to take advantage of unwary victims. Worse still, he compromised his master by saying he had sent him. To what fearful lengths will a covetous heart carry its subjects!

And Naaman said, "Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him" (2 Ki. 5:23). Naaman was quite unsuspecting. He not only complied with Gehazi's request but gave him more than he asked for. After the prophet's firm and repeated refusals to accept his gifts, he should have been more on his guard. There is a warning here for us to beware of crediting every beggar we encounter, even though he is a religious one. There have always been religious leeches who consider the righteous are legitimate prey for them to fatten upon. While it is a Christian duty to relieve the genuinely poor, yet we are not to encourage idleness or let ourselves be deceived by those with a smooth tongue. Investigate their case.

"And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed" (v. 24). He took pains to carefully conceal his ill-gotten gains in a secret place, no doubt congratulating himself on his shrewdness. This reminds us of our first parents hiding themselves (Gen. 3:8) and of Achan's sin (Josh. 7:21). "But he went in, and stood before his master" (2 Ki. 5:25). Pretending to be a faithful and dutiful servant, he now appeared before Elisha to await his orders. The most untruthful and dishonest often assume a pious pose in the company of the saints! And Elisha said unto him, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" An opportunity was thus given him to confess his sins, but instead of so doing, he added lie to lie "And he said, Thy servant did not go anywhere." There was no repentance, but a daring brazenness.

And he said unto him, "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 oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow" (vv. 26-27). Though Christians are not endowed with the extraordinary powers of the prophets, yet if they be truly walking with God they will discern a liar when he confronts them (1 Cor. 2:15). Elisha put his finger on the worst feature of the offence: "Is it a time to receive money [and thus stain God's free grace]?" From the words that follow, Elisha indicated that he knew how Gehazi planned to use the money: he intended to leave his service and set up as a farmer. His punishment was an appropriate one: he had coveted something of Naaman's—he should have that which would henceforth symbolically portray the polluted state of his soul.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

Show the similarity between Gehazi and Judas?

2 Kings 4:27 2 Kings 5:20-22 Ecc. 8:11 Matt. 18:6 Mark 7:21-23 1 Tim. 6:6-10

2 Kings 6:1-7

From the brief allusion made to them, it would seem that Elisha devoted much of his time and attention to the training of young preachers who were formed into schools and designated "the sons of the prophets," which in the Hebrew language would emphasize the nature of their calling and contain no reference to their ancestry. There was one group of them at Bethel and another at Jericho (2 Ki. 2:3, 5) and yet another at Gilgal (4:38). It is from the last reference we learn that Elisha was accustomed to sojourn with them for a time and preach or lecture to them, as their "sitting before him" signifies (Deut. 33:3; Lk. 2:46; 10:39). From the repeated mention of "the people" in this connection (2 Ki. 4:41-42), we

gather that these seminaries also served as more general places of assembly where the pious in Israel gathered together for the worship of Jehovah and to receive edification through His servant. That Elisha acted as rector or superintendent of these schools is evident from the young prophets owning him as "thou man of God" (4:40) and "master" (6:5).

We are not told which particular school of the prophets this one was, but from its proximity to the Jordan there can be little doubt that it was the one situated either at Jericho or Gilgal—most probably the latter, because the reference in 2 Ki. 4:38 seems to indicate that it was there that Elisha made his principal headquarters. This appears to be confirmed by the language used by the students "where we dwell with thee"; they would have said "sojourn" had he been merely on a temporary visit to them. From their statement, we gather that under the superintendency of Elisha their school had flourished, that there had been such an increase of their numbers that the accommodation had become too cramped for them. Accordingly, they respectfully called the attention of their master to what seemed a real need. It is to be observed that they did not impudently take matters into their own hands and attempt to spring a surprise upon Elisha, but instead pointed out to him the exigency of the situation.

He at once perceived the reasonableness of their request and concurred with them therein. A proud and haughty man would quickly resent any suggestion coming from those under his charge or care. Thus an important practical lesson is here taught: superiors ought not to consider themselves above receiving and weighing ideas from their underlings; and when discerning the wisdom of the same and recognizing they could be carried out to advantage, they should not hesitate to adopt them. It is the mark of a little mind, and not of a great one, which considers it has a monopoly of intelligence and is independent of help from others. Many a man has paid dearly for disdain the counsel of his wife or employees.

And he answered, "I will go. So he went with them to the Jordan." And a good thing it was that he did so, as the sequel shows. "And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood" (2 Ki. 6:4).

"But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed" (v. 5). An accident now happened. In one sense it is perfectly true that there are no accidents in a world that is presided over by the living God; but in another sense it is equally true that accidents do occur in the human realm.

This calls for a defining of our term. What is an accident? It is when some effect is produced or some consequence issues from an action undesigned by its performer. From the divine side of things, nothing occurs in this world but what God has ordained; but from the human side, many things result from our actions which were not intended by us. It was no design of this man that he should lose the head of his ax; that he did so was accidental on his part.

And the man of God said—Observe the change in verse 6 of 2 Kings 6 from verse 1: not simply "Elisha" here, because he was about to act officially and work a miracle. "Where fell it?" This was designed to awaken hope. And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim (v. 6).

The incident which has been before us may, we consider, be justly regarded as broadly illustrating what is portrayed by the law and the gospel. It serves to give us a typical picture of the sinner's ruin and redemption. As the result of being dissatisfied with the position God originally assigned us—subjection to His authority—we (in Adam) appropriated what was not ours, and in consequence suffered a fearful fall. The inanimate iron falling into the Jordan—the place of "judgment"—is an apt figure of the elect in their natural state: dead in trespasses and sins, incapable of doing anything for their deliverance. The way and means which God took for our recovery was for Christ to come right down to where we were, and to be "cut off" (Dan. 9:26), yes, "cut off out of the land of the living" (Isa. 53:8), enduring judgment on our behalf, thereby recovering us to God (1 Pet. 3:18).

This incident may also be taken to inform the believer of how lost blessings may be restored to him. Are there not among our readers some who no longer enjoy the liberty they once had in prayer, or the satisfaction they formerly experienced in reading the Scriptures? Are there not some who have lost their peace and assurance, and are deeply concerned about being so deprived? If so, the devil will say the loss is irrecoverable and you must go mourning the rest of your days. But that is one of his many lies. This passage reveals how your situation may be retrieved. (1) Acquaint your Master with your grief (2 Kings 6:5); reveal yourself freely and frankly unto Him. (2) Let His "where fell it?" (2 Kings 6:6) search you. Examine yourself: review the past, ascertain the place or point in your life where the blessing ceased, discover the personal cause of your spiritual loss, judge yourself for the failure and confess it, acknowledging the blame to be entirely yours. (3) Avail yourself and make use of the means for recovery: cast in the "stick" or "tree" (2 Kings 6:6): that is, plead the merits of Christ's cross (1 Pet. 2:24). (4) Stretch forth the hand of faith (2 Kings 6:7); that is, count upon your Master's infinite goodness and grace, expect His effectual intervention, and the lost blessing shall be restored to you.

This incident may also be viewed as making known to us how we may grow in grace. (1) There must be the desire and prayer for spiritual expansion (2 Kings 6:1)—a longing to enter into and possess the "large place" (Ps. 118:5) God has provided for us. (2) The recognition that to enter therein involves effort from us (2 Kings 6:2), labor on our part. (3) Seek the oversight of a servant of God in this (2 Kings 6:3), if one is available. (4) Observe very carefully the particular place to which we must take ourselves if such spiritual enlargement is to be ours. We are to be buried under the Jordan. We can only enter into an enriched spiritual experience by dying more and more unto the flesh, that is, by denying self, and mortifying our lusts (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). (5) Expect to encounter difficulties (2 Kings 6:5). (6) Use the appointed means (2 Kings 6:6) for overcoming the obstacle of the flesh (Gal. 6:14). (7) Stretch forth the hand of faith (2 Kings 6:7) and appropriate what God has given us in Christ.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

How does this incident with the axe head speak to you when your situation seems irrecoverable with no solution?

2 Kings 6:5-6 Ps. 118:5 John 2:1-14

Has God been able to raise our stony iron heart out of the mud and also raise our natural earthly affections to things above?

Rom. 6:3-8 1 Pet. 2:24

2 Kings 6:8-12

In this incident we see Elisha discharging a different line of duty. No longer do we see him engaged in ministering to the young prophets, but instead we find him faithfully rendering valuable assistance to his sovereign. Once more the lust of blood or booty moved the king of Syria to war against Israel. Following the advice of his military counselors, he decided to encamp in a certain place through which the king of Israel was apt to pass, expecting to catch him and his retainers. God acquainted Elisha with his master's peril, and accordingly the prophet went and warned him. By heeding him, the king was preserved from the snare set for him. It is required of us, as we have opportunity, to "do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10). True, the Christian is not endowed with the extraordinary gifts of Elisha; nevertheless he has a responsibility toward his king or ruler. Not only is he divinely commanded to "Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17), but "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). We come now to the thirteenth miracle.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp" (2 Kings 6:8). Clearly, the opening "Then" bids us pay attention to the connection. From a literary viewpoint we regard our present incident as the sequel to what is mentioned in 2 Kings 5, taking 2 Kings 6:1-7 as a parenthesis, thereby emphasizing the base ingratitude of the Syrian monarch for the miraculous healing of his commander-in-chief in the land of Israel. There he had written a personal letter to Israel's king (2 Kings 5:5-6) to recover Naaman from his leprosy; but here he has evil designs upon him. That he should invade the land of Samaria so soon after such a remarkable favor had been rendered to him, made worse his offense and made more manifest his wicked character. It is wrong for us to return evil for evil, for vengeance belongeth alone unto the Lord; but to return evil for good is a sin of double enormity; yet how often have we treated God thus!

But there is another way in which this opening "Then" may be regarded, namely, by linking it unto the typical significance of what is recorded in 2 Kings 6:1-7. We suggested a threefold application of that miracle. First, this miracle supplies a picture of the sinner's redemption. Viewing it thus, what is the next thing he should expect to meet with? Why, the rage of the enemy, and this is illustrated by the attack of the king of Syria.

Second, this miracle may also be regarded as showing the Christian how a lost blessing is to be retrieved. And when the believer has peace, joy, and assurance restored to him, what is sure to follow? This, "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel." Nothing so maddens Satan as the sight of a happy saint—blessed is it to see in what follows how his evil designs were thwarted.

Third, this miracle can also be viewed as portraying how the Christian may grow in grace—by mortifying his members which are upon the earth. And if he does, and enters into an enlarged spiritual experience, then he may expect to be an object of the enemy's renewed assaults; yet he shall not be overcome by him.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel." Yes, my reader, there were wars in those days; human nature has been the same in each generation and in all countries. So far from war being a new thing, the history of nations—both ancient and modern, civilized and uncivilized—is little more than a record of animosities, intrigues, and fightings. "Their feet are swift to shed blood" (Rom. 3:15) is one of the solemn indictments which God has made against the whole human family. There is no hint anywhere that Ben-hadad had received any provocation from Israel; it was just his own wicked greed and bloodthirstiness which moved him. And this in spite of a serious defeat he had suffered on a previous occasion (1 Kings 20:1, 26-30). "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11), and nothing but the restraining hand of God can stop them from executing their desires and devices. Neither solemn warnings nor kindly favors—as this man had recently received—will soften their hearts, unless the Lord is pleased to sanctify the same unto them.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants" (2 Kings 6:8). He asked not counsel of the Lord, for He was a stranger to him. We are glad to see no mention is made here of Naaman. It was with his "servants" rather than "the captain of the host" (2 Kings 5:1) he now conferred. We would hope that it was against the remonstrance of Naaman rather than with his approval that the king now acted. Yet what daring impiety to attack a people whose God wrought such marvels! If he had been impressed by the healing of his general, the impression speedily faded. "Saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp" (2 Kings 6:8). From the sequel it would appear that this particular "place" was one through which the king of Israel had frequent occasion to pass; thus Benhadad evidently laid a careful ambush for him there. Thus it is with the great enemy of our souls: he knows both our ways and our

weaknesses, and where he is most likely to gain an advantage over us. But as carefully as he made his plans, this king reckoned without the Most High.

"And the man God sent to the king of Israel, saying, Beware that you do not pass this place; for the Syrians are coming down there" (2 Kings 6:9). Yes, the king of Syria had left the living God out of his calculations. God is fully acquainted with the thoughts and intents of His enemies and, with the utmost ease, can bring them to naught. The methods which He employs in providence are as varied as His works in creation. On this occasion He did not employ the forces of nature, as He did at the Red Sea when He overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts. Nor did He bid the king of Israel engage Ben-hadad in battle and enable him to vanquish his enemy. Instead, He prompted His servant to give his royal master warning and made the king believe him. The lesson for us is important. God does not always use the same method in His interpositions on our behalf. The fact that He came to my relief for deliverance in a certain manner in the past is no guarantee that He will follow the same course or use the same means now. This is to lift our eyes above all secondary causes to the Lord Himself.

Observe that it was "the man of God" not merely "Elisha" who went with this warning. "The Lord GOD... revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Thus it was in his official character that he went to the king with this divine message. Just previously he had used his extraordinary powers to help one of his students; here he befriended his sovereign. Whatever gift God has bestowed on his servants, it is to be used for the good of others. One of their principal duties is to employ the spiritual knowledge they have received in warning those in peril. How merciful God is in warning both sinners and saints of the place of danger! How thankful we should be when a man of God puts us on our guard against an evil which we suspected not! How many disastrous experiences shall we be spared if we heed the cautions given us by the faithful messengers of Christ. It is at our peril and to our certain loss if, in our pride and self-will, we disregard their timely "beware that thou pass not such a place."

The course which the Lord took in delivering the king of Israel from the ambush set for him may not have flattered his self-esteem, any more than Timothy's was when Paul bade him "flee youthful lusts"; yet we may perceive the wisdom of it. God was enforcing the king's responsibility. He gave him fair warning of his danger; if he disregarded it then his blood was on his own head. So it is with us. The particular locality of peril is not named. The Syrian had said, "In such and such a place shall be my camp," and, "Beware that thou pass not such a place" was the prophet's warning. That the king would identify it in his mind is clear from the sequel. Yet since there is nothing meaningless in Scripture, there must be a lesson for us in its not being specifically named. We are plainly informed in the Word that our arch foe lies in wait to ensnare us. Sometimes a particular danger is definitely described; at others it is (as here) more generally mentioned—that we may ever be on our guard, pondering "the path of our feet" (Prov. 4:26).

Though Satan may propose, God will both oppose and dispose. Before passing on to the sequel, let us link up what has just been before us with the typical teaching of the previous miracle—as the opening "Then" of verse 8 of 2 Kings 6 and the connecting "And" of 2 Kings 6:9 require—and complete the line of thought set out in our paragraph above. When a sinner has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, he at once becomes the object of the devil's enmity; but God has graciously made provision for his security and prevents the enemy from ever completely vanquishing him. Likewise when a believer has been enabled to regain his peace and joy, Satan will renew his efforts to encompass his downfall; but his attempts will be foiled, for since the believer is now in communion with God, he has light on his path and clearly perceives the place to be avoided. So also when by means of mortification the Christian enjoys an enlarged spiritual experience, Satan will lay a fresh snare for him; but it will be in vain, for such a one will receive and heed divine warning.

"And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God had told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice" (2 Kings 6:10). Here we see the king's skepticism (cf. 2 Kings 5:7). He had some respect for the prophet's message or he would have disregarded it, yet he had not full confidence therein or he would not have "sent" to investigate. It was well for him that he went to that trouble, for thereby he obtained definite corroboration and found the caution he had received was not groundless. Ah, my reader, the warnings of God's servants are not idle ones, and it is our wisdom to pay the most serious heed to them. But alas, while most of our fellow men will pay attention to warnings against physical and temporal dangers, they are deaf concerning their spiritual and eternal perils. There is a real sense in which we are required to emulate Israel's king here: we are to follow no preacher blindly, but we must test his warnings, investigating them in the light of Scripture: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21) and thereby we shall obtain divine corroboration.

"Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel" (2 Kings 6:11). It never crossed his mind that it was the Lord who was thwarting him. Being a stranger to Him, he had no place in his thoughts for God; and therefore he sought a natural explanation. Instead of recognizing that God was on the side of Israel and blaming himself, he was chagrined (angered by being let down) at the failure of his plan. He suspected a traitor in his camp and sought a scapegoat.

And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber" (2 Kings 6:12). Even the heathen are not in entire ignorance of God; they have sufficient light and knowledge of Him to render them "without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20, 2:14-15). Much more so is this the case with unbelievers in Christendom. This verse also shows how the spirituality and power of a true servant of God is recognized even by his enemies. The spokesman here may have been one of those who formed the retinue of

Naaman when he came to Elisha and was healed of his leprosy. Yet observe there was no recognition and owning of God here. There was no acknowledgment that He was the one who revealed such secrets to His servants, no terming of Elisha "the man of God," but simply "the prophet that is in Israel." He was regarded merely as a "seer," possessing magical powers. Neither God nor His servant is accorded His rightful place by any but His own people.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

Do we get a better advantage in life by reading in Scripture the experiences of others who have faced various temptations and trials?

2 Kings 6:13-23

This miracle occurred at Dothan, which was to the west of Jordan, in the northeast portion of Samaria. Significantly enough, Do-than means "double feast," and from Genesis 37:16-17 we learn it was the place where the flocks were fed. And he said, "Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan" (2 Kings 6:13). Even now, the Syrian monarch was unwilling to recognize that he was fighting against Jehovah, but determined to remove this obstacle in the way of a successful carrying out of his campaign, even though that obstacle was a prophet. God allowed him to have his own way up to this point, that he might discover he was vainly flinging himself against God's "brick wall" and be made to feel his own impotency.

This verse illustrates the persistence of our great adversary, who will not readily accept defeat. As the Syrian now sought to secure the one who had come between him and his desired victim, so the devil makes special efforts to silence those who successfully warn the ones he would like to take captive.

"Therefore he sent horses, and chariots, and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city" (2 Kings 6:14). That he had some realization of the power Elisha wielded is evident by the strength and size of the force he now sent forth to take him prisoner. Yet the fact that he did not deem him to be invincible is shown by the plan he put into operation. Though the wicked are rendered uneasy by the stirrings of conscience and their convictions that they are doing wrong and following a course of madness, yet they silence the one and treat the other as vain superstitions, and continue in their sinful career. The surrounding of Dothan "by night" illustrates the truth that the natural man prefers the darkness to the light, and signifies that our adversary follows a policy of stealth and secrecy, ever seeking to take us unawares, especially when we are asleep.

And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). Notice its subject is termed a servant, not of "Elisha" but of "the man of God." It is in such small but perfect details that the devout student loves to see the handiwork of the Holy Spirit, evidencing as it does the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures—God guiding each penman in the selection of every word he employed. This man, the successor of Gehazi, was new in the prophet's service, and therefore he was now being tested and taught. When a young believer throws in his lot with the people of God he will soon discover they are hated by the world; but he is called upon to share their reproach. Let not his older brethren expect too much from him while he is young and inexperienced; not until he has learned to walk by faith will he be undaunted by the difficulties and perils of the way.

"Alas, my master! What shall we do?" See here a picture of a young, weak, timid, distracted believer. Is not the picture true to life? Cannot all of us recall its exact replica in our own past experience? How often have we been nonplussed by the trials of the way and the opposition we have encountered. Quite likely this "young man" (2 Kings 6:17) thought he would have a smooth path in the company of the man of God, and yet here was a situation that frightened him. And did we never entertain a similar hope? And when our hope was not realized, did we never give utterance to an unbelieving "Alas!" How shall we act—shutting God completely out of our view, with no hope of deliverance, no expectation of His showing Himself strong on our behalf? If memory enables us to see here a past representation of ourselves, then let compassion cause us to deal leniently and gently with others who are similarly weak and fearful.

It should be borne in mind that the young believer has become, constitutionally, more fearful than unbelievers. Why so? Because his self-confidence and self-sufficiency has been shattered. He has become as "a little child," conscious of his own weakness. So far so good; the great thing now is for him to learn where his strength lies. It should also be pointed out that Christians are menaced by more numerous and more formidable foes than was Elisha's servant, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Well might we tremble and be more distrustful of ourselves were we more conscious of the supernatural beings opposing us. And he answered, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). A realization of that will dispel our doubts and quiet our fears. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17). How blessed is this! "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa. 26:3). There was no trepidation on the part of Elisha; perfect peace was his, and therefore could he say, "Fear not" to his trembling companion. Note there is no scolding of his servant, but instead a turning to the Lord on his behalf. At first the writer was

puzzled at the "Elisha prayed" rather than the "man of God"; but pondering this brought out a precious lesson. It was not in his official character that he prayed, but simply as a personal believer—to show us that God is ready to grant the petition of any child of His who asks in simple faith and unselfish concern for another.

"And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). Proof was this of his "they that be with us are more than they that be with them": the invisible guard was now made visible to the eyes of his servant. Blessed illustration is this that, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7). "Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). Doubtless the angels took the form of "horses and chariots" on this occasion because of the Syrian horses and chariots which "compassed Dothan" (2 Kings 6:14). What could horses of flesh and material chariots do against celestial ones of fire! That they were personal beings is clear from the "they" of 2 Kings 6:16; that they were angels may also be gathered from a comparison with Hebrews 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8.

Here we are shown how to deal with a young and fearing Christian. The strong "ought to bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). Many of God's little ones are living far below their privileges, failing to apprehend the wondrous provisions which God has made for them. They are walking far too much by sight, occupied with the difficulties of the way and those opposing them. First, such are not to be browbeaten or upbraided; that will do no good, for unbelief is not removed by such a method. Second, their alarm is to be quietened with calm and confident "Fear not," backed up with, "For they that be with us are more than they that be with them," and, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31), showing their fears are needless. Third, definite prayer is to be made for the shrinking one that the Lord will operate on and in him, for God alone can open his spiritual eyes to see the sufficiency of His provision for him.

Before passing on, let us offer a further remark about this celestial guard which was round about Elisha. That it was composed of personal beings is clear from the pronoun "*they* that be with us are more than *they* that be with them." That they were angelic beings is evident from several passages: "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4). At His second advent, we are told, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:7-8). The ministry of angels is admittedly a mysterious subject, one about which we know nothing except what it has pleased God to reveal to us. Yet it is a subject which holds by no means an inconspicuous place in Holy Writ. It would be outside our present scope to explore it at large; rather must we confine ourselves to that aspect of it which is here presented unto us.

Angels are not only God's messengers sent on missions of mercy, but they are also His soldiers, commissioned both to guard His people, and execute judgment on His enemies. They are designated "the host of heaven" (1 Kings 22:19; Luke 2:13)—the Greek word meaning "soldiers" or, as we would term them, "men of war," the militia of heaven. In full accord with that concept we find the Savior reminding His disciples that "more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:53) were at His disposal, should He but ask the Father for protection against the armed rabble that had come to arrest Him. It was a host of them, in the form of fiery horses and chariots (cf. Psalm 68:17) which here encamped around Elisha, ready to fight for him. How mighty the angels are we know. One, called "the destroyer" (Ex. 12:23 and cf. 2 Samuel 24:16) slew all the firstborn of the Egyptians, while another slew 185,000 Assyrians in a night (2 Kings 19:35). That their operations continue in this Christian era is plain from such passages as Acts 12:7-10; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 7:1, 15:1; Matthew 24:31.

"And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness" (2 Kings 6:18). The "they" looks back to the armed host mentioned in 2 Kings 6:14. Formidable as was the force sent to slay him, or at least take him captive, the prophet stood his ground and calmly waited their approach. And well he might. Could he not say, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (Ps. 3:6); and again, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" (Ps. 27:3)! And should not the same confidence and courage be the Christian's? "The clearer sight we have of the sovereignty and power of heaven, the less shall we fear the calamities of this earth" (Henry). Perhaps the reader says, If I were favored with an actual view of protecting angels round about me, I would not fear physical danger or human enemies. Ah my friend, is that not tantamount to a confession that you are walking by sight? And may we not apply to you those words, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29)?

"And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord" (2 Kings 6:18). That needs to be pondered and interpreted in the light of the previous verse, or we are likely to miss its beauty and draw a false inference. Very lovely was the prophet's conduct on this occasion. The presence of those horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha was virtually a sign that God had delivered these Syrians into his hands; he had only to speak the word and the angels would have destroyed them. But he bore his enemies no ill will. Had our present verse stood by itself, we might have concluded that the prophet was asking in self-defense, begging the Lord to protect him from his foes, but it opens with the word "And"; and in the light of the one preceding, we are obliged to revise our thought. It is quite clear that Elisha was in no personal danger, so it could not have been out of any concern for his own personal safety that he now sought God. Yet, though he calmly awaited their approach, he did not meet his enemies in his own strength, for prayer is an acknowledgment of insufficiency.

Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, "Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness." At first glance it seems strange that he is referred to here by his personal name rather than as "the man of God," which the Holy Spirit generally uses when he was about to work a miracle; yet the variation in this place is neither fortuitous nor meaningless. It points to a blessed lesson for us, showing as it does the readiness of the Lord to hearken to the requests of His people. Though we do not possess the extraordinary powers of a prophet, yet it is our privilege to ask God to confuse and confound those of our natural enemies who seek our harm, and to subdue our spiritual ones. This incident has been recorded for our instruction and comfort, and one of the things we are to learn from it is that prayer avails to render our enemies impotent. Another preceding lesson, wherein we see another of Elisha's requests granted: success in prayer should encourage and embolden us to ask further favors from God.

Go back again for a moment to Elisha's situation. This petition of his was neither because he felt he was in any personal danger, nor did it proceed from any spirit of malice which he bore his enemies. Then what prompted it? Does not the miraculous healing of Naaman supply the answer to our question? When the king of Israel had rent his clothes in dismay, the man of God assured him that the king of Syria "shall know there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:7-8), and when Naaman was recovered of his leprosy he sought unto the man of God and, before all his own retinue, testified, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). And now this heathen monarch had sent his forces to take the prophet prisoner! Very well, then, if he were not yet convinced that it was the true and living God whom Elisha served, he would receive further proof. It was Jehovah's glory which prompted Elisha's request. Weigh that well my reader. Everything depends upon the motive which inspires our petitions, determining whether or not we shall receive an answer. True and acceptable prayer rises above a sense of personal need, having in view the honor of God's name. Keep before you 1 Corinthians 10:31.

"And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha" (2 Kings 6:18). That was an exact reversal of what took place under the foregoing miracle: there the prophet's servant was enabled to see what was invisible to others (2 Kings 6:17), but here the Syrian soldiers were rendered incapable of seeing what was visible to others. But let us behold in this miracle the willingness of our God to respond to the cries of His own, that He is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. If we self-distrustfully refuse to encounter foes in our own strength, if we confidently ask God to render their efforts impotent, and if we do so with His glory in view, we may be assured of His gracious intervention. No matter what may be our need, how drastic the situation, how urgent our case, how formidable our adversary, while simple faith is exercised and the honor of God is our aim, we may count upon His showing Himself strong on our behalf. "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). He is the same now as He was in Elisha's day.

"And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria" (2 Kings 6:19). He did not abandon them in their blindness and leave them to themselves. Contrast Genesis 19:11, where God was dealing in wrath. Had they not been blinded, probably they would have identified the prophet by his attire; but being strangers to him, they would be unable to recognize him by his voice. Spiritually that illustrates a fundamental difference between the goats and the sheep: the former are incapable of distinguishing between teachers of truth and of error; not so the latter, for they "know not the voice of strangers" but "will flee from him" (John 10:5). But exactly what did Elisha signify by those statements? It is lamentable to find one commentator, in whose notes there is generally that which is sound and good, saying, "The prophet intended to deceive the Syrians, and this might lawfully be done, even if he had meant to treat them as enemies, in order to his own preservation; but he designed them no harm by such deception."

Apart from such a view giving the worst possible interpretation to the prophet's language, such an observation as the above is most reprehensible. It is never right to do wrong, and, no matter what may be our circumstances, for us to deliberately lie is to sin both against God and our fellowmen. Such an explanation as the above is also absurd on the face of it. Elisha was in no personal danger at all; and now that these Syrians were blinded, he could have walked away unmolested by them, had he so pleased. "This is not the way." What way? He could not mean to Dothan, for they were already there and must have known it. "I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." And who was that? Why, ultimately and absolutely, the king of Israel, for whom their master had laid an ambush (see 2 Kings 6:11), Elisha being merely an obstacle, who had hindered him. One who had just obtained from God such an answer to prayer, and who was now showing mercy to his enemies, would scarcely lie to them!

"And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria" (2 Kings 6:20). Here was still further proof that Elisha harbored no malice against these Syrians and that he intended them no harm. Though they had hostile designs against him, yet he now uses his interest with the Lord on their behalf. Most gracious was that. What an example for every servant of God: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2:25). Instead of cherishing ill will against those who are unfriendly to us, we should seek their good and pray to the Lord on their behalf. How this incident reminds us of a yet more blessed example when the Lord of glory in the midst of His sufferings made intercession for His crucifiers (Isa. 53:12; Luke 23:34).

A further miracle was now wrought in answer to Elisha's intercession, showing us once more the mighty power of God and His willingness to employ it in answer to the petitions of His people. Note how Elisha made good his promise: he led them to the man they really sought, for the next person mentioned is "the king of Israel!"

"And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? Shall I smite them?" (2 Kings 6:21). Very solemn is this: and in full accord with the king's character: the Lord did not open *his* eyes; consequently he was blind to the working of His goodness and incapable of appreciating the magnanimous spirit which had been displayed by the prophet. Here we see what man is by nature: fierce, cruel, vindictive. Such are we and all of our fellowmen as the result of the fall: "living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). Only the restraining hand of God prevents our enemies from falling upon us. Were that hand completely withdrawn, we should be no safer in a "civilized" country than if we were surrounded by savages or cast into a den of wild beasts. We do not sufficiently realize that God's restraining power is upon those who hate us: "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:10).

"And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master" (2 Kings 6:22). Observe how Elisha kept full control of the situation, even though he was now in the royal quarters—something which every servant of God needs to heed, exercising the authority which Christ has given him. Note too how this verse teaches that mercy is to be shown to prisoners of war; or taking it in its wider application, how kindness is to be extended to our enemies. And this, mark it well, occurred under the Old Testament economy! The divine law commanded its subjects, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink" (Prov. 25:21, and see also Ex. 23:4-5); much more so under the dispensation of grace are we required to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

Elisha had his way, and the king "prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master" (2 Kings 6:23), that he might learn anew that our times, the success or failure of our plans, our health and our lives, are in the hand of the living God, and that He is not only infinite in power but plenteous in mercy. The sequel was, "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23). God honored the magnanimity of His prophet and rewarded the obedience of his royal master by exempting the land from any further depredations from these savage bands.

May we not see in the above incident another lovely gospel picture, viewing the graciousness of Elisha to those who had gone to take him captive as a shadowing forth of God's mercy to elect sinners? First, we are shown that they are by nature—at enmity with His servant. Second, we behold them as the subjects of His servant's prayers, that they may be granted a sense of their wretched condition. Third, in answer thereto they are duly brought to realize their impotency; who are so consciously helpless as the blind? Fourth, they were moved to follow the instructions and guidance of God's servant. Fifth, in due course their eyes were opened. Sixth, they were feasted with "great provision" at the king's own table! Seventh, the picture is completed by our beholding them as changed creatures—coming no more on an evil errand into Israel's land.

But is there not also an important spiritual meaning and lesson here for Christians? How are we to deal with those who seek to injure us, should Providence deliver them into our hands? We are to ask the Lord to nullify their efforts and render them powerless to injure us. But more. We are also to pray that God will open their eyes, and treat them kindly and generously (see Matthew 5:44).

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

When we walk by sight we cannot see the invisible guard that encamps around us and the sufficiency of His provision during desperate situations. **Why is Elisha a good example of how to walk by faith?**

2 Kings 6:17 Ps. 34:7 Ps. 104:4 Rom. 8:31 Heb. 1:14

2 Kings 6:24-30

"And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria" (2 Kings 6:24). The opening clause is far more than a historical mark of time; properly understood, it serves to bring out the character of this man. The introductory "And" bids us link his action here with what is recorded in the context. In the remote context (2 Kings 5), we saw how God graciously healed Naaman of his leprosy. Naaman was the commander-in-chief of Ben-hadad's army and had been sent by him into Samaria to be cured of his dread disease. But little did the Syrian monarch appreciate that signal favor; shortly after, he assembled an increased force of his bands and "warred against Israel" (2 Kings 6:8). His plan was to capture Jehoram, but being foiled by Elisha he sent his men to capture the prophet. In that too he failed, for in answer to Elisha's prayer, they were smitten with blindness; though instead of taking advantage of their helplessness, he later prayed for their eyes to be opened, and after having the king give them a feast, sent them home to their master, who had returned to Syria.

"And it came to pass after this"; not that Ben-hadad repented of his former actings, nor that he was grateful for the mercy and kindness which had been shown his soldiers; but that he "gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria." Not only was this base ingratitude against his human benefactors, but it was blatant defiance against Jehovah Himself. Twice the Lord had manifested His miracle-working power in grace on his behalf; and here was his response.

Yet we must look further if we are to perceive the deeper meaning of "it came to pass after this," for we need to answer the question, Why did the Lord permit this heathen to invade Israel's territory?

The reply is also furnished by the context. Ben-hadad was not the only one who had profited by God's mercies in the immediate past; the king of Israel had also been divinely delivered from those who sought his life. And how did he express his appreciation? Did he promptly institute a religious reformation in his dominions and tear down the altars which his wicked parents had set up? No, so far as we are informed he was quite unmoved and continued in his idolatry.

It is written, "the curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2). When God afflicts a people, be it a church or a nation, it is because He has a controversy with them. If they refuse to put right what is wrong, He chastises them. God, then, was acting in judgment on Samaria when He commissioned the Syrians to now enter their land in full force. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation" (Isa. 10:5-6). So again, at a later date, the Lord said of Nebuchadnezzar "Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with [or 'by'] thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms" (Jer. 51:20). It is in the light of such passages as these we should view the activities of a Hitler or a Mussolini! Though God's time to completely cast off Israel had not come in the days of Jehoram, yet He employed Ben-hadad to grievously afflict his kingdom.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was *sold* for eighty *shekels* of silver, and one-forth of a kab (approx. 1 pint) of dove droppings for five *shekels* of silver" (2 Kings 6:25). Troubles seldom come singly, for God means to leave us without excuse if we fail to recognize whose hand it is which is dealing with us. Ben-hadad chose his hour to attack when Israel was in sore tribulation, which serves also to illustrate Satan's favorite method of assaulting the saints. Like the fiend that he is, he strikes when they are at their lowest ebb, coming as the roaring lion when their nerves are already stretched to the utmost, seeking to render them both praiseless and prayerless while lying on a bed of sickness, or to instill into their minds doubts of God's goodness in the hour of bereavement, or to question His promises when the meal has run low in their barrel. But since "we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11), we should be on our guard against such tactics.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria." It needs to be pointed out in these days of skepticism and practical atheism that the inhabitants of earth are under the government of something infinitely better than "fickle fortune," namely, a world which is ruled over by the living God. Goodly harvests or the absence of them are not the result of chance nor the effect of a blind fate. In Psalm 105:16 we read that God "called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread." And my reader, when He calls for a "famine," neither farmers nor scientists can prevent or avert it. We have read in the past of famines in China and in India, but how faintly can we conceive of the awful horrors of one in our day! As intimated above, the Lord called for this famine on Samaria because the king and his subjects had not taken to heart His previous chastisements of the land for their idolatry. When a people refuse to heed the rod, then He smites more heavily.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it." Their design was not to storm but to starve the city, by throwing a powerful military cordon around it, so that none could either go out or come in. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall [probably taking stock of his defenses and seeking to encourage the garrison], there cried a woman unto him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king" (2 Kings 6:26). And well she might, for they were now deprived of the bare necessities of life, with a slow but painful death by starvation staring them in the face. Ah, my reader, how little we really value the common mercies of this life until they are taken from us! Poor woman, she turned to lean upon a broken reed, seeking relief from the apostate king, rather than making known her need to the Lord. There is no hint anywhere in the narrative that the people prayed to God.

And he said, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barnfloor or out of the winepress?" (2 Kings 6:27). That was not the language of submission and piety, but, as the sequel shows, of derision and blasphemy. His language was that of anger and despair: the Lord *will* not help; I *cannot*, so we must perish. Out of the abundance of his evil heart his mouth spoke. Calming down a little, the king said unto her, "What aileth thee"? And she answered, This woman [pointing to a companion] said unto me, "Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son" (2 Kings 6:28-29). This shows the desperate conditions which then prevailed and the awful pass (change) to which things had come. Natural affection yielded to the pangs of hunger. This too must also be regarded as a most solemn example of the divine justice, and vengeance on idolatrous Israel.

It must be steadily borne in mind that the people of Samaria had cast off their allegiance to Jehovah and were worshipping false gods, and therefore according to His threatenings, the Lord visited them with severe judgments. They were so blockaded by the enemy that all ordinary food supplies failed them, so that in their desperation they were driven to devour the most abominable offals (internal organs of an animal) and even human flesh. Of old the Lord had announced unto Israel, "If ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins, and ye shall eat the flesh of your sons" (Lev. 26:27-29). And again, "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee... And he shall besiege thee... And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you" (Deut. 28:49, 52-53). This was even more completely fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. No words of God's shall fall to the ground; His threatenings, equally with His promises, are infallibly certain of fulfillment!

"Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his cloths; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath *he had* sackcloth on his body" (2 Kings 6:30). According to the customs of those days and the ways of Oriental people, this was the external garb of a penitent; but what was it worth while he renounced not his idols? Not a particle in the eyes of Him who cannot be imposed upon by any outward shows. It was a pose which the king adopted for the benefit of his subjects, to signify that he felt deeply for their miseries; yet he lamented not for his own iniquities, which were the underlying cause of the calamity. Instead of so doing, the very next verse tells us that he took an awful oath that Elisha should be promptly slain. "Rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:13) is ever the divine call to those under chastisement, for God desires truth (reality) in "the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6).

As it is useless to wear sackcloth when we mourn not for our sins, so it is in vain to flock to church on a "day of prayer" and then return at once to our vanities and idols. Israel later complained, "Wherefore have we fasted,... and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" And God answered them by saying, "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors . . . Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high" (Isa. 58:3-4). Thus there is such a thing as not only praying but fasting which God pays no attention to. At a later date He said to them, "When ye fasted and mourned... did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets!" (Zech. 7:5, 7). While a nation tramples upon the divine commandments, neither prayer and fasting nor any other religious performances are of any avail with Him who says, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). There must be a turning away from sin before there can be any real turning unto God.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

What explanation is there for cannibalism existing in Samaria?

2 Kings 6:31-7:2

"Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat stand on him this day" (2 Kings 6:31). This was the language of hatred and fury. Refusing to admit that it was his own impenitence and stubbornness which was the procuring cause of the terrible straits to which his kingdom was now reduced, Jehoram turned an evil eye on the prophet and determined to make a scapegoat of him. As though the man of God was responsible for the famine, Israel's apostate king took a horrible oath that he should be promptly slain. He was well acquainted with what had happened in the reign of his parents, when in answer to the words of Elijah there had been no rain on Samaria (1 Kings 17:1), and he probably considered that his own desperate situation was due to Elisha's prayers. Though just as Ahab declined to recognize that the protracted drought was a divine judgment upon his own idolatry, so his son now ignored the fact that it was his personal sins that had called down the present expression of divine wrath.

This solemn and awful incident should be viewed in the light of that divine indictment, "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), and that my reader, is true of your mind and of my mind by nature. You may not believe it, but He before whose omniscient eye your heart is open, declares it to be so. You may be quite unconscious of your awful condition, but that does not alter the fact. If you were better acquainted with the true God, were aware of His ineffable holiness and inexorable justice, and realized that it is His hand that smites you when your body suffers acute pain or when your circumstances are most distressing, you might find it easier to discover how your heart really beats toward Him and the ill will you bear Him. True, that fearful "enmity" does not always manifest itself in the same way or to the same degree, for in His mercy God often places His restraining hand upon the wicked and prevents the full outbursts of their hostility and madness. But when that restraining hand is removed, their case is like that described in Revelation 16:10-11: "They gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds."

And why do we say that Jehoram's conduct on this occasion made manifest the enmity of the carnal mind against God? Because, while he was unable to do Jehovah any injury directly, he determined to visit his spite upon Him indirectly, by maltreating His servant. Ah my reader, there is important if solemn instruction for us in that. Few people realize the source from which proceeds the bitterness, the opposition made against, the cruel treatment meted out to many of the ministers of the gospel. As the representatives of the holy One, they are a thorn in the side of the ungodly. Though they do them no harm, but instead desire and seek their highest good, yet are they detested by those who want to be left alone in their sins. Nothing recorded in human history more plainly and fearfully displays the depravity of fallen man and his alienation from God than his behavior toward the most faithful of His servants—supremely manifested when the Lord of glory took upon Him the form of a servant and tabernacled among men. It was just because He made known and revealed the character of God as none else ever did, that man's hatred of and enmity against Him was so inveterately and fiercely exhibited.

"But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him" (2 Kings 6:32). This verse also needs to be pondered in the light of other Scriptures. For example: "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Prov. 1:33). The one who truly fears the Lord, fears not man; and his heart is preserved from those trepidations which so much disturb the rest and so often torment the wicked. No, "he shall not be afraid of evil tidings"; he shall neither have

alarming anticipations of such, nor be dismayed when they actually arrive. And why not? Because "his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" (Ps. 112:7). Rumors do not shake him, nor does he quake when they are authenticated, for he is assured that his "times" are in the hand of the Lord (Ps. 31:15). And therefore is he kept in peace. In the light of all that is recorded of him, who can doubt that Elisha and his companions had been on their knees before the throne of grace, and now calmly awaited events. That is the holy privilege of the saints in times of acutest stress and distress: to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Ps. 37:7).

"And the king sent a man from before him." This man was dispatched quickly ahead of Jehoram, either to announce his awful decision or to put it into actual execution. Had the king paused to reflect, he should have realized that it was one thing to form such a determination, but quite another to carry it out. Had not Ben-hadad, only a short time previously, sent a "great host" not only of footmen, but of "horses and chariots" against this servant of the Lord (2 Kings 6:14) only for them to discover their impotence against him! But when a soul (or a people) has abandoned the Lord, he is given up to a spirit of madness, so that not only does God have no place in his thoughts, but he is no longer capable of acting rationally—rationality and spirituality are closely connected. "But ere the messenger came to him, he [Elisha] said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" (2 Kings 6:32).

"And while he was still talking with them, there was a messenger, coming down to him; and then *the king* said, Surely this calamity *is* from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" (2 Kings 6:33). We confess we do not find it easy to ascertain the precise force of this verse, not even its grammatical meaning. The first sentence is clear, for the "while he yet talked" evidently refers to what Elisha was saying to the elders. The difficulty is to discover the antecedent of the "And he said." The nearest is the "him" or Elisha, yet certainly he would not say his proposed murder ("this evil") was "of the Lord," ordered by Him. The next is "the messenger," but the prophet had given definite orders that he was not to be admitted, nor would this agree with what follows in 2 Kings 7:1-2. We therefore regard the second sentence as recording the words of the king himself, who had followed immediately on the heels of his messenger, thus the more remote but principal antecedent of 2 Kings 6:30-31; just as we understood "the man whom ye seek" as meaning Jehoram rather than Elisha (2 Kings 6:19).

But what did the king signify by "this evil is of the Lord?" We certainly do not concur with Henry and Scott that he referred to the siege and famine, for not only is the grammar of the passage against such a view, but it is in direct opposition to everything else which is recorded of this son of Jezebel. He did not believe in Jehovah at all, and therefore his language must be regarded as that of derision and blasphemy. The context shows he was in a towering rage, that he regarded Elisha as being in some way responsible for the present calamity, and that he was determined to put a sudden end to his life. Fully intending to execute his murderous design, he now burst in on the prophet and said, "This evil is of the Lord." Those were the words of contemptuous mockery: you profess to be a servant of an all-powerful Jehovah; let's see what He can do for you now—behold me as His executioner if you please. "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Jehovah has no place in my thoughts or plan; the situation is hopeless, so I shall waste no more time, but slay you and surrender to Ben-hadad and take my chance.

"Then Elisha said—"The "Then" looks back to all that has been before us in the last ten verses of 2 Kings 6. "Then" when "all the hosts of Syria" were besieging Samaria; "then" when there was a great famine and things had come to such an extreme pass that the people were paying immense prices for the vilest of offals (internal organs of an animal), and mothers were consuming their own infants. "Then" when the king of Israel had sworn that the prophet should be beheaded this very day; "then" when the king in a white heat of passion entered Elisha's abode to carry out his murderous intention. "Then"—what? Did the prophet give way to abject despair and break forth into bitter lamentations of murmuring rebellion? No indeed. Then what? Did Elisha fling himself at the king's feet and plead with him to spare his life? Very far from it; such is not the way the ambassadors of the King of kings conduct themselves in a crisis. Instead, "then Elisha said [calmly and quietly], Hear ye the word of the Lord." To what import? That His patience is exhausted, that He will now pour out His wrath and utterly consume you? No, the very reverse; the last thing they could have expected him to say.

Then Elisha said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for [as little as] a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (2 Kings 7:1). This brings us to the third area of consideration.

In view of the next verse, it is quite clear that the prophet addressed himself to the king and those who had accompanied him. It was as though he said, I have listened to the derisive and insulting words which you have spoken of my Master; now hear what He has to say! And what was His message on this occasion? This: He is about to have mercy upon your kingdom. He is on the point of working a miracle within the next twenty-four hours which will entirely reverse the present situation, so that not only will the Syrians depart, but there shall be provided an abundant supply of food, which will fully meet the needs of your people, and that, without a blow being struck or your royal coffers being any the poorer.

Admire here the remarkable faith of Elisha. "Then." When things were at their lowest possible ebb, when the situation was desperate beyond words, when the outlook appeared to be utterly hopeless. Mark the implicit confidence of the prophet in that dark hour. He had received a message of good tidings from his Master, and he hesitated not to announce it. Ah, but put yourself in his place, my reader, and remember that he was "a man of like passions" with us, and therefore liable to be cast down by an evil heart of unbelief. It is a great mistake for us to look upon the prophets as

superhuman characters. In this case, as in all parallel ones, God was pleased to place His treasure in an "earthen vessel," that the glory might be His. Elisha was just as liable to the attacks of Satan as we are. For all we know to the contrary and reasoning from the law of analogy, it is quite likely that the enemy of souls came to him at that time with his evil suggestions and said, May you not be mistaken in concluding that you have received such a word as this from the Lord? Nay, you are mistaken—your own wish is father to the thought. You are deluded into imagining that such a thing can be.

Those who are experimentally acquainted with the conflict between faith and unbelief, who are frequently made to cry out, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," will have little difficulty in following what has just been said. They who know something from firsthand acquaintance of the tactics of the devil and the methods of his assaults, will not consider our remarks farfetched. Rather will they concur that it is more than likely Elisha was hotly assailed by the adversary at this very time. Would he not pose too as an angel of light, and preach a little sermon to the prophet, saying, A holy God is now acting in judgment, righteously scourging the idolatrous Jehoram, and therefore you must certainly be mistaken in supposing He is about to act in a way of mercy. At any rate, exercise prudence, wait awhile longer lest you make a fool of yourself; it would be cruel to raise false hopes in the starving people! But if so, Elisha heeded him not, but being strong in faith, he gave glory to God. It was just such cases as this that the apostle had in mind when he mentioned the faith of "the prophets" in Hebrews 11:32.

Ah, my reader, Elisha was assured that what he had received was "the Word" of Him "that cannot lie," and no matter how much opposed it was to common sense and to all outward appearances, he firmly took his stand upon it. The "faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1) is no fiction but a glorious reality. It is something more than a beautiful ideal to talk about and sing of. It is a divine gift, a supernatural principle, which not only overcomes the world but survives the "fiery trial," yes, issues therefrom refined. Elisha was not put to confusion. That divine "word," though perhaps quite unexpected and contrary to his own anticipations, was faithfully and literally fulfilled; and remember that this is recorded for our learning and consolation. We too have in our hands the Word of truth, but do we have it in our hearts? Are we really relying upon its promises, no matter how unlikely their accomplishment may seem to carnal reason? If so, we are resting upon a sure foundation, and we too shall have our faith vindicated, and God will be glorified through and by us.

But let us look higher now than Elisha's faith in that divine word to the One who gave it to him. It was the Lord manifesting Himself as the God of all grace to those who were utterly unworthy. In their dire extremity the Lord had mercy upon them and remembered they were the seed of Abraham, and therefore He would not entirely destroy them. He turned an eye of pity on the starving city and promised them speedy relief from the awful famine. How truly wonderful is His mercy! He was saying, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). But that mercy rested on a righteous basis; there was a "handful of salt" in Samaria which preserved it from destruction—the prophet and the elders. Rightly was Elisha styled by a later king "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 13:14), for his presence in their midst was a better defense than a multitude of infantry and cavalry; a British queen feared the prayers of Knox far more than any arm of flesh.

And may not what has just been pointed out provide a ray of hope for us in this, spiritually speaking, dark night? Of old Israel was reminded, "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" (Deut. 4:7).

Has not that been true of Britain the past four centuries as of no other people? God has shown us favors, granted us privileges, such as no other nation in the world has enjoyed. And we, like Israel of old, have evilly required Him and abused His great benefits. For years past His judgments have been upon us, and like Israel again, we have sadly failed to bow to His rod and turn from our sins. If God was so reluctant to abandon Israel, may He not continue to show us mercy, and for the sake of the little "salt" still left in our midst, spare us from destruction? Time will tell, but we are not left without hope.

"Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Kings 7:2). There was the response that was made to Jehovah's word through His prophet. Instead of being received with thanksgiving and tears of gratitude, it met with a contemptuous sneer. The courtier's language expressed the skepticism of carnal reason. Unbelief dared to question the divine promise—illustrative of the unregenerate's rejection of the gospel. This man argued from what he could see: as no possible relief was visible, he scorned its probability, or rather certainty. "And he [Elisha] said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof" (2 Kings 7:2). Let it be noted that the prophet wasted no breath in reasoning with this skeptic. It is not only useless, but most unbecoming for a servant of the Lord to descend to the level of such objectors. Instead, he simply affirmed that this man would witness the miracle but be unable to share in its benefits. God Himself will yet answer the skeptics of this age, as He did that one, with appropriate judgment. Such will be the doom of unbelievers: they shall see the redeemed feasting at the marriage of the Lamb, yet not partake thereof (Matthew 8:11-12).

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

Name and date some of the great missionary endeavors that proceeded from Great Britain in the last 400 years? Is there any relationship between missionary activity and the state of a nation?

2 Kings 7:3-8

We have dwelt upon its occasion, which was the fearful shortage of food in the city of Samaria, resulting from its being so closely surrounded by the Syrians that none of its inhabitants could go forth and obtain fresh supplies (2 Kings 6:24-25). So acute did conditions become that the vilest of offals were sold at exorbitant prices, and mothers had begun to consume their own babies. So far from the king humbling himself beneath the hand of divine judgment and acknowledging that it was his own idolatry and impenitence which was the procuring cause of reducing his kingdom to such sore straits, Israel's king now turned an evil eye upon Elisha and determined to make a scapegoat of him, taking a horrible oath that he should be slain forthwith (2 Kings 6:31)—evidencing that he was a true son of Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4).

"But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him" (2 Kings 6:32); he calmly awaited events. Announcing that "this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head," he gave orders that the door should be shut and the royal messenger not be admitted. Jehoram himself hastened on just behind. The prophet and the king then came face to face, and the former announced the impending miracle. Then Elisha said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, 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 Kings 7:1). That was tantamount to saying, God in His high sovereignty is going to show mercy on your wretched kingdom, and within a day will work a miracle that shall entirely reverse the present situation. Not only will the Syrians depart, but there shall be provided an abundant supply of food which will fully meet the needs of your people, without a blow being struck or your royal coffers being any the poorer.

"Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Kings 7:2). Such a message of good news as the prophet had just proclaimed, of deliverance from the enemy and food for the starving, seemed utterly incredible to carnal reason, and therefore instead of being received with fervent thanksgiving, it was met with a contemptuous sneer. Unbelief presumed to call into question the divine promise. Arguing from what he could see, no possible relief being visible, this wicked lord scorned the likelihood of its fulfillment. That which Elisha had announced was indeed impossible to anyone but the living God, for only by a miracle could it be made good; yet it was the express word of Him that cannot lie and who is endowed with omnipotence. Despite the effort of his unbelieving courtier to prevent any weakening of his resolution, the king of Israel decided to wait another day before carrying out his murderous design, and during that interval the prediction was accomplished. We now continue this study.

Heralds are the ones made use of by the Lord to proclaim the wonder of mercy which He had wrought. Strange indeed do the divine methods often appear to our dim vision, yet in the light of Scripture their significance is not lost upon those favored with anointed eyes. It was not "the elders of Israel" who had sat with Elisha in his house, nor was it "the sons of the prophets" whom the Lord honored on this occasion. God is sovereign and employs whom He pleases. Often He acts as He does in order to stain the pride of man, for He is jealous of His own honor and will suffer no flesh to glory in His presence. It is true that He has called certain men to the special work of the ministry and set them apart, and that He frequently works through them in the converting of His people; yet He is by no means tied to that particular agency, and often manifests His independence by making use of the most unlikely ones to be His agents—as appears in the more extreme cases of Balaam and Judas. So it was here.

"And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?" (2 Kings 7:3). More unlikely instruments could scarcely be imagined. They were pariahs, outcasts, men debarred from mingling with their ordinary fellow citizens. They were lepers, and as such excluded by the divine law (Lev. 13:46). Yet these were the ones whom God was pleased to employ. How different are His thoughts and ways from man's! But let us observe the position which they occupied and the strange anomaly which that reveals. They were sitting "at the entering in of the gate," that is, of Samaria (2 Kings 7:1, 3), namely, on the outside of the city's walls—as the next verse shows. There we have a striking sidelight on the inconsistency of perverse human nature, especially in connection with religious matters. Though idolaters devoid of any respect for Jehovah, yet Jehoram and his officers were punctilious in carrying out the requirement of the ceremonial law as it respected the exclusion of lepers! They were diligent in tithing mint and anise while omitting the weightier matters of the moral law (Matthew 23:23).

That to which we have called attention is frequently exemplified on the pages of Holy Writ. Instead of utterly destroying Amalek and all his possessions, as commanded when God delivered them into his hands, Saul permitted the people to spare the best of the sheep and oxen that they might offer them in "sacrifice unto the Lord." To these Samuel declared, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). Because it was the eve of the Passover the Jews besought Pilate that the bodies of Christ and the two thieves who had been crucified with Him "might be taken away" (John 19:31), that their solemn feast might not be defiled. What a strange mixture human nature is! Those ceremonially unclean lepers must be shut out of Samaria, even though Jehovah Himself was treated with the utmost contempt! And do we not see the same principle illustrated in Christendom? Let a Christian attend morning services, and he may spend the remainder of Sunday as he pleases. Being a stickler for a particular form of baptism, breaking bread each Lord's day morning, or spending five days at a "communion," is a mockery if we love not our neighbor as ourselves.

"And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?" It will probably surprise many to know that some have been taught that this is the proper attitude to assume when one has been convicted of his lost condition. Appeal for this is made to such passages as "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors" (Prov. 8:34), "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water" (John 5:3). The awakened sinner is told that he is utterly helpless to do anything for himself, entirely dependent on God's sovereign pleasure, and then since there is a set time to favor Zion (Ps. 102:13), he must meekly wait for God's appointed hour of deliverance, should He deign (stoop, descend from His level) to deliver him. But such counsel is an utter misuse of both the truth of God's sovereignty and of man's spiritual inability. Proof of its error is found in the fact that it both clashes with the call of the gospel and is a repudiation of human responsibility.

The truth is that the spiritual inability of the natural man is both a voluntary and a criminal one. He does not love and serve God because he hates Him; he believes not the gospel because he prefers to cherish a lie; he will not come to the Light because he loves darkness. So far from his "I cannot repent, I cannot believe" expressing an honest desire to do so, it is but an avowal of the heart's enmity against God. If the doctrine of the cross and the glorious message of the gospel contain nothing to overcome such enmity and attract the soul to Christ, it is not for us to invent another gospel and bend the Scriptures to the inclination of man's depravity. It is we who must bend to the Scriptures; and if we do not, it will be to our eternal undoing. The one who wrings his hands over his inability to believe and asks, What can I do? is not to be soothed by something other than the gospel of Christ, or encouraged to suppose that he is willing to be saved in God's way. Yet that is the very delusion such souls cherish, imagining they are as willing to be saved from their sins as the impotent man by the pool was desirous of being made whole.

Neither Christ nor any of His apostles ever told a convicted soul to passively wait for God's appointed hour of deliverance. Instead, He bade the heavy laden "Come unto me." And instead of informing those who followed Him across the sea, "It lies not in your power to do anything to secure the bread of life," He exhorted them to, "Labor . . . for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27). Rather than tell men they must sit quietly before it, Christ commanded, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). When his hearers were pricked in their hearts and asked, "What shall we do?", instead of saying, "You can do nothing, except wait until God speaks peace unto you," Peter bade them "repent" (Acts 2:37-38). Those who think they have been given a sense of their helplessness are quite content if some physician of no value will inspire them with a hope in the way they are now in, and encourage them to expect that if they remain passive, God will release them by a "moving of the waters." We do but miserably deceive souls if we give them any comfort or hold out any hope for them while they remain impenitent and away from Christ.

But to return to the narrative. "They said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2 Kings 7:3-4). How those poor lepers put to shame the "do nothing" fatalists! Those men rightly recognized the hopelessness of their case, perceiving that continued passivity would profit them nothing, and hence they decided to act. And if you, my reader, are already convicted of your perishing condition, do not rest content with that conviction and persuade yourself that in due time God will save you. Embrace the gospel offer and receive Christ as your Lord and Savior, for He has declared, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

We ask the indulgence of others who have not been infected with such paralyzing teaching while we add a further word. We would ask them to beg God to use these paragraphs to deliver some souls from this subtle snare of the devil. If one who reads these lines has been made to feel his lost condition, then consider, we pray you, the far happier situation facing you from that in which those lepers were. They decided to come unto an enemy and cast themselves upon his mercy, while you are invited to betake yourself unto the Friend of publicans and sinners! They had no invitation from the Syrians, but you have from the Lord: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." They had nothing better than an "if they save us alive" to venture upon, whereas you have, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." They were confronted with the possible alternative of being killed; not so you; "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Then why hesitate?

"And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there" (2 Kings 7:5). What was before us in 2 Kings 7:3-4 did not end in idle talk. The situation for those lepers was a desperate one; and prompted by a sense of urgency, they acted. Their sitting still had gotten them nowhere, so they "rose up" and proceeded at once to their proposed objective. They did not puzzle their heads about God's secret decree and whether or not His ordained hour had arrived, for that was none of their business. Instead, they responded to the instinct of self-preservation. Again we say, how far superior is the sinner's case: he need not wait a moment for the prompting of any instinct, but is invited, "Come; for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17). Come just as you are with all your sinfulness and unworthiness; and if you cannot come to Christ with a melted heart and faith, then come to Him as a patient desperate for healing.

The divine narrative breaks in upon the account of the heralds of this miracle to show us its means. For before we see those lepers going forth to publish their good news, we are first informed how it was that they came to find the camp empty. "For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and the noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites,

and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us" (2 Kings 7:6). This is to be regarded as the sequel to 2 Kings 6:24: Ben-hadad's purpose was to starve out Samaria. But man proposes and God opposes and disposes. "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect" (Ps. 33:10).

The Lord accomplishes His purpose by a great variety of measures and methods, sometimes employing the supernatural, more often using the natural. What were the means He used here? In the light of what is not said in 2 Kings 7:6, it seems strange that Thomas Scott should write, "The infatuation which seized the minds of the whole Syrian army was equal to the illusion put upon their senses, and both were from the Lord, but how produced we know not." Little better is Matthew Henry's "these had their hearing imposed upon." There was neither illusion nor imposition. It does not say, "The Lord made them to hear a noise *like* as of chariots and horses," but the actual thing itself. That is to say, He so attuned their auditory nerves that they registered the sound of what previously was inaudible to them. This is but another instance of how we create our own difficulties when reading the Word through failing to attend closely to exactly what is said.

If we allow scripture to interpret scripture, we should have no difficulty in ascertaining the precise means used on this occasion. On a previous one God had employed "horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17), and as we showed, the reference there was to angelic beings. Then why not the same here! In the former case, God "opened the eyes of the young man" in order to see them; here, He opened the ears of the Syrians to hear them. It may well be that in their original condition our first parents were capacitated to both see and hear celestial beings, but the fall impaired those as well as all their faculties. The "clairvoyance" and "clairaudience" of spiritist mediums could be the devil's imitation of man's original powers. That the Syrians, unregenerate idolaters, misinterpreted what they heard is only to be expected. Those who heard the Father speaking to His Son thought "it thundered" (John 12:29), and those who accompanied Saul heard the voice which spoke to him (Acts 9:7) but "heard not the voice" (Acts 22:9)—distinguished not the words.

"Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life" (2 Kings 7:7). How true it is that "the wicked flee when no man pursueth." Supposing that a more formidable force had come to the relief of the besieged Samaritans, the Syrians were filled with consternation and at once abandoned their well-provisioned camp. So thoroughly panic-stricken were they that they left their "horses" which would have helped their flight. How easily can the Lord make the heart of the stoutest to quake, and how vain and mad a thing it is for anyone to defy Him! "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it" (Ezek. 22:14). Then throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and make your peace with Him now.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

What method did God use to make the Syrians hear the noise of chariots, horses and a great host?

2 Kings 7:9-20

In continuing our contemplation of this miracle, let us now pause and admire the marvel of it. Ben-hadad had become dissatisfied with the results achieved by his marauding bands, and, gathering together the whole of his armed forces, determined to reduce Samaria to utter helplessness. Throwing a powerful force around their capital he sought to bring its inhabitants to complete starvation by means of a protracted siege. In order to carry out his scheme, he had brought with his army large supplies of food and clothing, so that they might be in comfort while they waited for the stores of his victim to give out. How nearly his plan succeeded we have seen: the Samaritans were reduced to the most desperate straits in an effort to keep life in their bodies. Yet as Scott pointed out, "In extreme distress unexpected relief is often preparing, and whatever unbelievers may imagine, it is not in vain to wait for the Lord, how long soever He seems to delay His coming."

But in the instance now before us, there is not a word to indicate that the Samaritans had been crying unto the Lord and looking to Him for relief. They had openly turned away from Him and were worshiping idols. This it is which renders the more noteworthy the act of Jehovah on this occasion: He was found of them that sought Him not (Isa. 65:1). He showed Himself strong on the behalf of a people who had grievously despised and insulted Him. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. It was the Most High acting in His absolute sovereignty, having mercy on whom He pleased to have mercy and showing favor unto those who not only had no claim thereto but who deserved only unsparing judgment at His hands. The means which the Lord used on this occasion was as remarkable as the exercise of His distinguishing mercy. He was pleased to use the stores of the Syrians, their deadly enemies, to feed the famished Samaritans. Thus were the wise taken in their own craftiness.

Four lepers outside Samaria's gates said, "Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2 Kings 7:3-4). Observe how God wrought: it was not by an audible voice that He bade these lepers act—not such are the mysterious but perfect workings of Providence. It is by means of a secret and imperceptible impulse from Him, through the process of

natural laws, that God usually works in men both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Those lepers acted quite freely of their own volition, in response to simple but obvious thoughts on their situation, and followed the dictates of common sense and the impulse of self-preservation. Mark, we are not here attempting to philosophize or explain the conjunction between the natural and the supernatural, but we are merely calling attention to what lies on the surface of our narrative, and which is recorded for our instruction.

When the four lepers arrived at the enemy's camp they found it to be deserted, "For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life" (2 Kings 7:6-7). That was indeed the employment of the supernatural—something over and above the ordinary workings of Providence, for though the Syrians misinterpreted the sound, we believe (as stated before) that what they heard was the movement of angelic horses and chariots (cf. 2 Kings 6:17). The Lord allowed their ears to register what normally would have been inaudible to them. Yet even here there was a blending of the supernatural with the natural: those celestial beings did not slay the Syrians but only terrified them by the noise which they made.

It may not so strike the reader, but what most impresses the writer in connection with this incident is the remarkable blending together of the supernatural and the natural, the operations of God and the actions of men, and the light this casts on the workings of divine providence. Perhaps that would be made plainer by first reading 2 Kings 7:6-7, where we have recorded the miracle itself and the startling effect which it had upon the Syrians, and then 2 Kings 7:5 where we are told of the action of these four men which led to their discovery of a miracle having been wrought, thereby preparing the way for all that follows. Here we have another illustration of what we have frequently pointed out in these pages, namely, that when God works He does so at both ends of the line: here openly at one end and secretly at the other. Had not the lepers actually journeyed to the Syrians' camp, those in Samaria would have remained in ignorance that food was to be had. God therefore moved those lepers to go there, yet how naturally He wrought! They were not conscious that He had given them a secret inclination to move, nor had they any inkling of the miracle, as their words in 2 Kings 7:4 make clear.

"And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they 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" (2 Kings 7:8). Solemn indeed is this, first, from the negative side. There was no recognition of the divine hand, no awesome explanation, "What hath God wrought!" No bowing before Him in thanksgiving for such a remarkable favor. They conducted themselves like infidels, accepting the mercies of heaven as a mere matter of course. And remember, they were lepers; but even such an affliction had not turned their hearts to the Lord. Be not surprised then that those whose homes are destroyed and whose bodies are injured by bombs are not brought to repentance thereby. After satisfying their hunger, they plundered the Syrian tents. Verily, "There is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). There was looting then as there is now, though theirs was not nearly so despicable and dastardly as what is now so common.

And why is it that "there is no new thing under the sun"? Because "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). Whether he be a man living in centuries B.C. or A.D., whether he be civilized or uncivilized, his heart is depraved. Civilization effects no change within any person, for civilization (not to be confused with morality and common decency) is but a veneer from without. But to return to our passage. The lepers, enriching themselves from the spoil of the Syrians, did not contribute to the relief of the starving Samaritans, and that was what Jehovah had promised. Mark then the sequel: "Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household" (2 Kings 7:9). The divine design of mercy to the starving city was not to be thwarted by the greed of these lepers, for His counsel must stand. Yet note how it was now effected.

As God had wrought secretly in those lepers in verses 3-4, He again did so now. First it was by an impulse upon their instinct of self-preservation; here it is upon their conscience. Yet observe how conscience acts in the unregenerate, producing not horror and anguish at having offended a gracious God, but causing fear of the consequences. This is made clearer by the rendering: "If we tarry till the morning light, we shall find punishment." But unless God had wrought secretly upon them, they too would have been like our own generation, from whom His restraining hand is removed and who are "given up to their own hearts' lusts"—utterly reckless and regardless of consequences. In this instance, in order to carry out His benevolent purpose, God put a measure of fear upon these lepers and caused them to realize that not only were they playing an ignoble part, but were likely to swiftly be smitten by His wrath if they failed to announce the good news to their famished fellows.

"Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household" (2 Kings 7:9). Here, as everywhere, we need to be much on our guard against making a misapplication of Scripture. It is so easy to read our own thought into the Word and thus find what we are looking for. Those who are so enthusiastic in urging young believers to become evangelists by preaching the gospel to all, would likely find in this verse what they would consider a striking passage on which to base an address on the necessity of personal work; yet it would be an altogether unwarranted use to make of it. This verse is very far from teaching, by typical implication, that it is the duty of every Christian to announce the "good tidings" to all they contact. Holy Writ does not contradict itself, and none other than the Lord Jesus has expressly bidden us, "Give not that

which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and tear you" (Matthew 7:6). That command is designed to bridle the restless energy of the flesh.

It was unto those who had been prepared for those "good tidings" who would welcome them, these lepers went forth, namely, to those who were fully conscious of their starving condition! There is a radical difference between those who are "lovers of pleasure" and satisfied with what they find therein, and the ones who have discovered the emptiness of such things and are deeply concerned about their eternal welfare; and there should be an equally radical difference in the way we deal with and speak to each of them. The gospel would not be "good tidings" to the former, but would be trodden beneath their feet if offered to them; yet it is likely to be welcomed by the latter. And if we unmistakably meet with the latter, it would be sinful for us to remain selfishly silent. "So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were" (2 Kings 7:10).

Not being permitted to enter the city, the four lepers called out to those who were keeping watch at its gate. They announced the good news in plain and simple language, and then left the issue with them. The chief porter did not receive the strange tidings with unbelief, but "he called the porters;" and, while he remained at his post of duty, "they told it to the king's house within" (2 Kings 7:11), middle of the night though it was. Here too we may perceive the continued, though secret, workings of the Lord. He it was who caused the porter to give heed to the message he had just heard. Altogether unexpected as it must have been, too good to be true as it would have sounded, yet he was divinely inclined to believe the glad tidings and promptly acquaint his royal master with them. Yet the porter acted quite freely and discharged his personal responsibility. How wondrous are the ways of Him with whom we have to do!

"And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city" (2 Kings 7:12). The king's reaction to the good news was thoroughly characteristic of him, being consistent with everything else recorded of him. Instead of expressing gratitude at the glad tidings, he voiced his skepticism; instead of perceiving the gracious hand of God, he suspected his enemies of laying a subtle snare. Perhaps some may be inclined to say, It was very natural for Jehoram to argue thus: the king was acting in prudence and wise caution. Natural it certainly was, but not spiritual! There was no thought that the Lord had now made good His word through the prophet, but simply the reasoning of a carnal mind at enmity against Him. One of the ways in which the carnal mind expresses itself is by a reasoned attempt to explain away the wondrous works and acts of God.

When God has spoken, plainly and expressly, it is not for us to reason, but to set to our seal that He is true and receive with unquestioning faith what He has said. If it is a promise, expect Him to make it good. The skepticism of the king only serves to show how the tidings borne by the lepers would have been lost on the porters and the entire royal household had not God wrought secretly but effectually in the one and the other. Accordingly we are next told, "And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see" (2 Kings 7:13). That too was "of the Lord." He it was who gave this servant both courage and wisdom to remonstrate with his master. He knew the man he had to deal with, as his "send and see" showed, reminding us at once of 2 Kings 6:10, when the king "sent" to see if Elisha's warning were a true one.

Nothing could be lost (unless it were the horses) by pursuing the policy proposed by the servant, and much might be gained. As the divine purpose could not be thwarted by the greed of the lepers, so it should not be by the skepticism of the king. It was God who gave the servant's counsel favor in his master's sight, and therefore we are told, "They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see" (2 Kings 7:14). God's ways and works are as perfect in their execution as they are in their devising. But be it noted that though Jehoram yielded to the solicitation of his servant, it was with some unbelief he did so, as his sending them "after the host of the Syrians" rather than "unto their camp" indicates. Nor was their errand in vain: "They went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste" (2 Kings 7:15). It was no temporary spasm of fear that possessed them but a thorough and lasting one. When God works, He works effectually.

"And the messengers returned, and told the king. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord" (2 Kings 7:15-16). Of course it was, for no word of God's can possibly fall to the ground, since it is the Word of Him "that cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). Men may scoff at it, kings may not believe it, even when its definite fulfillment is declared to them; but that affects not its truth. "Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise" (1 Kings 8:56). It is to be noted that the prediction made through Elisha was fulfilled in no vague and mere general way, but specifically and to the letter. That too is recorded both for our instruction and our consolation.

After all we have sought to bring out upon this miracle, its spiritual significance should, in its broad outline at least, be plain to every Christian reader. We say "its broad outline," for every detail in it is not to be regarded as a line in the picture. First, the starving Samaritans may surely be viewed as portraying perishing sinners. They were not seeking God nor looking to Him for relief. So far from it, they had turned their backs upon Him and had given themselves up to idolatry.

They were reduced to the most desperate straits, being quite unable to deliver themselves. As such they accurately represented the condition and position of the fallen and depraved descendants of Adam.

Second, in Ben-hadad and his hosts who sought the destruction of the Samaritans, we have a figure of Satan and his legions who are relentlessly attempting to destroy the souls of men, "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Third, in the divine deliverance of the famished Israelites, by a miracle of sovereign mercy, we have a striking foreshadowment of the saving of God's elect. The particular aspect of the gospel here pictured appears in the strange means which God employed to bring about deliverance, namely, His causing the Syrians themselves to supply the food for those they had designed to be their victims. Does not this remind us forcibly of that verse; "that through death he might destroy him that had [as the executioner] the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14)! As the Savior Himself declared, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53); yet by allowing the serpent to bruise His heel, He set free his captives. Incredible as it seems to the proud philosopher, it is by Christ's humiliation His people are exalted, by His poverty they are made rich, by His death they have life, by His being made a "curse" all blessing comes to them!

"And the king [God working secretly in him to do so] appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God [not simply 'Elisha'!] had said, who spake when the king came down to him. And so it fell out unto him" (2 Kings 7:17, 20). Thus in due course, the divine threat was executed, fulfilled to the very letter. Solemn indeed was this, being the awful sequel to what was before us in 2 Kings 7:1-2. In like manner God will yet answer the skepticism and blasphemous scoffing of this degenerate age. The great of this world may laugh at the Lord's servants now, but in eternity they shall gnash their teeth in anguish. This sequel completes the symbolic picture, showing as it does the doom of the reprobate. The gospel is a savor of death unto death as well as of life unto life. Unbelievers will "see" the elect feasting with Christ, as the rich man saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom; but they shall not partake thereof.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

What was the mechanism (means) that moved the lepers to go to the Syrian camp and then go tell the kings household what they found?

2 Kings 8:1-6

The first six verses of 2 Kings 8 chronicle an incident which is rather difficult to classify in connection with the ministry of Elisha. By this we mean it is perhaps an open question whether we are to regard it as properly belonging to the miracles which were wrought through his instrumentality. Undoubtedly the majority of Christian writers would look upon this episode as an example of the gracious and wondrous operations of divine providence, rather than a supernatural happening. With them we shall have no quarrel, for it is mainly a matter of terms—some define a "miracle" in one way and some in another. No question of either doctrinal or practical importance is involved: it is simply a matter of personal opinion whether this series of events is to be viewed as among the ordinary ways of the divine government as God orders the lives of each of His creatures, and in a more particular manner undertakes and provides for each of His dear children, or whether we are to contemplate what is here narrated as something over and above the workings of providence.

The signal deliverances which the Lord's people experience under the workings of His special providence are just as truly manifestations of the wisdom and power of God as are what many theologians would technically term His "miracles," and are so to be regarded by us. While strongly deprecating the modern tendency to deny and decry the supernatural, we shall not now enter into a discussion as to whether or not "the day of miracles is past;" but this we do emphatically insist upon, that the day of divine intervention is most certainly not past. God is as ready to hear the cry of the righteous now as He was in the time of Moses and the prophets, and to so graciously and definitely answer the prayer of faith as cannot be explained by so called "natural laws," as this writer, and no doubt many of our readers, can bear witness. Whether you term His interpositions "miracles" or not, this is sure; the Lord still shows Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect (upright, sincere) toward Him.

This is intimated by the opening word of our narrative. That "then," which occurs so frequently in the Scriptures, should never be hurried over carelessly. There is nothing meaningless nor superfluous in God's Word, and every syllable in it should be given its due force and weight. "Then" is a sign of time, emphasizing the season or occasion when some particular event happened. To ascertain its significance we should always pause and ask, When? And in order to find the answer, refer back to the immediate context—often obliging us to ignore a chapter division. By so doing we are better enabled to perceive the connection between two things or incidents, and often the moral relation the one sustains to the other, not only of cause and effect, but of antecedent and consequent.

In passing, we may point out that "Then" is one of the key words of Matthew's gospel, with which should be linked "when" and "from that time" (see Matthew 4:1,17; 15:1,21; 25:1; 26:14). The deeper significance of many an incident is discovered by observing this simple rule: Ask the "then"—when?

In our present instance the miracle we are about to contemplate is immediately linked to the one preceding it by this introductory "Then." There is therefore a close connection between them; the one is the sequel to the other. When considering 2 Kings 7, we saw how wondrously Jehovah wrought in coming to the relief of the famished Samaritans,

furnishing them with an abundant supply of food at no trouble or cost to themselves, causing their enemies to supply their needs by leaving their own huge stores behind them. But, as we pointed out, there was no recognition of the hand that had so kindly ministered to them, no acknowledgment of His goodness, no praising Him for such mercies. He had no place in their thoughts, for they had grievously departed from Him and given themselves up to idolatry. Consequently, here as everywhere, we find inseparably linked together "unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim. 3:2). Where there is no true piety, there is no genuine gratitude; and where there is no thankfulness, it is a sure sign of the absence of holiness. This is a criterion by which we may test our hearts: are we truly appreciative of the divine favors, or do we accept them as a matter of course?

It may seem a small matter to men whether they are thankful or unthankful for the bounties of their Maker and Provider, but He takes note of their response, and sooner or later regulates His governmental dealings with them accordingly. He will not be slighted with impunity. Whether He acts in judgment or in mercy, God requires us to acknowledge His hand, either by bowing in penitence beneath His rod, or offering to Him the praise of our hearts. When Moses demanded of Pharaoh that he should let the Hebrews go a three days' journey into the wilderness to hold a feast unto the Lord, he haughtily answered, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2). But before God's plagues were finished, the magicians owned, "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19), and the king himself confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord your God" (Ex. 10:16). We are expressly bidden "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good" (Ps. 136:1); and if men break that commandment, God will visit His displeasure upon them. One of the reasons why He gave up the heathen to uncleanness was because they were "unthankful" (Rom. 1:21, 24).

God employs various methods and means in chastening an ungrateful people. Chief among His scourges are His "four sore judgments," namely, "the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence to cut off from it man and beast" (Ezek. 14:21). In the present instance it was the second of these judgments. "Then spake Elisha 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 the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years" (2 Kings 8:1). This we regard as a miracle, and as connected with Elisha. First, because this pronouncement was a prophecy, a supernatural revelation which he had received from God and then communicated to the woman. Second, because his announcement here is expressly said to be "the saying of the man of God" (2 Kings 8:2), indicating he was acting in his official character. Third, because both in 2 Kings 8:1 and 5, this incident was definitely linked with an earlier miracle—the restoring of her dead son to life.

But our present miracle is by no means confined to the famine which the Lord here sent upon Samaria, nor to the prophet's knowledge and announcement of the same. We should also contemplate the gracious provision which the Lord made in exempting the woman from the horrors of it. A famine is usually the outcome of a prolonged drought with the resultant failure of the crops and the drying up of all vegetation, though in some cases it follows incessant rains which prevent the farmers from harvesting their grain. Now, had the Lord so pleased, He could have supplied this woman's land with rain, though it was withheld from her adjoining neighbors (see Amos 4:7), or He could have prevented her fields from being flooded, so that her crops might be garnered; or in some mysterious way He could have maintained her meal and oil that it failed not (1 Kings 17:16). Yet, though the Lord did none of those extraordinary things, nevertheless He undertook for her just as effectually by His providences.

This particular famine lasted no less than seven years, which was double the length of time of the one God sent on Samaria in the days of Elijah (Jam. 5:17). When men refuse to humble themselves beneath the mighty hand of God, He lays His rod more heavily upon them, as the successive plagues which He sent upon Egypt increased in their severity, and as the judgments mentioned in the Revelation are more and more distressing in nature. Of old God called upon Israel, "Consider your ways" and complained that His house was neglected, while they were occupied only with rebuilding and attending to their own. But they heeded Him not, and accordingly He told them, "Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands" (Hag. 1:10-11). Thus it was now upon the rebellious and idolatrous Samaritans.

This was "the woman whose son Elisha restored to life." She was before us in 2 Kings 4. There we saw that she was one who had a heart for the servant of God, not only inviting him into her house for a meal whenever he passed by her place, but building and furnishing for him a chamber (2 Kings 4:8-10). Then we beheld her remarkable faith; for instead of wringing her hands in despair upon the sudden death of her child, she promptly rode to Mount Carmel where Elisha then was, with the evident expectation that God would undertake for her in that extremity through His servant. Nor was her hope disappointed; a miracle was wrought and her dead son quickened. But now that the seven years' famine was imminent, Elisha did not keep to himself the knowledge he had received from the Lord, but put it to a good use, thinking of the family which had shown him kindness in his earlier days, warning the woman of the sore judgment that was about to fall upon the land of Samaria.

The prophet's action contains important instruction for us, especially for those who are the ministers of God. First, we are shown that we are not to selfishly keep to ourselves the spiritual light God gives us, but pass it on to those ready to receive it. Second, the servant of God is not to lose interest in those to whom God made him a blessing in the past, but

seek opportunities to further help them in spiritual things, particularly endeavoring to express his gratitude to those who befriended him in earlier days. Often this can be most effectively accomplished by prayer for them or by sending them a special word of greeting (see Romans 16:6; 2 Timothy 1:16). Elisha did not consider he had already discharged his indebtedness to this woman by restoring her son to life, but as a fresh emergency had arisen, he gave timely counsel. Third, here too we see God honoring those who honored Him. In the past she had ministered to the temporal needs of His servant, and He had not forgotten this. Having received a prophet in the name of a prophet, she now received the prophet's reward—light on her path.

Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn" (2 Kings 8:1). As there is no mention of her husband throughout the whole of this narrative it is likely he had died in the interval between 2 Kings 4 and 8 and that she was now a widow. If so, it illustrates the special care the Lord has for widows and orphans. But let us observe the exercise of His sovereignty on this occasion, for He does not always act uniformly. In an earlier famine He had miraculously sustained the widow of Zarephath by maintaining her meal and oil. He could have done the same in this instance, but was pleased to use other means, yet ones just as real and effective in supplying her every need. We must never prescribe to the Lord, nor limit Him in our thoughts to any particular form or avenue of deliverance, but trustfully leave ourselves in His hands and meekly submit to His imperial but all-wise ordering of our lot.

"Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn." How frequently are we reminded that here have we no continuing city, which should cause us to hold all earthly things with a very light hand. This incident also reminds us that the righteous are occasioned many inconveniences because of the conduct of the wicked; nevertheless the Lord evidences His particular care of His own when His judgments fall upon a nation. Observe to what a severe test this woman's faith was now submitted. It was no small matter to leave her home and property and journey with her household into another land, the inhabitants of which had for so long time been hostile to the Israelites. It called for implicit confidence in the veracity of God's servant. Ah, my reader, nothing but a genuine faith in God and His Word is sufficient for the human heart in such an emergency; but the mind of one who trusts Him will be kept in perfect peace.

"And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God" (2 Kings 8:2). Note well how that is phrased: she regarded Elisha's instruction as something more than the kindly advice of a personal friend, viewing him as the messenger of God to her. In other words, she looked above the prophet to his Master, and accepted the counsel as from Him. Thus she acted in faith, which was in entire accord with what was previously recorded of her. There is no hint that she murmured at her lot or complained at the severity of her trial. No, when faith is in exercise, the spirit of murmuring is quelled. On the contrary, when we grumble at our lot, it is sure proof that unbelief is dominant within us. Nor did she yield to a fatalistic inertia and say, If God has called for a famine, I must bow to it; and if I perish, I perish. Instead she acted as a rational creature, discharged her responsibility, forsook the place of danger, and took refuge in a temporary haven of shelter.

"And she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years" (2 Kings 8:2). Not in the adjoining territory of Judah, be it noted, for probably even at that date the Jews had "no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). It is sad, yet true, that a Christian will often receive kinder treatment at the hands of strangers than from those who profess to be the people of God. This Israelite woman had not been warranted when she took refuge among the Philistines without divine permission, for God had said unto Israel, "ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine" (Lev. 20:26); and therefore did He declare, "the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9). But note well that it is not said that she and her household "settled down" in the land of the Philistines but only that she "sojourned" therein, which means that she did not make herself one with them, but lived as a stranger in their midst (cf. Genesis 23:4; Leviticus 25:23).

"And sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years." That is surely remarkable, and very blessed. The Philistines had long been the enemies of Israel, and had recently made war against it. Yet here was this Israelite woman, and her household, permitted to live peacefully in their midst with her temporal needs supplied by them! In that we must see the secret power of God working on her behalf and giving her favor in their eyes. The Lord never confounds those who truly trust Him, and as this woman had honored His word through His prophet, so now He honored her faith. Her ways pleased the Lord, and therefore He made her enemies to be at peace with her.

"And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines" (2 Kings 8:3). This too is equally blessed. She had not found the society of the Philistines so congenial that she wished to spend the remainder of her days with them. But observe how it is worded: not "when the famine was over" she returned to Samaria, but "at the seven year's end" mentioned by the prophet—the word of God through His servant was what directed her! "And she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land" (2 Kings 8:3). It is not clear whether her property had reverted to the crown upon her emigration, or whether someone had unlawfully seized it and now refused to relinquish it; but whichever it was, she did not shirk her duty, but actively discharged her responsibility. She was neither a believer in passive resistance nor in looking to God to undertake for her while she shelved her duty—which would have been highly presumptuous. Scott has pointed out how this verse illustrates "the benefit of magistracy," and rightly added in connection therewith, "Believers may, on important occasions, avail themselves of their privileges as members of the community: provided they are not actuated by covetousness or resentment, do not manifest a contentious spirit and make

no appeal in a doubtful or suspicious cause; and rulers should award justice without respect of persons, and compel the injurious to restitution." Had not this woman now appealed to the king for the restoration of her own property, she would have condoned a wrong and refused to uphold the principles of righteousness.

This is equally striking, for the anointed eye will clearly perceive the power of the Lord working on behalf of His handmaid. "And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now" (2 Kings 8:4-6). Who can fail to see the superintending hand of God in the king's desire to hear of Elisha's miracles, the presence of one well qualified to inform him, the timing of such an occurrence, the interest in this woman which would be awakened in the King, and his willingness to grant her full restitution!

In the course of our remarks, we have called attention to many details of this incident which we may profitably take to heart, but there is one outstanding thing in it which especially claims our notice, namely, the wonder-working providences of God in behalf of the woman—through Elisha, the Philistines, Gehazi, and the king of Israel. And thus it is that He still acts on behalf of His own, making gracious provision for them in an evil day. Whatever be the means or the instruments He makes use of in providing a refuge for us in a time of trouble, it is as truly "the Lord's doing" and should be just as "marvelous in our eyes," especially when God constrains the wicked to deal kindly with us, as if He openly worked for us what are technically called "miracles." At the close of Psalm 107, after recounting the various deliverances the Lord wrought for those who cried unto Him, this comment is made: "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." The greater pains we take to observe God's hand undertaking for us by His providences, the better shall we understand His "lovingkindness" and the more confidence we shall have in Him.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

Speak about the timing of the woman who requested from the king to have her house and land restored.

2 Kings 8:7-15

The opening verse of 2 Kings 8 informs us that the Lord had called for a seven years' famine on Samaria, and we considered one of the things which transpired during that "sore judgment" from heaven. That which is now to claim our attention is not to be regarded as something which occurred after the expiration of the famine, but rather as what took place at its beginning. After tracing the experiences of the woman from Shunem, the Holy Spirit picks up the thread of 2 Kings 8:1 and informs us of the movements of the prophet himself. "And Elisha came to Damascus" (2 Kings 8:7). He too left Samaria, for it was no place for him now that the indignation of the Lord was upon it. When God deals in judgment with a people, His temporal plagues are usually accompanied by spiritual deprivations, often by removing His servants "into a corner" (Isa. 30:20), and then the people of God are left "as sheep without a shepherd"—one of the acutest afflictions they can experience. It was thus with Israel in the earlier famine days of Ahab. There is no intimation that Elijah did any preaching during these three and a half years, for the Lord sent him to Cherith and then to Zarephath.

Sad indeed is the plight of any people when they are not only scourged temporally but have their spiritual blessings taken from them too. During the times of the judges, when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25), we are told, ". . . in those days; there was no open vision" (1 Sam. 3:1). This signifies there was no accredited servant of God to whom the people could go for a knowledge of the divine mind and will. So again in the days of Ezekiel it was announced, "Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumor shall be upon rumor;" and as the climactic calamity: "Then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest" (Ezek. 7:26). Little as it is realized by the present generation, the most solemn, fearful, and portentous of all the marks of God's anger is the withholding of a Spirit-filled, faithful, and edifying ministry. For then there is "a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). There is much more than appears on the surface in that short statement, "And Elisha came down to Damascus."

Solemn indeed is that brief and simple sentence, denoting as it does that the prophet had left Samaria, left it because his ministry there was unwelcome, wasted. How often we find a parallel to this in the gospels. At the very beginning of His public ministry, we read that Christ "came down to Capernaum" (Luke 4:31). Why? Because at Nazareth they were filled with wrath at His teaching (Luke 4:28-29). "He entered into a ship, and passed over." Why? Because at Capernaum the whole city "besought him that he would depart out of their coasts" (Matthew 8:34; 9:1). He "withdrew himself from thence" because the Pharisees had "held a council against him" (Matthew 12:14-15). "He could there do no mighty work . . . because of their unbelief". What follows? "And He went round about their villages teaching" (Mark 6:5-6). "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you... lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). When God calls a pastor to another charge, the church he has left has reason to search itself before the Lord as to the cause.

"And Elisha came to Damascus" (2 Kings 8:7). The opening "And" links the incident which follows with the first verse of our chapter. But more, as was the case in several previous instances, it points a series of striking contrasts between this and the events recorded in the context. There, the central character was a godly woman; here it is a wicked man. In the former the prophet took the initiative, communicating with the woman; now, a king sends to inquire of the man of God. There his prophetic announcement was promptly credited; here it is scornfully ridiculed (2 Kings 8:13). In the first, the king's servant told him the truth (2 Kings 8:5); in this, another king's servant tells him a lie (2 Kings 8:13). There God put forth His power and graciously provided for one of His own; here He removes His restraining hand and lets one of the reprobate meet with a violent end. The previous miracle closed with the restoration of the woman's property to her; this ends with a callous murder and the usurper occupying the throne.

"And Elisha came to Damascus"—the most ancient city in the world, with the possible exception of Jerusalem. Josephus says that "it was founded by Uz, the son of Aram, and grandson of Shem." It is mentioned as early as Genesis 14:15, in the days of Abraham, 2000 B.C. It was captured and occupied in turn by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Paul commenced his ministry there (Acts 9:19-22). It remains to this day. In the time of Ahab, Ben-hadad, after his defeat by the Samaritans and the sparing of his life, said to the king of Israel, "Thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." Upon which Ahab said, "I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away" (1 Kings 20:34). Whether Ben-hadad ever made good his promise Scripture does not inform us, but his "covenant" with Ahab certainly gave Elisha the right of asylum in Damascus.

That Elisha had not fled to Damascus in the energy of the flesh in order to escape the hardships and horrors of the famine, but had gone there in the will of the Lord is evident from the sequel. In what follows we are shown how that while he was here he received communications from God and was used by Him. That is one of the ways in which the child of God may ascertain whether or not he is in the place he should be, or whether in self-will he has forsaken the path of duty. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:... and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21), make Myself a living reality to his soul, make discoveries of My glory to him through the written Word. But when we take matters into our own hands and our ways displease the Lord, communion is severed, and He hides His face from us. When we choose our own way and the Spirit is grieved, He no longer takes the things of Christ and shows them to us, but disquiets our hearts because of our sins.

Yes, God made use of Elisha while he sojourned in Damascus. But how varied, how solemnly varied, are the several ways in which He is pleased to employ His servants. Not now was he commissioned to heal a leper, nor to restore a dead child to life, but rather to announce the death of a king. Herein we have shadowed forth the more painful and exacting side of the minister's duty. He is required to set before men the way of life and the way of death. He is under bond to faithfully make known the doom awaiting the wicked, as well as the bliss reserved for the righteous. He is to preach the law as well as the gospel; to describe the everlasting torments of hell, as well as the unending glory of heaven. He is bidden to preach the gospel to every creature, and announce in no uncertain tones, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Only by so doing will he be warranted in saying, "I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

"And Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither" (2 Kings 8:7). The wearing of a crown does not exempt its possessor from the common troubles to which man is born; rather does it afford additional opportunities for gratifying the lust of the flesh, which will only increase his troubles. It is only by being temperate in all things that many sicknesses can be avoided, for walking according to the rules of Scripture promotes health of body as well as health of soul. When sickness overtakes a saint his first concern should not be its removal, but a definite seeking unto the Lord to ascertain why He has afflicted him (Job 10:2). His next concern should be to have his sickness sanctified to the good of his soul, that he may learn the lessons that chastisement is designed to teach him, that he may be able to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). But it is the privilege of faith to become better acquainted with *Jehovah-Rophi*, "the Lord that healeth thee" (Ex. 15:26).

In the case before us it was not a child of God who had fallen sick, but a heathen monarch. "And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" (2 Kings 7:8). What a startling antithesis this presents from what was before us in 2 Kings 6:31! Only a short time previously, the king of Israel had sworn a horrible oath that Elisha should be slain; here a foreign king owns him as "the man of God" and makes inquiry concerning his own life or death. Striking too is the contrast between Ben-hadad's action here and the last thing recorded of him when he sent his forces to take Elisha captive (2 Kings 6:14)! How fickle is human nature: Man is one day ready to pluck out his eyes and give them to a servant of God, and the next regards him as an enemy because he told the truth (Gal. 4:15-16). But now the Syrian king was concerned about his condition and anxious to know the outcome of his illness.

It appears to have been the practice in those days for a king who was seriously ill to make a formal inquiry from one whom he regarded as endowed with supernatural knowledge. Thus we read that when Jeroboam's son fell sick, he sent his wife to ascertain of Ahijah the prophet "what shall become of the child" (1 Kings 14:1-3); and again we are told that Ahaziah sent messengers "to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease." (2 Kings 1:2). From what is recorded in 1 Kings 20:23 and the sequel, we may conclude that Ben-hadad had lost confidence in his own "gods" and placed more reliance upon the word of Elisha; yet it is to be noted that he neither asked for his prayers nor expressed any desire for a visit from him; seriously sick as he felt himself to be, he was not concerned about his soul

but only his body. Throughout the whole of his career there is nothing to indicate he had the slightest regard for the Lord, but much to the contrary.

"So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" (2 Kings 8:9). The "present" was to intimate that he came on a peaceful and friendly mission and with no design of doing the prophet an injury or carrying him away as a prisoner. This too was in accord with the custom of those days and the ways of Orientals. Thus when Saul wished to consult Samuel about the lost asses of his father, he lamented the fact that he had "not a present to bring to the man of God" (1 Sam. 9:7), and when the wife of Jeroboam went to inquire of the prophet Ahijah she took a present for him (1 Kings 14:3). But looking higher, we may see in the lavish nature of Ben-hadad's present the guiding hand of God and an "earnest" for His servant that He would spread a table for him in the presence of his enemies! We are not told that Elisha refused this present, nor was there any reason why he should; perhaps he sent a goodly portion thereof to relieve the distress of the schools of the prophets still in Samaria.

"And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die" (2 Kings 8:10). Observe first a significant omission. Elisha did not offer to go and visit Ben-hadad! That was not because he was callous, for the very next verse shows he was a man of compassion. Rather was he restrained by the Lord, who had no design of mercy unto the Syrian king. Very solemn was that. But what are we to make of the prophet's enigmatical language? The disease from which your master is suffering will not produce a fatal end; nevertheless, the Lord has showed me that his death is imminent—by violence: another proof that the Lord God "revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). It is on this same principle we discover the harmony between there being "an appointed time to man upon earth" (Job 7:1) and "why shouldest thou die before thy time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17)—before the normal course of nature; and the fifteen years "added to" the course of Hezekiah's life—God intervening to stay the ordinary working of his disease.

"And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept" (2 Kings 8:11). The first clause must be interpreted in the light of all that follows. Had it stood by itself, we should have understood it to signify that Hazael was deeply grieved by the prophet's announcement and sought to control his emotions—though that would not account for the prophet bursting into tears. But the sequel obliges us to conclude that, far from being horrified at the news he had just received, Hazael was highly gratified, and the settling of his countenance was an endeavor to conceal his elation. Accordingly, we regard the "until he was ashamed" (the Hebrew word is often rendered, "confounded," and once, "put to confusion") as denoting that, under the piercing gaze of Elisha he realized he had not succeeded and was chagrined that his countenance revealed the wicked pleasure he found in the prophet's reply. God has wisely, justly, and mercifully ordered that to a considerable extent, the countenance is made to betray the workings of our minds and the state of our hearts.

The servant of God was not deceived by Hazael's playacting, for he not only had the aid of his own eyes to perceive the attempted deception, but also had a direct revelation from heaven concerning the sequel. The weeping of the man of God was not occasioned by his knowledge of the violent end awaiting Ben-hadad, but rather from what the Lord had also shown him concerning the fearful horrors which should shortly be inflicted upon Israel. In his tears we behold Elisha foreshadowing his incarnate Lord, who wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Elisha was no heartless stoic: even though he knew that his nation fully deserved the still sorer judgments which God would shortly visit upon it through the agency of the man who now stood before him, yet Elisha could not be unmoved at his prophetic foreview of their terrible afflictions. The prophets were men of deep feelings, as the history of Jeremiah abundantly manifests. So too was Paul (Phil. 3:18). So is every true servant of Christ.

"And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child" (2 Kings 8:12). Like the two preceding ones, this miracle consists of a supernatural disclosure, the announcing of a prophetic revelation which he had received directly from God—in this case a double one: the death of Ben-hadad and the judgments which should come upon Israel. Hazael was far from being melted by Elisha's tears (he was probably nonplussed by them), and in order to gain time for composure of mind, he asked the question which he did. It is solemn to note that while Elisha announced what he foresaw would happen, he made no effort to dissuade or deter Hazael—as our Lord foretold the treachery of Judas, but sought not to turn him from his evil purpose.

"And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" (2 Kings 8:13). Hotly did he resent such a charge, nor did he at that moment deem himself capable of such atrocities, nor did he wish the prophet to regard him as such a wretch. How little do the unregenerate realize or suspect the desperate wickedness of their hearts! How anxious are they that others should not think the worst of them! When not immediately exposed to temptations, they do not believe they are capable of such enormities, and are highly insulted when the contrary is affirmed. "And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." Again we see the extraordinary powers with which the prophets were invested, though Elisha gives God the glory for his. When Hazael ascended the throne, all human restraint would be removed from him, and enlarged powers and opportunities would be his for working evil.

"So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover" (2 Kings 8:14). Thus did Hazael seek to put off his guard the one he intended to murder by deliberately lying to him. "And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead" (2 Kings 8:15). And this was the man who a few hours before indignantly denied he had the character of a savage dog! In the fearful doom of Ben-hadad we see the righteous retribution of God. Having been a man of violence, he met with a violent end—as he had lived, so he died (see 1 Kings 20:1, 16, 21, 26, 29; 22:1; 2 Kings 6:8, 24). And for Hazael in the future: 2 Kings 10:32.

This is so obvious that very few words are needed: it is the glaring contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful servant. Elisha had unflinchingly declared the counsel which he had received from the Lord, however unpalatable it was to his hearer. But Hazael gives us a picture of the hireling, the false prophet, the deceiver of souls. Ostensibly he went forth in obedience to his master's commission (2 Kings 8:9); in reality he was playing the part of a hypocrite (2 Kings 8:11). When he delivered his message he falsified it by withholding the most pointed and solemn part of it (2 Kings 8:14). How many there are like him, uttering "smooth things" and remaining guiltily silent on the doom awaiting the wicked. As surely as Hazael slew Ben-hadad, the unfaithful preachers of our day are murdering souls. As Hazael became king, so the most faithless now occupy seats of power in Christendom.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

How does A. W. Pink compare Hazael with unfaithful preachers of our day?

2 Kings 8:16-29

A brief account of the life and reign of Jehoram, one of the worst of the kings of Judah, but the son and successor of Jehoshaphat, one of the best. A nation is sometimes justly punished with the miseries of a bad reign for not employing the blessings and advantages of a good one.

Concerning Jehoram, the general idea here given of his wickedness (v. 18): *He did as the house of Ahab*, and worse he could not do. Jehoram chose the house of Ahab for his pattern rather than his father's house, and this choice was his ruin.

The rebukes of Providence which he was under for his wickedness:

1. The Edomites revolted, who had been under the government of the kings of Judah ever since David's time, about 150 years, v. 20. He attempted to conquer them, and gave them a defeat (v. 21), but he could not recover his dominion over them: *Edom rebelled* (v. 22), and the Edomites were, after this, bitter enemies to the Jews, as appears by the prophecy of Obadiah and Psalm 137:7.

2. Libnah revolted. This was a city in Judah, in the heart of his country, a priests' city; the inhabitants of this city shook off his government *because he had forsaken God*, and would have compelled them to do so too, 2 Chron. 21:10, 11. In order that they might preserve their religion they set up for a free state.

3. His reign was short. God cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but forty years old, and had reigned but eight years.

The gracious care of Providence for the keeping up of the kingdom of Judah, and the house of David, despite the apostasies and calamities of Jehoram's reign (v. 19): *Nevertheless, the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah*.

The conclusion of this impious and inglorious reign, v. 23, 24. Nothing special is here said of him; but we are told (2 Chron. 21:19, 20) that he *died in great pain and his people made no fire in his honor*.

Jehoshaphat and Ahab had the same names in their families at the same time, in which they intended to compliment one another. Ahab had two sons. Ahaziah and Jehoram, who reigned successively; Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson named Jehoram and Ahaziah, who, in like manner, reigned successively. Ahaziah king of Israel had reigned but two years, Ahaziah king of Judah reigned but one. We are here told that his relation to Ahab's family was the occasion,

1. Of his wickedness (v. 27): *He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab*, that idolatrous bloody house: for his mother was Ahab's daughter (v. 26). When men choose wives for themselves they must remember they are choosing mothers for their children, and are concerned to choose accordingly.

2. Of his fall, Joram, his mother's brother, courted him to join with him for the recovery of Ramoth Gilead, an attempt fatal to Ahab; so it was to Joram his son, for in that expedition he was wounded (v. 28), and returned to Jezreel to be cured, leaving his army there in possession of the place. Ahaziah likewise returned, but went to Jezreel to see how Jehoram did, v. 29.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Judah was now infected with the sin of Israel. **What was Elijah's prophecy against Jehoram and the people of Judah and give details of the fulfillment?**

Despite the apostasies and calamities of Jehoram's reign why was Judah's lamp kept burning?

2 Kings 8:19 2 Chr. 22 Ps.132:17

2 Kings 9:1-10

"And when you arrive at that place, look for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him rise up from among his associates, and take him to an inner chamber" (2 Kings 9:2). Here we behold another example of the extraordinary powers possessed by Elisha. He knew where Jehu was to be found, that he would not be alone, the precise company he would be in, that he would be seated, and yet not in the inner chamber! But it was a trying ordeal to which he now subjected his deputy and a solemn errand on which he sent him. The wicked Jehoram (also called "Joram") was still on the throne and at that time sojourning in Ramoth-gilead, where he was recovering from the wounds which the Syrians had given him in the recent battle at Ramah (2 Kings 8:29). With him was the son of the king of Judah, who was visiting him in his sickness, and with him too were other members of the reigning house. The mission entrusted to the young prophet involved his entry into the royal quarters, his peremptory ordering one of the princes to accompany him to a private chamber, and then discharging the purpose for which he had come.

That purpose was not only to anoint and make him king, but to deliver an announcement which would to most temperaments be very unpleasant. But the minister of God, be he young or old, is not free to pick and choose either his sphere of labor or the message he is to deliver. No, being but a "servant" he is subject only to the will of his Master, and therefore any self-seeking or self-pleasing is nothing else than a species of insubordination. Implicit obedience to the Lord, no matter what it may involve or cost him in this life, is what is required of him, and only by rendering such obedience will he be rewarded in the next life, by hearing from the lips of Christ himself, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant... enter thou into the joy of the Lord." Oh that each young minister of Christ who reads these lines may be constrained to earnestly seek enabling grace that he may live and act now with the day to come before him.

"So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead" (2 Kings 9:4). Observe how the Holy Spirit has emphasized his youth! Often the babe in Christ is more pliable and responsive than an older Christian. Note there is nothing to show he asked for an easier task, objected to this one on the score of his youth, nor that he felt unworthy for such a mission—which is more often the language of pride than of humility, for *none* is "worthy" to be commissioned by the Almighty. It is entirely a matter of sovereign grace, and in nowise one of personal merit, that anyone is called to the ministry. Said the apostle Paul, "I was made a minister, according to the gift of the *grace* of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power." He at once added, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:7-8). He referred to a two-fold "grace": in calling and equipping him. When God calls one to His service, He also *furnishes* him. This is illustrated in this incident by "the box of oil" put into the young prophet's hand.

"And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. And he arose, and went into the house" (2 Kings 9:5-6). We regard the "behold" as having a threefold force. First, as calling attention to the accuracy of Elisha's indirect but obvious prediction in 2 Kings 9:2. Second, as emphasizing the severity of the ordeal which then confronted the young prophet: Jehu being surrounded by companions of note, and the likelihood that he would resent such an intrusion. Third, in view of what follows, as intimating the gracious hand of God so ordering things that Jehu promptly and uncomplainingly complied with the prophet's order, thus making it much easier for him. In that we see how God ever delights to honor those who honor Him and show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him.

In the charge here given to Jehu we are shown how he was to be God's battle-ax (Jer. 51:20) or sword of justice. Man might see in Jehu's conduct (see remainder of 2 Kings 9) nothing more than the ferocity of a human fiend, but in these verses we are taken behind the scenes as it were and shown how he was appointed to be the executioner of God's judgments. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end, it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab. 2:3). This is equally true whether the "vision" of prophecy foretells divine mercy or wrath, as the wicked house of Ahab was to discover.

"And he opened the door and fled" (2 Kings 9:10). This was most praiseworthy, and should be duly taken to heart by us. The servant of God is not free to please himself at any point but must carry out the orders he has received to the last letter. In all probability, if this young man had lingered, Jehu, after receiving such a high favor at his hands, would have evidenced his appreciation by bestowing some reward upon him, or at least feasting him at his royal table. But Elisha had bidden him, "Open the door [as soon as he had performed his errand] and flee, and tarry not" (2 Kings 9:3); and here we see his implicit obedience to his master. Oh that we may in all things render unqualified compliance with our Master's will. It is not without significance that in the very next verse the young prophet is scornfully referred to as "this mad fellow" (2 Kings 9:11) by one of the servants of the king. For the unregenerate are quite incapable of assessing at their true value the motives which prompt the faithful minister of Christ, and judging him by their own standards, regard him as crazy. But

what is the contempt and ridicule of the world if we have the approbation of the Lord? Nothing, and less than nothing, especially if we expect it, as we should do.

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

Compare this young prophet with the prophet that was sent to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 13:11-24?

2 Kings 9:11-10:36

The prophet leaves as suddenly as he came, and Jehu, challenged by his fellow officers, is compelled at last to deliver to them his message. Instantly they proclaim him king, spread their military cloaks as a carpet beneath his feet, and from the roof of the house in view of the camp hail him as the king of Israel. The army takes up the cry, and the revolution has been won.

The Revolution

But promptness and skill are necessary to prevent resistance. Instantly the gates of the city are closed, and Jehu with a select body of soldiers starts upon a forced march to Jezreel. Fifty miles long was the way, but swiftly did the furious driver cover it, and ere long a cloud of dust at the entrance to Jezreel proclaimed to the watchman in the tower that a cavalcade was coming. Messenger after messenger is sent out to meet them, but no answer is returned save an order to the messenger to turn and follow in the rear. At length the near approach of the party enables the watchman to identify the mad driving of Jehu.

Joram at once orders his chariot, and with Ahaziah, king of Judah, who is visiting him at the time, drives out to meet his general. Doubtless, he expects some message from the battlefield. "Has Hazael been beaten? Has he made peace with Israel?" "Do you come in peace?" (2 Kings 9:18). "Is it peace, Jehu?" is the question. But Jehu's answer leaves no doubt upon the royal mind. "How can there be peace, . . . as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?" (9:22).

The Retribution

Quickly Joram calls out to his brother sovereign, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" (9:23) and turns to flee. But it is too late. An arrow from Jehu's mighty bow pierces the royal heart, and as Joram falls from his chariot Jehu orders his bleeding body to be hurled into Naboth's vineyard that his blood may sink into the ground in the very place where Naboth died.

Dashing on to the palace where Jezebel watches the whole proceeding he lifts up his eyes to behold her, painted and gorgeously arrayed, looking down upon him from the portico and taunting him in her defiant pride as a true follower of the assassin Zimri. "Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?" (9:31). She is still the untamed lioness. But the hour of her doom has come. Hurling from the window by her attendants at Jehu's command, his horses and chariot wheels pass over her mangled body, and he drives on to the banquet hall to refresh himself with food and wine after his journey. Then he pauses to give orders for the burial of Jezebel, but the messenger returns to tell him that there is nothing left but a gnawed skull and the palms of her hands and her feet. The dogs have devoured her flesh, and the word of the Lord through Elijah has been fulfilled.

The Work of Judgment

But this is only the beginning. Samaria, the capital, has not yet been captured, and is in the hands of Ahab's princes with 70 of his sons under their tutelage and care. Jehu sends a polite message to the princes of Samaria, bidding them select one of Ahab's sons as his heir, and let him come to meet him face to face and fight out the issue for the throne. But the princes very sensibly conclude, "If two kings could not resist him, how can we?" (10:4). And they send back a meek message that they want no other king but Jehu, and are ready to become his loyal servants. "If," replies Jehu, "you are on my side and will obey me, take the heads of your master's sons and come to me in Jezreel by this time tomorrow" (10:6).

The next morning two ghastly pyramids of skulls stood at the entrance of the gate of Jezreel like those that Assyrian kings were accustomed to rear over conquered cities. As Jehu looked at them, he shrewdly turned the blame on Ahab's princes. "It was I who conspired against my master and killed him," he says, "but who killed all these?" (10:9). Taking as a pretext for his bloody work their murder of the princes, he slays all that remains of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, his kindred and his priests, until he has left none remaining.

Then sweeping on to Samaria he meets a lot of princes from Judah on the way, belonging to the house of the wicked Ahaziah, and leaves their corpses behind him, too. His entrance into Samaria is signaled by the execution of all Ahab's courtiers and princes there, and the men that had murdered Ahab's sons but yesterday are themselves the victims today.

The Finishing Stroke

But yet his commission has only been half fulfilled. He is bound to extirpate the whole brood of idolatry throughout the land. And so with the deepest subtlety he calls an assembly to the worshipers of Baal at the great temple in Samaria, announcing, "Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much" (10:18). They come from the north and the south and crowd the great assembly hall, and Jehu stands before them and offers sacrifice to Baal, and when the mocking pageant is over, his appointed soldiers fall upon the multitude and mingle their sacrifices with their blood. Then the images are brought forth and burned, and the very temple made a place for the garbage and refuse of the city to be thrown, while the historian adds, "So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel" (10:28).

Jehu's Failure

But how sad is the sequel! The very next sentence turns the picture over, and we read, "However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit—the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan" (10:29). He exterminated idolatry, but he did not restore the pure worship of Jehovah, but only the hybrid religion—half heathen and half divine—which Jeroboam had established and which had led Israel into all the sins for which his house was destroyed.

Not only so. Jehu himself continued to live an ungodly life, and his own conduct contradicted the work which his zeal had begun, "Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart" (10:31). And the record tells us, that while God blessed him for his fidelity to his terrible commission, yet He had to punish him and his people for his failure and his personal wickedness. "The Lord said to Jehu, 'Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation'" (10:30). But two verses later we see the story of the divine retribution for the national sin. "In those days the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel. Hazael overpowered the Israelites throughout their territory" (10:32). Such is the story of Jehu.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Show how the words of Elijah were literally fulfilled in the death of Ahab and Jezebel and the rule of Ahab's house.

2 Kings 11:1-21

God had assured David of the continuance of his family, which is called his *ordaining a lamp for his anointed*. Now here we have David's promised lamp almost extinguished and yet wonderfully preserved.

I. It was almost extinguished by the barbarous malice of Athaliah, the queen mother, who, when she heard that her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, *proceeded to destroy the whole royal family* (v. 1), all that she knew to be akin to the crown. She did it,

1. From a spirit of ambition. She thirsted after rule, and thought she could not get to it any other way.

2. From a spirit of revenge and rage against God. The house of Ahab being utterly destroyed, she resolved, as it were, by way of reprisal, to destroy the house of David. Well might she be called *that wicked woman Athaliah* (2 Chron. 24:7), Jezebel's own daughter.

II. It was wonderfully preserved by the pious care of one of Joram's daughters (who was wife to Jehoiada the priest), who stole away one of the king's sons, Joash by name, and hid him, v. 2, 3. The place of his safety was the house of the Lord, one of the chambers belonging to the temple, a place Athaliah seldom troubled. His aunt, by bringing him here, put him under God's special protection, and so hid him by faith, as Moses was hidden. Now were David's words made good to one of his descendants (Ps. 27:5), *He will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle*. With good reason did this Joash, when he grew up, set himself to repair the house of the Lord, for it had been a sanctuary to him. See the wisdom and care of Providence and how it prepares for what it intends; and see what blessings those lay up in store for their families that marry their children to those who are wise and good.

Six years Athaliah tyrannized. While Jehu was extirpating the worship of Baal in Israel, she was establishing it in Judah, as appears, 2 Chron. 24:7. All this while, Joash lay hid, entitled to a crown and intended for it, and yet buried alive in obscurity. Joash in his seventh year was ready to be shown, having served his first apprenticeship to life and arrived at his first critical year. By that time the people had grown weary of Athaliah's tyranny and ripe for a revolution. How that revolution was effected:

I. The manager of this great affair was Jehoiada the priest, probably the high priest. By his birth and office he was a man in authority. By marriage he was allied to the royal family, and, if all the royal family were destroyed, his wife, as daughter to Joram, had a better title to the crown than Athaliah had. By his eminent gifts and graces he was fitted to serve his country, and better service he could not do it than to free it from Athaliah's usurpation.

II. The management was very discreet as became so wise and good a man as Jehoiada.

1. He planned the matter with the *commanders of units of a hundred and the Carites*, the men in office, ecclesiastical, civil, and military; he got them to him to the temple, consulted with them, gave them an oath of secrecy, and *showed them the king's son* (v. 4). What a pleasing surprise it was to them, who feared that the house and lineage of David were quite cut off, to find such a spark as this in the embers.

2. He posted the priests and Levites, who were more immediately under his direction, in the several avenues to the temple, to keep guard. David had divided the priests into courses. Every Sabbath day morning a new company came into waiting, but the company of the previous week did not go out of waiting until the Sabbath evening, so that on the Sabbath day, when double service was to be done, there was a double number to do it. These Jehoiada employed to attend on this great occasion; he armed them out of the armory of the temple with David's spears and shields. Two things they were ordered to do:

(1) To protect the young king from being insulted.

(2) To preserve the holy temple from being profaned by the concourse of people that would come together on this occasion (v. 6).

3. When the guards were fixed, then the king was brought forth, v. 12. Jehoiada, without delay, proceeded to the coronation of this young king. This was done with great solemnity, v. 12.

(1) As a sign of his being invested with kingly power, he *put the crown on him*.

(2) As a sign of his obligation to govern by law, and to make the word of God his rule, he gave him the testimony, Deut. 17:18, 19.

(3) As a sign of his receiving the Spirit, to qualify him for this great work to which he before was called, he anointed him.

(4) As a sign of the people's acceptance of him and subjection to his government, they clapped their hands for joy, and expressed their hearty good wishes to him: *Long live the king*; and thus they made him their king and concurred with the divine appointment. They had reason to bid him welcome to the crown whose right it was, and to pray, *Long let him live*, concerning him who came to them as life from the dead and in whom the house of David was to live. With such acclamations of joy and satisfaction must the kingdom of Christ be welcomed into our hearts when his throne is set up there and Satan the usurper is deposed.

It was intended when they had finished the celebration of the king's inauguration, to pay a visit to Athaliah, and call her to an account for her murders, usurpation, and tyranny; but, like her mother Jezebel, she went out to meet them, and hastened her own destruction.

1. Hearing the noise, she came in a fright to see what was the matter, v. 13. Jehoiada and his friends proclaimed what they were doing. When she heard the noise it was strange that she was so ill advised as to come herself, and, for all that appears, to come alone.

2. Seeing what was done she cried out for help. She saw the king's place by the pillar possessed by one to whom the princes and people did homage (v. 14). This made her tear her clothes and cry, "Treason! treason! Come and help against the traitors."

3. Jehoiada gave orders to put her to death as an idolater, a usurper, and an enemy to the public peace.

(1) That she should not be killed in the temple.

(2) That whoever appeared for her should die with her. She endeavoring to make her escape the back way to the palace, through the stalls, they pursued her, and there killed her, v.16.

Jehoiada had now got over the hardest part of his work, when, by the death of Athaliah, the young prince had his way to the throne cleared of all opposition.

I. The good foundations he laid, by an original contract, v. 17. Now that prince and people were together in God's house, Jehoiada took care that they should jointly covenant with God, and mutually covenant with each other, that they might rightly understand their duty both to God and to one another.

1. He endeavored to settle and secure the interests of religion among them, by a covenant between them and God. In this covenant, the king stands on the same level with his subjects and is as much bound as any of them to serve the Lord. By this engagement they renounced Baal, whom many of them had worshipped, and resigned themselves to God's government. By our bonds to God the bonds of every relation are strengthened. They *gave themselves first to the Lord*, and then *to us*, 2 Cor. 8:5.

2. He then settled both the coronation-oath and the oath of allegiance, the *pacta conventa*—*covenant*, between the king and the people, by which the king was obliged to govern according to law and to protect his subjects, and they were obliged, while he did so, to obey him and to bear faith and true allegiance to him.

II. The good beginnings he raised on those foundations.

1. Pursuant to their covenant with God they immediately abolished idolatry. Every one, now that they were so well headed, would lend a hand to pull down Baal's temple, his altars, and his images. All his worshippers, it should seem, deserted him; only his priest Mattan stuck to his altar. Though all men forsook Baal, he would not, and there he was slain. Having destroyed Baal's temple, they *posted guards at the temple of the Lord*, to see that the service of God was regularly performed by the proper persons, in due time, and according to the instituted manner.

2. Pursuant to their covenant with one another,

(1) The king was brought in pomp to the royal palace, and sat there on the throne of judgment, *the throne of the house of David* (v. 19), ready to receive petitions and appeals, which he would refer to Jehoiada to give answers to and to give judgment concerning.

(2) The people rejoiced, and Jerusalem was in quiet (v.20).

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

How does 2 Kings 11:18 speak to you concerning your personal life?

2 Kings 12:1-21

This chapter gives us the history of the reign of Joash, which does not correspond to that glorious beginning of it which we had an account of in the previous chapter; he was not so illustrious at forty years old as he was at seven, yet his reign is to be reckoned one of the better sort, and appears much worse in Chronicles (2 Chron. 24) than it does here. Here we are only told, I. That he did well while Jehoiada lived, verses 1 -3. II. That he was careful and active to repair the temple, verses 4-16. III. That after a wicked compact with Hazael (verses 17, 18) he died ingloriously, verses 19-21.

The general account given of Joash is,

1. That he reigned forty years.

2. That he did that which was right as long as Jehoiada lived to instruct him, v. 2.

3. That the *high places were not removed*, v. 3. Up and down the country they had altars both for sacrifice and incense, to the honor of the God of Israel only. These private altars, perhaps, had been more used in the recent bad reigns than formerly, because it was not safe to go up to Jerusalem, nor was the temple service performed as it should have been; and, it may be, Jehoiada condoned them, because he hoped that the reforming of the temple, and putting things into a good posture there, would by degrees draw people from their high places and they would dwindle of themselves.

An account of the repairing of the temple in the reign of Joash.

I. Though Solomon built it of the best materials and in the best manner, yet in time it went to decay, and there was *damage found in it* (v. 5). Even temples themselves are the worse for the wearing; but the heavenly temple will never grow old. Yet it was not only the teeth of time that caused this damage, the sons of Athaliah had *broken into the temple* (2 Chron. 24:7).

II. The king himself was the first and most eager man who took care for the repair of it.

1. Because he was king, and God expects and requires from those who have power that they use it for the maintenance and support of religion, the redress of grievances, and reparation of decays.

2. Because the temple had been both his nursery and his sanctuary when he was a child, in a grateful remembrance of which he now appeared zealous for the honor of it. Those who have experienced the comfort and benefit of religious assemblies will make the support of them their care, and the prosperity of them their chief joy.

III. The priests were ordered to collect money for these repairs, and to take care that the work was done.

1. He gave them orders for the levying of the money. They must not stay until it was paid in, but they must call for it where they knew it was due, in their respective districts, as redemption-money (by virtue of the law, Exod. 30:12), or as estimation-money (by virtue of the law, Lev. 27:2, 3), or as a free will offering, v. 4.

IV. This method did not answer the intention, v. 6. Little money was raised. Either the priests were careless, and did not call on the people to pay in their dues, or the people had so little confidence in the priests' management that they were

reluctant to pay money into their hands. But what money was raised was not applied to the proper use: *The priests still had not repaired the temple.*

V. Another method was therefore taken. The king had his heart much set on *repairing the damage done to the temple, v. 1*. His apostasy, at last, gives us cause to question whether he had as good an affection for the service of the temple as he had for the structure. Many have been zealous for building and beautifying churches, and for other forms of godliness, who yet have been strangers to the power of it. However, we commend his zeal. Another course was taken,

1. For raising money, v. 9, 10. The money was put into a public chest, and then people brought it in readily and in great abundance. The money that was given,

(1) Was dropped into the chest through a hole in the lid, past recall, to intimate that what has been once resigned to God must never be resumed.

(2) The chest was put on the right hand as they went in, which, some think, is alluded to in that rule of charity which our Savior gives, *Let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing*. But, while they were getting all they could for the repair of the temple, they did not bring in that which was the stated maintenance of the priests, v. 16. Let not the servants of the temple be starved under the pretence of repairing the damage done to it.

2. For laying out the money that was raised.

(1) They did not put it into the hands of the priests, who were not versed in affairs of this nature, having other work to attend, but *gave the money to the men appointed to supervise the work, v. 11*. [1] Carefully, purchasing materials and paying workmen, v. 12. [2] Faithfully, such a reputation they got for honesty that there was no occasion to examine their bills or audit their accounts. Those who think it is no sin to cheat the government, cheat the country, or cheat the church, will be of another mind when God shall set their sins in order before them.

(2) They did not lay it out in ornaments for the temple, in vessels of gold or silver, but in necessary repairs first (v. 13).

When Joash had revolted from God and become both an idolater and a persecutor the hand of the Lord went out against him, and his *last state was worse than his first*.

I. His wealth and honor became an easy prey to his neighbors. Hazael, when he had chastised Israel (*ch. 10:32*), threatened Judah and Jerusalem likewise, took Gath, a strong city (v. 17), and therefore intended to march with his forces against Jerusalem. Joash had neither spirit nor strength to resist him, but gave him all the hallowed things, and all the gold that was found both in his royal palace and in the treasury of the temple (v. 18), to bribe him to march another way. If he had not forsaken God, and forfeited his protection, his affairs would not have been brought to this extremity. He lost the honor of a prince and a soldier. He impoverished himself and his kingdom. He tempted Hazael to come again, when he could carry home so rich a booty without striking a stroke. And the next year the army of Aram came up against Jerusalem, destroyed the prince, and plundered the city, 2 Chron. 24:23, 24.

II. His life became an easy prey to his own servants. They conspired against him and slew him (v. 20, 21), to be avenged on him for murdering the prophet, Jehoiada's son. Thus fell Joash, who began in the spirit and ended in the flesh.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

How must we be on our guard so not to fall into the same fate as Joash?

2 Kings 13:1-13

The history of the kings of Israel, and particularly of the family of Jehu. We have here an account of the reign, I. Of his son Jehoahaz, which continued seventeen years. 1. His bad character in general (ver. 1, 2), the trouble he was brought into (ver. 3), and the low ebb of his affairs, ver. 7. 2. His humiliation before God, and God's compassion towards him, ver. 4, 5, and again, ver. 23. 3. His continuance in his idolatry nevertheless, ver. 6. 4. His death, ver. 8, 9. II. Of his grandson Joash, which continued sixteen years. Here is a general account of his reign (ver. 10-13), but a particular account of the death of Elisha. 1. The kind visit the king made him (ver. 14), the encouragement he gave the king in his wars with Aram, ver. 15-19. 2. His death and burial (ver. 20), and a miracle performed by his bones, ver. 21. And, lastly, the advantages Joash gained against the Arameans, according to his predictions, ver. 24, 25.

In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. (1 Kings 13:1)

A general account of the reign of Jehoahaz, and of the state of Israel during his seventeen years.

I. The glory of Israel turned into shame. How is its crown profaned and its honor laid in the dust!

1. It was the honor of Israel that they worshipped the only living and true God, who is a Spirit, an eternal mind, and had rules by which to worship Him of His own appointment; but by *exchanging the glory of their immortal God for images*

made to look like birds and animals and reptiles, the truth of God for a lie, they lost this honor, and leveled themselves with the nations that worshipped the work of their own hands. We find here that the king *followed the sins of Jeroboam* (v. 2), and the people *did not turn away from them, but continued in them*, v. 6.

2. It was the honor of Israel that they were taken under the special protection of heaven; God himself was their defense. But here, as often before, we find them stripped of this glory, and exposed to the insults of all their neighbors. They by their sins provoked God to anger, and then he *kept them under the power of Hazael and Ben-Hadad*, v. 3. *Hazael oppressed Israel*, v. 22. Surely never was any nation so often plucked and pillaged by their neighbors as Israel was.

II. Some sparks of Israel's ancient honor appearing in these ashes. For,

1. It was the ancient honor of Israel that they were praying people: and here we find somewhat of that honor revived; for Jehoahaz their king, in his distress, *sought the Lord's favor* (v. 4), applied for help, not to the calves (what help could they give him?) but to the Lord.

2. It was the ancient honor of Israel that they had *God near to them whenever they pray to Him* (Deut. 4:7) and so He was here. Though He might justly have rejected the prayer as an abomination to Him, yet *the Lord listened to Jehoahaz*, and to his prayer for himself and for his people (v. 4), and *he provided a deliverer for Israel* (v. 5), not Jehoahaz himself, for all his days Hazael oppressed Israel (v. 22), but his son, to whom, in answer to his father's prayers, God gave success against the Arameans, so that he recovered the cities which they had taken from his father, v. 25. This gracious answer God gave to the prayer of Jehoahaz in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham (v. 23). See how swift God is to show mercy, how willing to find out a reason to be gracious, else he would not look so far back as that ancient covenant.

Joash, the son of Jehoahaz and grandson of Jehu, on the throne of Israel. Probably the house of Jehu intended some respect for the house of David when they gave this heir-apparent to the crown the same name with him that was then king of Judah.

He was none of the worst, and yet, because he kept up that ancient and politic idolatry of the house of Jeroboam, it is said, *He did evil in the eyes of the Lord*.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Show the state of the kings of Israel and the people at this point in their history?

Why was Israel delivered and who delivered them?

Was it king Joash of Judah or king Joash of Israel that died in these verses?

2 Kings 13:14-25

"Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died" (2 Ki. 13:14). "The Spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha and yet he is not sent for to heaven in a fiery chariot, as Elijah was, but goes the common road out of the world. If God honors some above others, who yet are not inferior in gifts and graces, who should find fault? May He not do what He wills with His own?" (Henry). God does as He pleases and gives no account of His matters. He asks counsel of none and explains His actions to none. Every page of Holy Writ registers some illustration and exemplification of the exercise of His high sovereignty. "Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deut. 34:7). Whereas of Joshua, who lived ten years less (Josh. 24:29), we read that he "waxed old" and was "stricken in age" (23:1); yet certainly he was not inferior in spirituality, nor did he occupy a less eminent position in the Lord's service than did his predecessor. So it is still; God preserves the faculties of some unto old age, yet not so with others.

"And Joash the king (also called 'Jehoash' in 2 Ki. 1:21, the grandson of Jehu; he is to be distinguished from 'Joash the king of Judah' in 2 Ki. 13:10-13), came down unto him" (v. 14). This indicates that the prophet had not spent his closing years in isolated seclusion, for the king of Israel, not long come to the throne, knew the place of his abode. But this mention of the king's visit also informs us that the man of God was held in high esteem, and though the royal house had sadly failed to respond to his teachings, yet they recognized his value to the nation. Israel's fortunes had fallen to a very low point, for a little earlier than this we are told, "In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan" (10:32-33). What would the end be if Elisha were now removed!

"And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Ki. 13:14). While this visit of the king probably indicated his respect for Elisha, yet his tears are not to be regarded as proof of his affection for him; the second half of the verse really interprets the first. The king was worried over the assaults of Hazael, and greatly feared that upon the death of this man whose

counsels and miracles had more than once been of service to the royal house and saved the nation from disaster (3:16-25, 6:9, 7:1), it would henceforth be left completely at the mercy of their enemies. Joash regarded the prophet as the chief bulwark of the nation, and the prospect of his speedy removal filled him with consternation and sorrow. Thus there was a strange mingling of esteem and selfishness behind those tears; and is not that generally the case even in connection with the departure of a loved one?

The practical lesson for us here is plain. In the words of another,

Let us seek so to live that even ungodly men may miss us when we are gone. It is possible for us in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, so to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things, that when we die many shall say "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," and men shall drop a tear, and close the shutter, and be silent and solemn for an hour or two when they hear that the servant of God is dead. They laughed at him while he lived, but they weep for him when he dies: they could despise him while he was here, but now that he is gone they say:—"We could have better missed a less-known man, for he and such as he are the pillars of the commonweal: they bring down showers of blessing upon us all." I would covet this earnestly, not for the honor and esteem of men, but for the honor and glory of God, that even the despisers of Christ may be compelled to see there is a dignity, a respect, about the walk of an upright man.

"And said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Ki. 13:14). This was an acknowledgment that Joash regarded Elisha as the chief security of his kingdom, his best defense against aggressors, as the piety and prayers of God's people are today the nation's best protection in a time of evil, being far more potent than any material weapons. But we must note the striking language used by the king on this occasion as he gave expression to that truth. We dwelt at some length upon the connection which the ministry of Elisha has to that of his predecessor: how he was raised up to act in his stead and carry forward the work which he began. The final confirmation of the identity of the latter with the former is found in these words of the king, for they unmistakably make clear the unusually intimate relation he sustained to the Tishbite. As he had gazed on the departing form of his master, Elisha had cried "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2:12), and now that he was on the eve of taking his departure from this world, another utters the same words over him!

We turn now to consider Elisha's response to the king's visit, his tears, and his acknowledgment. The prophet was very far from acting as a flatterer before Joash on this occasion, but maintained and manifested his official dignity to the end of his course. He was an ambassador of the King of kings, and conducted himself accordingly. Instead of any indication that he felt himself to be honored by this visit or flattered by the monarch's tears, the man of God at once took charge of the situation and gave orders to his earthly sovereign. Let not young ministers today conclude from this incident that they are thereby justified in acting haughtily and high-handedly in the presence of their seniors and superiors. Not so. Such an inference would be entirely unwarranted, for they do not occupy the extraordinary office which Elisha did, nor are they endowed with his exceptional gifts and powers. Nevertheless, they are to maintain their dignity as the ministers of Christ: "Let no man despise thy youth: but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in [behavior], in [love], in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12).

"And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows" (2 Ki. 13:15). What follows is virtually a parable in action. It should be remembered that in Eastern lands, instruction by means of symbolic actions is much more common than it is with us; and thus we find the prophets frequently using this method. When Samuel would intimate unto the self-willed Saul that "the LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day," he "laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent" (1 Sam. 15:28, 27). When the prophet Ahijah announced that the Lord would "rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give ten tribes to another," he caught hold of the new garment upon Jeroboam and "rent it in twelve pieces" and bade him "take thee ten pieces" (1 Ki. 11:29-31). Even the false prophets employed such means (see 1 Ki. 22:10-11). Significant emblems were presented to the eye to stir up the minds of those who beheld them and evoke a spirit of inquiry (see Jer. 27:2 and cf. 28:10-11 and see Eze 24: 17-19). To this custom God referred when He said, "I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets" (Hos. 12:10). For a New Testament example see Acts 21:10-11.

When Elisha bade Joash "Take bow and arrows," he was making use of a visual "similitude." The articles selected at once explain it. In response to the king's lamentation the prophet said, in effect, Weeping over my departure will avail the nation nothing: stand fast in the faith, quit you like a man, be strong (1 Cor. 16:13). Take not the line of least resistance, but assemble your forces, lead your army in person against the enemy. Though I be taken away from the earth, Jehovah still lives and will not fail those who put their confidence in Him. Nevertheless, you must discharge your responsibility by making good use of the means at hand.

Thus Joash was informed that he was to be the instrument of Israel's deliverance by means of his own military efforts, and that if he trusted in the Lord and followed out His servant's instructions, He would grant him full success. There was no need then for the king to be so distressed. If he acted like a man, God would undertake for him!

"And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow.

And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands" (2 Ki. 13:16). Here again we see the commanding authority and influence which the prophet had, under God, for Joash made no demur but meekly did as he

was ordered. By placing his hands upon the king's, Elisha signified his identification with what he should yet do, thereby intimating that he owed it to the prophet's mission and ministry that Israel was to be spared and that God would again intervene on their behalf. By symbolic action, Elisha was saying to him, "The battle is not your's, but God's" (2 Ch. 20:15). How little is that recognized today! "He teacheth my hands to war" (Ps. 18:34) was what Elisha now sought to impress upon his royal master.

"And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou hast consumed them" (2 Ki. 13:17). In those words the prophet explained to the king the meaning of his symbolic actions, and what should be the outcome of them. It evidenced that Elisha's mind was still occupied with the welfare of Israel. It demonstrated that he still acted as the servant of Jehovah; it was the final use of his prophetic gift and proof of his prophetic office. "Eastward" was the portion of the land which Hazael had already conquered (10:33), and in bidding the king shoot in that direction Elisha indicated where the fighting would have to be done. Notice the striking conjunction of the divine and human elements here, and the order in which they were made. It should be "the arrow of the LORD'S deliverance," yet "thou (Joash) shalt smite the Syrians." God would work, yet by and through him!

"And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed" (v. 18). In the light of what follows it is clear that the king's faith was here being put to the test; the prophet would have him indicate his reaction to the reassuring message he had just heard. "Smite upon the ground" and intimate thereby how far you believe the words which I have spoken and really expect a fulfillment of them. Did the Lord's promise sound too good to be true, or would Joash rest upon it with full confidence? Would he lift up his heart and eyes to God and say with David, "Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me" (Ps 18:40), or would he follow the temporizing course which Ahab had pursued, when instead of following up his victory by slaying Ben-hadad whom the Lord had delivered into his hand, spared his life, made a covenant with him, and then sent him away (1 Ki. 20:29-31)?

"And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times" (2 Ki. 13:19). There are some who teach that a saint should never lose his temper, that all anger is sinful, which shows how little their thoughts are formed by Scripture. In Ephesians 4:26-27 Christians are thus exhorted: "Be ye angry, and sin not," though it is at once added, "let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil." There is a holy and spiritual anger—a righteous indignation—as well as a carnal and sinful one. Anger is one of the divine perfections, and when the Son became incarnate we read that on one occasion He "looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Elisha was disgusted at the half-hearted response made by the king to his message, and from love for Israel, he was indignant that Joash should stand in their way and deprive them of full deliverance from their foes. And if we had more zeal for God and love for souls we would be angry at those who deprive them of their privileges.

"You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria *only* three times" (2 Ki. 13:19). What possible difference to the issue could be made by the number of times the king smote upon the ground? If God had foreordained that the Syrians should be "consumed" (v. 19), then could any failure on the part of Joash prevent or even modify it? But do not Elisha's words plainly signify that the extent to which the Syrians would be vanquished turned upon the response made by him to the divine promise? We shall not here give a solution to this problem.

Instead of wasting time on metaphysical subtleties let us learn the practical lesson which is here pointed, namely, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Mt. 9:29). For it was at that point Joash failed; he did not thoroughly believe the prophet's words. The majority of God's people today need to realize that the exercise of faith does make a real difference in what they obtain or fail to obtain from God, as real and as great a difference as between Joash "consuming" the Syrians (the Hebrew word is rendered "destroy utterly" in Lev. 26:44 and "make an utter end of" in Nah. 1:8-9) and the "three times" he beat Hazael (2 Ki. 13:25). Most Christians expect little from God, ask little, and therefore receive little, and are content with little. They are content with little faith, little knowledge of the deep things of God little growth and fruitfulness in the spiritual life, little joy, peace, and assurance. And the zealous servant of God is justified in being wroth at their lack of spiritual ambition,

"And Elisha died, and they buried him" (2 Ki. 13:20). It is to be noted that nothing is said here of any burial service. Nor is there anywhere in the Scriptures, either in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Elaborate, mournful ceremonies are of pagan origin and are neither authorized nor warranted by the Word of God. If the body of Christ was tenderly and reverently interred without the mummery of any "service" over His corpse, shall the disciple be above his Master! What slaves many are to "the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:2), and in what bondage do they let themselves be held through fear of public opinion, afraid of what their friends and neighbors would think and say if they should be regulated only by Holy Writ.

"And 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 sepulcher 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). Behold here once more the sovereignty of God; He honored Elijah at his departure from this world, but Elisha, in a different way afterward. It was the Lord's seal upon His servant's mission. It indicated that the Lord was his God after death as well as

before, and thus furnished evidence both of the immortality of the soul and the final resurrection of the body. It was an intimation that other miracles would yet be wrought for Israel in response to his prayers and as the result of his labors. Thus to the end, miracles are connected with the mission of Elisha,

(Gleanings From Elisha, A. W. Pink)

What is the meaning behind Joash only striking the ground three times? What application does this have for us today?

What is the significance of the miracle of the man that was raised from the dead that had touched the bones of Elisha?

2 Kings 14:1-29

This chapter continues the history of the succession in the kingdoms both of Judah and Israel. I. In the kingdom of Judah, 1. The entire history of Amaziah's reign. (1) His good character, ver. 1-4. (2) The justice he executed on the murderers of his father, ver. 5, 6. (3) His victory over the Edomites, ver. 7. (4) His war with Joash, and his defeat in that war, ver. 8-14. (5) His fall, at last, by a conspiracy against him, ver. 17-20. 2. The beginning of the history of Azariah, ver. 21, 22. II. In the kingdom of Israel, the conclusion of the reign of Joash (ver. 15, 16), and the entire history of Jeroboam his son, the second of that name, ver. 23 -29.

Amaziah, the son and successor of Joash.

I. In the temple he acted, in some measure, well, like Joash, but not like David, v. 3. He began well, but did not persevere. It is not enough to do that which our pious predecessors did, merely to maintain the custom, but we must do it as they did it, from the same principle of faith and devotion and with the same sincerity and resolution. It is here taken notice of, as before, that *the high places were not removed*, v. 4.

II. On the bench we have him doing justice on the traitors who murdered his father, not as soon as he came to the crown, lest it should occasion some disturbance, but he prudently deferred it until *the kingdom was firmly in his grasp*, v. 5. *He did not put the sons of the assassins to death*, because the law of Moses had expressly provided that *the children shall not be put to death for the fathers.*, v. 6. ,

III. In the field we find him triumphing over the Edomites, v. 7. Edom had *been in rebellion against Judah* in Joram's time, *ch. 8:22*. Now he makes war against them to bring them back to their allegiance. We shall find a larger account of this expedition, 2 Chron. 25:5ff.

For several successions after the division of the kingdoms that of Judah suffered much by the *enmity* of Israel. After Asa's time, for several successions, it suffered more by the *friendship* of Israel, and by the alliance and affinity made with them. But now we meet with hostility between them again.

I. Amaziah, with no provocation, and without showing any cause of quarrel challenged Joash into the field (v. 8): *Come, meet me face to face*; let us test our strength in battle. By this he showed himself proud, presumptuous, and prodigal of blood. Some think that he had the vanity to think of subduing the kingdom of Israel, and reuniting it to Judah.

II. Joash sent him a grave rebuke for his challenge, with advice to withdraw it, v. 9, 10.

1. He belittles Amaziah's pride, by comparing himself to a cedar, a stately tree, and Amaziah to a thistle, a sorry weed, telling him he was so far from fearing him that he despised him, and scorned as much to have anything to do with him, or make any alliance with him, as the cedar would to match his daughter to a thistle. The ancient house of David he thinks not worthy to be named the same day with the house of Jehu, though an upstart.

2. He foretells his fall: *A wild beast trampled the thistle underfoot*, and so put an end to his treaty with the cedar; so easily does Joash think his forces can crush Amaziah.

3. He shows him the folly of his challenge. "You are proud of the blow you have given to Edom, as if that had made you formidable to all mankind."

4. He counsels him to be content with the honor he has won, and not to hazard that, by grasping at more that was out of his reach.

III. Amaziah persisted in his resolution, and the result was bad.

1. His army was routed and dispersed, v. 12. Josephus says, When they were to engage they were struck with such terror that they did not strike a blow, but every one made the best of his way.

2. He himself was taken prisoner by the king of Israel, and then had enough of *meeting face to face*.
3. The conqueror entered Jerusalem, which tamely opened to him, and yet he broke down their wall (and, as Josephus says, drove his chariot in triumph through the breach), in reproach to them.
4. He plundered Jerusalem, took away all that was valuable, and returned to Samaria, laden with spoils, v. 14. .

Here in verses 15-22 three kings brought to their graves in these few verses: —

1. Joash king of Israel, v. 15, 16.
2. Amaziah king of Judah. Fifteen years he survived his conqueror the king of Israel, v. 17. He was slain by his own subjects, who hated him for his maladministration (v. 19) and made Jerusalem too hot for him, the ignominious breach made in their walls being occasioned by his folly and presumption. He fled to Lachish. How long he continued concealed or sheltered there we are not told, but, at last, he was there murdered, v. 19.
3. Azariah succeeded Amaziah, but not until twelve years after his father's death, for he was but four years old at the death of his father, so that, for twelve years, until he came to be sixteen, the government was in the hands of protectors. He reigned very long (*ch.* 15:2) and yet the account of his reign is here industriously compressed, and broken off abruptly (v. 22): *He rebuilt Elath* which had belonged to the Edomites

An account of the reign of Jeroboam the second.

I. His reign was long, the longest of all the reigns of the kings of Israel: *He reigned forty-one years*; yet his contemporary Azariah, the king of Judah, reigned longer, even fifty-two years. This Jeroboam reigned just as long as Asa had done (1 Kings 15:10), yet one did that which was good and the other that which was evil. We cannot measure men's characters by the length of their lives or by their outward prosperity.

II. His character was the same as that of the rest of those kings: *He did evil* (v. 24), for *he did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam*; he maintained the worship of the calves. But a sin is never the less evil in God's sight for its being an ancient custom.

III. Yet he prospered more than most of them, for though, in that one thing, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, yet it is likely, in other respects, there was some good found in him and therefore God acknowledged him,

1. By prophecy. He raised up Jonah the son of Amittai, a Galilean. It is a sign that God has not cast off his people if he continues to give faithful ministers among them; when Elisha, who strengthened the hands of Joash, was removed, Jonah was sent to encourage his son. It is probable that it was when he was a young man, that God sent him to Nineveh, and that he flew off and fretted as he did; and, if so, this is an undoubted evidence of the forgiveness of his faults and follies, that he was afterwards employed as a messenger of mercy to Israel. A commission amounts to a pardon.

2. By providence. The event was in *accordance with the word of the Lord*: his arms were successful; he *restored the boundaries of Israel*, recovered those frontier towns and countries that lay from Hamath in the north to the sea of the plain, v. 25. Two reasons why God blessed them with those victories: —

(1) Because their distress was very great, which made them the objects of his compassion, v. 26. Those who lived in those countries which the enemies were masters of were miserably oppressed and enslaved, and the rest were much impoverished by the frequent incursions the enemy made against them to plunder them. Let those whose case is pitiful take comfort from the divine pity: we read of God's tenderness and compassion (Isa. 63:15; Jer. 31:20) and that he is full of compassion, Ps. 86:15.

(2) Because he had not as yet *said he would blot out the name Israel* (v. 27). If this be understood of the dispersion of the ten tribes, he did say it and do it, not long after—if of the utter extirpation of the name of Israel, he never said it, nor will ever do it, for that name still remains under heaven in the *gospel Israel*, and will to the end of time.

IV. Here is the conclusion of Jeroboam's reign. We read (v. 28) of his might, and how he waged war. Many prophets there had been in Israel, but none had left any of their prophecies in writing until those of this age began to do it, and their prophecies are part of the canon of scripture. It was in the reign of this Jeroboam that *Hosea* began to prophesy, and he was the first who wrote his prophecies; therefore it is said *the Lord began to speak through Hosea*, Hos. 1:2. At the same time *Amos* prophesied, and wrote his prophecy, soon afterwards *Micah*, and then *Isaiah*, in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah. Thus God never left himself without witness

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Describe the character of Amaziah king of Judah, Joash king of Israel and Jeroboam II king of Israel.

2 Kings 15:1-38

The history of two of the kings of Judah is briefly recorded:— 1. Of Azariah, or Uzziah, verses 1-7. 2. Of Jotham his son, verses 32-38.

The history of many of the kings of Israel that reigned at the same time is given in short, five in succession. 1. Zachariah, the last of the house of Jehu, reigned six months, and then was slain and succeeded by Shallum, verses 8-12. 2. Shallum reigned one month, and then was slain and succeeded by Menahem, verses 13-15. 3. Menahem reigned ten years, or tyrannized rather, and then died in his bed, and left his son to succeed him first, and then suffer for him, verses 16-22. 4. Pekahiah reigned two years, and then was slain and succeeded by Pekah, verses 23-36. 5. Pekah reigned twenty years, and then was slain and succeeded by Hoshea, the last of all the kings of Israel (verses 27-31), for things were now hastening towards the final destruction of that kingdom.

The reign of Azariah (king of Judah).

1. He began young and reigned long (v. 2), did, for the most part, that which was right, v. 3, only he had no zeal or courage to take away the high places, v. 4.

2. That which is peculiar, v. 5 (that God struck him with leprosy) is related at more length, with the occasion of it, 2 Chron. 26:16ff., where we have also a fuller account of the glories of the former part of his reign, as well as of the disgraces of the latter part of it. Here we are told,

(1) That he was a leper.

(2) God struck him with this leprosy, to chastise him for his presumptuous invasion of the priests' office.

(3) That he was a leper *until the day he died*. Though we have reason to think he repented and the sin was pardoned, yet, for warning to others, he was continued under this mark of God's displeasure.

(4) That he *lived in a separate house*, as being made ceremonially unclean by the law, to the discipline of which, though a king, he must submit.

(5) That his son was his viceroy in the affairs both of his court (for *he had charge of the palace*) and of his kingdom (for he *governed the people of the land*); and it was both a comfort to him and a blessing to his kingdom that he had such a son to take his place.

The best days of the kingdom of Israel were while the government was in Jehu's family. In his reign, and the next three reigns, though there were many abominable corruptions and miserable grievances in Israel, yet the crown went in succession, the kings died in their beds, and some care was taken of public affairs; but, now that those days are at an end, the history which we have in these verses of about thirty-three years represents the affairs of that kingdom in the utmost confusion imaginable.

I. These unhappy revolutions—these bad times, as they may truly be called.

1. God had tested the people of Israel both with judgments and mercies explained and enforced by his servants the prophets, and yet they continue unrepentant and unreformed, and therefore God just brought these miseries upon them.

2. God made good his promise to Jehu, that his sons to the fourth generation after him should sit on the throne of Israel, which was a greater favor than was shown to any of the royal families either before or after his. Thus God rewarded Jehu for his zeal destroying the worship of Baal and the house of Ahab and yet, when the measure of the sins of the house Jehu was full, God avenged against it the blood then shed, called *the massacre of Jezreel*, Hos. 1:4.

3. All these kings did that which was *evil in the eyes of the Lord*, for *they walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat*. Though at variance with one another, yet in this they agreed, to maintain idolatry and the people loved to have it so.

4. Each of these (except one) conspired against his predecessor, and slew him—*Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea*, all traitors and murderers, and yet all kings awhile. One wicked man is often made scourge to another, and every wicked man, at length a ruin to himself.

5. The ambition of the great men made the nation miserable. Here is Tiphshah, a city of Israel, barbarously destroyed, with all the vicinity around it, by one of these pretenders (v. 16).

6. While the nation was thus shattered by divisions at home the kings of Assyria, first one (v. 19) and then another (v. 29), came against it and did what they pleased.

7. This was the condition of Israel just before they were quite ruined and carried away captive, for this was in the ninth year of Hoshea, the last of the usurpers. If they had, in these days of confusion and perplexity, humbled themselves before God and sought his face, that final destruction might have been prevented.

II. A short view of the particular reigns.

1. Zachariah (king of Israel), the son of Jeroboam, began to reign in the thirty-eight year of Azariah, or Uzziah, king of Judah, v. 8. Some of the most critical chronologers reckon that between Jeroboam and his son Zachariah the throne was vacant twenty-two years through the disturbances and dissensions that were in the kingdom. Zachariah was deposed before he was well seated on the throne: he reigned but six months, and then Shallum *attacked him in front of the people*, with the approval of the people, to whom he had, some way or other, made himself odious; so ended the line of Jehu.

2. But did Shallum have peace, who slew his master? No, he did not (v. 13), one month of days measured his reign and then he was cut off. Menaham, either provoked by his crime or spurred by his example, soon served him as he had served his master—*assassinated him and succeeded him as king*, v. 14.

3. Menaham held the kingdom ten years, v. 17. He was so prodigiously cruel to those of his own nation who hesitated a little at submitting to him that he not only ruined a city, but *ripped open all the pregnant women*, v. 16. By these cruel methods he hoped to frighten all others into his interests; but when the king of Assyria came against him,

(1) So little confidence had he in his people that he dared not meet him as an enemy, but was obliged, at a vast expense, to purchase peace with him.

(2) Such need had he of help *to confirm the kingdom in his hand* that he made it part of his bargain that: should assist him against his own subjects who were disaffected to him. Thus he got clear of the king Assyria for this time; but his army now got so rich booty with so little trouble that it encouraged them to come again, not long after, when they laid all waste.

4. Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, succeeded his father, but reigned only two years, and then was treacherously slain by Pekah.

5. Pekah, though he got the kingdom by treason, kept it twenty years (v. 27), so long it was before his violent dealing returned upon his own head, but it returned at last. This Pekah, son of Remaliah,

(1) Made himself more considerable abroad than any of these usurpers, for he was a great terror to the kingdom of Judah, as we find, Isa. 7:1ff.

(2) He lost a great part of his kingdom to the king of Assyria. By this judgment God punished him for his attack against Judah and Jerusalem.

(3) Soon after this he forfeited his life to the resentments of his countrymen, who, it is probable, were disgusted at him for leaving them exposed to a foreign enemy, while he was invading Judah, of which Hoshea took advantage and, to gain his crown, seized his life, *assassinated him and then succeeded him as king*. Surely he was fond of a crown indeed who, at this time, would run such a hazard as a traitor did—a crown which a wise man would not have taken up in the street, yet Hoshea not only ventured *upon* it but ventured *for* it, and it cost him dear.

A short account of the reign of Jotham king of Judah, of whom we are told,

1. That he reigned very well, *did what was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 34. Josephus gives him a very high character, stating that he was pious towards God, just towards men, and laid out himself for the public good. Though the high places were not taken away, yet to draw people from them, and keep them close to God's holy place, he showed great respect for the temple, and built the higher gate to the temple. If magistrates cannot do all they would for the suppressing of vice and profaneness, let them do so much the more for the support and advancement of piety and virtue. If they cannot pull down the high places of sin, yet let them build and beautify the high gate of God's house.

2. That he died in the midst of his days, v. 33. By these accounts it appears that there were none of all the kings of Judah who reached David's age, seventy, the common age of man. Asa's age I do not find. Uzziah lived to be sixty-eight, Manasseh sixty-seven, and Jehoshaphat sixty; and these were the three oldest; many of those who were of note did not reach fifty. This Jotham died at forty-one.

3. That in his days the alliance was formed against Judah by Rezin and Remaliah's son, the king of Aram and the king of Israel, which appeared so very formidable in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz (king of Judah) that, on notice of it, the heart of that prince was moved and *his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind*, Isa. 7:2.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

2 Chronicles gives a fuller explanation of the sin that led to Azariah (Uzziah) to become a leper. **What changed in Azariah's life that led up to the sin of burning incense in the temple for which he was punished with leprosy?**

2 Chr. 26:1-23

What special revelation was Isaiah given in the year of Azariah's (Uzziah's) death?

Isa. 6:1-3

During the days of Pekah king of Israel (734 BC to 732 BC) Tiglath-Pilesea III of Assyria mounted one invasion against Judah and two against Israel. This was the beginning of the end for Israel. Assyria took much of Israel's territories and took many of its people captive.

2 Kings 16:1-20

The reign of Ahaz. I. He was a notorious idolater, verses 1 -4. II. With the treasures of the temple, as well as his own, he hired the king of Assyria to invade Aram and Israel, verses 5-9. III. He took the pattern from an idol's altar which he saw at Damascus for a new altar in God's temple, verses 10-16. IV. He abused and embezzled the furniture of the temple, verses 17, 18.

A general character of the reign of Ahaz (king of Judah).

1. *Unlike David, he did not do what was right* (v. 2). He had no love for the temple, did not set his mind on his duty to God, nor had any regard for His law. He was a reproach to that honorable name and family, which therefore was really a reproach to him.

2. He walked in *the ways of the kings of Israel* (v. 3), who all worshipped the calves. The kings of Israel pleaded policy and reasons of state for their idolatry but Ahaz had no such pretence. They were his enemies and had proved enemies to themselves too by their idolatry; yet he walked in their ways.

3. He *even sacrificed his son in the fire*, to the honor of his dunghill-deities. He burnt them (2 Chron. 28:3), and made others pass between two fires or to be drawn through a flame, as a sign of their dedication to the idol.

4. He *followed the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out*.

5. He *offered sacrifices at the high places*, v. 4. If his father had but had zeal enough to take them away, the corrupting of his sons might have been prevented; but those who condone sin do not know what dangerous snares they lay for those who come after them.

1. The attack of his allied neighbors, the kings of Aram and Israel, against him. They thought to make themselves masters of Jerusalem, and to set a king of their own in it, Isa. 7:6. In this they fell short, but the king of Aram recovered Elath, a considerable port on the Red Sea, which Amaziah had taken from the Arameans, *ch.* 14:22.

2. His project to get clear of them. Having forsaken God, he had neither courage nor strength to fight against his enemies, nor could he, with any boldness, ask help from God; but he made his court to the king of Assyria, and got him to come in for his relief. The sin itself was its own punishment; for, though it is true that he gained his point the king of Assyria listened to him, and, to serve his own turn, made an assault against Damascus, with which he gave a powerful diversion to the king of Aram (v. 9), and obliged him to let fall his intentions against Ahaz, carrying the Arameans captive to Kir, yet, considering all, he made but a bad bargain; for, to accomplish this,

(1) He enslaved himself (v. 7): *I am your servant and vassal*.

(2) He impoverished himself; for he took the silver and gold that were laid up in the treasury both of the temple and of the kingdom, and sent it to the king of Assyria, v. 8. I do not know what authority he had thus to dispose of the public stock; but it is common for those who have brought themselves into distress by one sin to help themselves out by another.

Though Ahaz had himself sacrificed in high places (v. 4), yet God's altar had thus far continued in its place and in use, but here we have it taken away by wicked Ahaz, and another altar, an idolatrous one, put in the place of it.

I. The model of this new altar, taken from one at Damascus, by the king himself, v. 10. The king of Assyria having taken Damascus, there Ahaz went, to congratulate him and to receive his commands. At Damascus he saw an altar that pleased his fancy extremely. He must have an altar just like this: a pattern of it must be taken immediately.

II. The making of it by Uriah the priest, v. 11. Whatever pretence he had, it was a most base wicked thing for him that was a chief priest to make this altar, in compliance with an idolatrous prince, for by this,

1. He prostituted his authority and profaned the crown of his priesthood, making himself a servant to the lusts of men.

2. He betrayed his trust.

III. The dedicating of it. Uriah set it near the bronze altar. The king was exceedingly pleased with it and offered in it his burnt offering, etc., v. 12, 13. His sacrifices were not offered to the God of Israel, but to the gods of Damascus.

IV. The removal of God's altar, to make room for it. Ahaz removed God's altar to an obscure corner in the north side of the court, and put his own before the sanctuary, in the place of it. His superstitious invention, at first, jostled *with* God's sacred institution, but at length jostled it *out*. Those will soon come to make nothing of God that will not be content to make Him their all. Ahaz dared not quite demolish the bronze altar. He pretends to advance it above its institution. The altar was never intended for an oracle, yet Ahaz will have it for that use. The Jews say that, afterwards, of the bronze of it he made that which was called *the stairway of Ahaz*, *ch.* 20:11.

Here (v. 17-20) is,

I. Ahaz abusing the temple, not the building itself, but some of the furniture of it.

1. He defaced the bases on which the basins were set (1 Kings 7:28, 29) and took down the Sea, v. 17. These the priests used for washing.

2. He removed *the Sabbath canopy*, erected either in honor of the Sabbath or for the convenience of the priests, when, on the Sabbath, they officiated in greater numbers than on other days.

3. The king's entry, which led to the house of the Lord, for the convenience of the royal family (perhaps that ascent which Solomon had made, and which the queen of Sheba admired, 1 Kings 10:5), he turned another way, to show that he did not intend to frequent the house of the Lord any more.

II. Ahaz resigning his life in the midst of his days, at thirty-six years of age (v. 19) and leaving his kingdom to a better man, Hezekiah his son (v. 20), who proved as much a friend to the temple as he had been an enemy to it.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings of Judah. He not only passed his children through the lines of fire, but seems to have burnt some of them, 2 Chron. 28:3. He filled Judah with the abominations of the heathen. The hills and woodlands of the Holy Land were contaminated by all the excesses of nature-worship. When therefore Syria and Israel confederated against him, Ahaz naturally turned to creature-aid. In spite of the remonstrances of Isaiah, he offered a bribe to the king of Assyria to do what God Almighty would have done, under happier conditions. This was the first step toward the utter undoing of Judah.

The first ten or twelve chapters of Isaiah cast a flood of light on the inner politics of this dark epoch. They give a glimpse also of Isaiah's profound emotions at the evils that threatened his fatherland.

The calling in of the king of Assyria was fraught with disastrous consequences. "He distressed him and strengthened him not." Well may the Apostle warn us not to be yoked with unbelievers. Such alliances always result in the undoing of God's children. We cannot serve two masters. Thus in the hour of distress, notwithstanding the increasing and noble remonstrances of Isaiah, this same king Ahaz trespassed yet more against Jehovah.

It is remarkable, as showing the folly of the human heart, that in the lowest hour of his degradation before his conqueror Ahaz imitated the altar which he saw at Damascus. For this, the ancient brazen altar in Jehovah's Temple was displaced; and upon it in the sacred fane (Temple) sacrifices were offered to the gods of the heathen. Alas, there is too much of this in the present day! Men are going back from the simplicity and spirituality of Christ to exploded philosophies and systems, which have failed in the past to satisfy soul hunger. Let us beware of the vacuum of the soul into which such evil things intrude. It is only as we are filled by the indwelling Spirit that we are immune against these temptations. (F. B. Meyer) **What are the evil intrusions F. B. Meyer is alluding to that creep into the lives of Christians?**

2 Kings 17:1-41

An account of the captivity of the ten tribes finishes the history of that kingdom, after it had continued about 265 years, from the setting up of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. I. A short narrative of this destruction, verses 1 -6. II. Remarks concerning it, and the causes of it, verses 7-23. III. An account of the nations which succeeded them in the possession of their land, and the mongrel religion set up among them, verses 24-41.

The reign and ruin of Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel, concerning whom observe,

I. That though he forced his way to the crown by treason and murder (as we read in *ch.* 15:30), yet he did not gain the possession of it until seven or eight years after.

II. That, though he was bad, yet not so bad as the kings of Israel had been before him (v. 2), not so devoted to the calves as they had been. And some say that this Hoshea took off the embargo which the former kings had put their subjects under, forbidding them to go up to Jerusalem to worship. But what shall we think of this dispensation of providence, that the destruction of the kingdom of Israel should come in the reign of one of the best of its kings? If Hoshea was not so bad as the former kings, yet the people were as bad as those who went before them. Their king gave them leave to do better, but they did as bad as ever, which laid the blame of their sin and ruin wholly on themselves.

III. That the destruction came gradually.

IV. That they brought it upon themselves by the indirect course they took to shake off the yoke of the king of Assyria, v. 4. Had the king and the people of Israel applied to God, made their peace with him and their prayers to him, they might have recovered their liberty, ease, and honor; but they withheld their tribute, and trusted the king of Egypt to assist them in their revolt, which, if it had taken effect, would have been but to change their oppressors. But Egypt became to them the staff of a broken reed.

V. That it was an utter destruction that came upon them.

1. The king of Israel was made a prisoner.

2. The land of Israel was made a prey. The army of the king of Assyria treated the people as traitors to be punished with the sword of justice rather than as fair enemies.

3. The royal city of Israel was besieged, and at length taken. Three years it held out after the country was conquered.

4. The people of Israel were carried captives into Assyria, v. 6. Most of the people, those who were of any note, were forced away into the conqueror's country, to be slaves and beggars there. Those who forgot God were themselves forgotten. Many of the commoner sort of people were left behind, many of every tribe, who either went over to Judah or became subject to the Assyrian colonies, and their posterity were *Galileans* or *Samaritans*. But thus ended Israel as a nation; now they became *Lo-ammi—not a people*, and *Lo-ruhamah—unpitied*. James writes to the twelve tribes scattered abroad (James 1:1) and Paul speaks of the twelve tribes which *earnestly served God day and night* (Acts 26.7); so that though we never read of those who were carried captive, yet a remnant of them did escape, to maintain the name of Israel.

The destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes and the reasons of it assigned.

1. It was *the Lord who removed Israel from his presence*; whoever were the instruments, He was the author of this calamity. It was *destruction from the Almighty*; the Assyrian was but the *rod of His anger*, Isa. 10:5. But why would God

ruin a people who were raised and incorporated, as Israel was, by miracles and oracles? Was it purely an act of sovereignty? No, it was an act of necessary justice. For,

2. They provoked him to do this by their wickedness. Was it God's doing? No, it was their own; by their *way and their doings* they *procured all this to themselves*, and it was their own wickedness that did correct them. This is here very movingly laid open as the cause of all the desolations of Israel.

I. What God had done for Israel, to cause them to serve him.

1. He gave them their liberty (v. 7). Thus they were bound in duty and gratitude to be his servants, for he had loosed their bonds; nor would he who rescued them out of the hand of the king of Egypt have contradicted himself so far as to deliver them into the hand of the king of Assyria, as he did, if they had not, by their iniquity, betrayed their liberty and sold themselves.

2. He gave them their law, and was himself their king. They could not plead ignorance of good and evil, sin and duty.

3. He gave them *their land*, for He *drove out the nations before them* (v. 8), to make room for them; and the driving out of them for their idolatries was as fair a warning as could be given to Israel not to do like them.

II. What they had done against God, despite these engagements which he had laid upon them.

1. They *sinned against the Lord their God* (v. 7), they *did those things that were not right* (v. 9), but *secretly*. They *sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of, the Lord*, that is, they wholly addicted themselves to sin, as slaves to the service of those to whom they are sold, and, by their obstinately persisting in sin, so hardened their own hearts that at length it had become morally impossible for them to recover themselves. Though they were guilty of many immoralities, and violated all the commands of the second table of the Law, yet nothing is here specified but their idolatry. *This* was the sin that did most easily beset them; this was, of all sins, most provoking to God: it was the spiritual adultery that broke the marriage-covenant, and was the inlet of all other wickedness. They feared other gods (v. 7), that is, worshipped them and paid their homage to them, as if they feared their displeasure. They *built themselves high places in all their towns*, v. 9. If in any place there was but the tower of the watchmen (a country town that had no walls, but only a tower to shelter the watch in time of danger), or but a lodge for shepherds, it must be honored with a high place, and that with an altar. If there was a fortified city, it must be further fortified with a high place. They *made idols and Asherah poles—Asherim* (even *wooden images*, so some think the term, which we translate *Asherah*, should be rendered)—directly contrary to the second commandment, v. 10. They served idols (v. 12), the works of their own hands. They *burned incense at every high place*, to the honor of strange gods, for it was to the dishonor of the true God, v. 11. Besides the molten images, even the two calves, they *bowed down to all the starry hosts*—the sun, moon, and stars. They used divinations and enchantments, that they might receive directions from the gods.

III. What means God used with them, to draw them away from their idolatries, and to how little purpose. Though they had forsaken God's family of priests, he did not leave them without a succession of prophets, who made it their business to teach them the good knowledge of the Lord, but all in vain (v. 14).

IV. How God punished them for their sins. He *was very angry with them* (v. 18). He afflicted them (v. 20) and *gave them into the hand of plunderers*, in the days of the judges and of Saul, and afterwards in the days of most of their kings, to see if they would be awakened by the judgments of God to consider and amend their ways; but, when all these corrections did not prevail to drive out the folly, God first *tore Israel away from the house of David*, under which they might have been happy.

Lastly, Here is a complaint against Judah in the midst of all (v. 19): *Even Judah did not keep the commands of God*; though they were not as yet quite so bad as Israel, yet Israel communicated the infection to Judah,

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

This chapter reads like a page from the books of the great white throne. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, did not follow in all the evil deeds of his eighteen predecessors, but the degeneracy of the nation was too far advanced, for anything to arrest its collapse. The dry-rot had eaten its way through the specious covering. Worldly policy was the immediate cause of the nation's downfall. Had they obeyed God simply and absolutely, they could have trusted Him to maintain their independence. But they chose to enter into alliances, now with Syria, and then with Egypt, and so became entangled in the wars of their allies. See Hos. 7:11; 9:3, 6; 12:1, etc.

Let us read carefully the bill of divorce which the Heavenly Husband gave to the recreant people whom he put away. It is a pathetic document from v. 7 onward; but none can say that Jehovah had not good and sufficient cause for acting as he did. The wonder is that he bore so long with the apostate race. Read the first three chapters of Hosea to learn how the divine heart was rent when the hour of separation came: but let us not forget the assurances of Romans 11, that the true Israel shall ultimately be saved.

There are three leading counts in this terrible indictment against Judah and Israel: (1) idolatry; (2) the ignoring of the Law; and (3) disregard of the many warnings brought them by prophets and seers. And all were aggravated by the fact that they sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. How greatly the complexion of our sins is deepened, when we remember the anguish by which we have been redeemed!

The policy of peopling Israel with other races was intended to keep the land under cultivation, and to break the ties of fatherland, which are the spring of patriotism. Men will not fight for a land which does not pull at their heart-strings. These newly-imported peoples believed that each country was under the care of its own local deity. They therefore deemed it

advisable, that, without renouncing their own gods, they should give the God of Israel some sort of recognition. Samaritan religion of this kind is still very popular. Too many people feel that they ought to do something to show their respect for God. They attend to the outward forms of worship, lest they should lose caste; but in their hearts they enthrone worldly and worthless ideals.

The Jews, as we learn from John 4:9, hated the Samaritans, as a kind of mongrel race. But how generous was the Savior, ministering to the woman of Sychar, healing the Samaritan leper, and making one of this despised people the central figure in his parable of mercy, thus compelling the world to speak of the *good Samaritan!* (F. B. Meyer) **From whom did the Samaritan race originate from?**

Israel is in a similar position today as it was back in the times of the kings of Israel. **How should they proceed as to have God fight for them instead of against them?**

2 Kings 18:1-37

When the prophet had condemned Ephraim for lies and deceit he comforted himself that Judah yet "ruled with God, and was faithful with the Most Holy," Hos. 11:12. This chapter shows us the affairs of Judah in a good posture, that it may appear God has not quite cast off the descendants of Abraham, Rom. 11:1. Hezekiah is here on the throne, I. Reforming his kingdom, ver. 1 -6. II. Prospering in all his undertaking (ver. 7, 8), and this at the same time when the ten tribes were led captive, ver. 9-12. III. Yet invaded by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, ver. 13. 1 His country obliged to pay tribute, ver. 14-16. 2. Jerusalem besieged, ver. 17. 3. God blasphemed, himself reviled, and his people solicited to revolt, in a virulent speech made by the field commander, ver. 18-37. But how well it ended, and how much to the honor and comfort of our great reformer, we shall find in the next chapter.

A general account of the reign of Hezekiah.

I. His great piety, which was the more wonderful because his father was one of the worst of the kings, yet he was one of the best. What good there is in any is not of nature, but of grace, which, contrary to nature, grafts into the good olive that which was wild by nature (Rom. 11:24), and also that grace gets over the greatest difficulties and disadvantages. Ahaz, it is likely, gave his son a bad education as well as a bad example; Uriah his priest perhaps had charge of his instruction; his attendants and companions were such as were addicted to idolatry; and yet Hezekiah became eminently good. When God's grace will work what can hinder it?

1. He was a genuine son of David (v. 3); *He did what was right, just as his father David had done.* Hezekiah was a second David, had such a love for God's word, and God's house, as he had. Let us not be frightened with an apprehension of the continual decay of virtue, as if, when times and men are bad, they must, as a matter of course, grow worse and worse; that does not follow, for, after many bad kings, God raised up one who was like David himself.

2. He was a zealous reformer of his kingdom (2 Chron. 29:3). He found his kingdom very corrupt, the people in all things superstitious. They had always been so, but in the last reign worse than ever. Idolatry had overspread the land; his spirit was stirred against this idolatry and therefore, as soon as he had power in his hand, he set himself to abolish it (v. 4).

(1) The images and the Asherah poles were idolatrous. These he broke and destroyed.

(2) The high places, though they had sometimes been used by the prophets on special occasions and had been thus far condoned by the good kings, were nevertheless an insult to the temple and gave opportunity for the introducing of idolatrous customs. Hezekiah, therefore, who made God's word his rule, not the example of his predecessors, removed them, made a law for the removal of them, which law was carried out with vigor.

(3) The bronze serpent was originally of divine institution, and yet, because it had been misused in idolatry, he broke it to pieces. It seems, it had been carefully preserved, as a memorial of God's goodness to their fathers in the wilderness, Num. 21:9. But when they began to worship the creature more than the Creator, those who would not worship images borrowed from the heathen were drawn in by the tempter to burn incense to the bronze serpent, because that was made by order from God himself and had been an instrument of good to them. But Hezekiah, in his pious zeal for God's honor, not only forbade the people to worship it, but, that it might never be so abused any more, he showed the people that it was *Nehushtan*, nothing else but a *piece of bronze*, and that therefore it was an idle wicked thing to burn incense to it; he then broke it to pieces. If any think that the just honor of the bronze serpent was diminished in this way they will find it abundantly made up again, John 3:14, where our Savior makes it a symbol of himself.

3. Two things he was eminent for in his reformation:

(1) Courage and confidence in God. In abolishing idolatry, there was danger of disobliging his subjects, and provoking them to rebel; but *he trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel* to bear him out in what he did and save him from harm.

(2) Constancy and perseverance in his duty.

- II. His great prosperity, v. 7, 8. He was with God, and then God was with him. Finding himself successful,
1. He threw off the yoke of the king of Assyria, which his father had wickedly submitted to. When he had thrown out the idolatry of the nations he might well throw off the yoke of their oppression.
 2. He made a vigorous attack against the Philistines, and struck them even as far as Gaza.

The kingdom of Assyria had now grown considerable;

I. Of the success of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, against Israel, his besieging Samaria (v. 9), taking it (v. 10), and carrying the people into captivity (v. 11), with the reason why God brought this judgment upon them (v. 12): *Because they had not obeyed the Lord their God*. This was related in the previous chapter, but it is here repeated,

1. As that which stirred up Hezekiah and his people to purge out idolatry, because they saw the ruin which it brought upon Israel.
2. As that which Hezekiah much lamented, but had not strength to prevent. Though the ten tribes had revolted from the house of David, yet being of the descendants of Israel he could not be glad at their calamities.
3. As that which laid Hezekiah and his kingdom open to the king of Assyria, and made it much more easy for him to invade the land.

II. Of the attack of Sennacherib, the succeeding king of Assyria, against Judah. The assault he made against Judah was a great calamity to that kingdom, by which God would test the faith of Hezekiah and chastise the people, because they did not willingly part with their idols, but kept them up in their hearts. Even times of reformation may prove troublesome times and then the blame is laid on the reformers. This calamity will appear great against Hezekiah if we consider,

1. How much he lost of his country, v. 13. The king of Assyria took all or most of the fortified cities of Judah, the frontier-towns and the garrisons.
2. How dearly he paid for his peace. He saw Jerusalem itself in danger of falling into the enemies' hand, and was willing to purchase its safety at the expense,
 - (1) Of humble submission (v. 14). Where was Hezekiah's courage? Where his confidence in God?
 - (2) Of a vast sum of money—300 talents of silver and thirty of gold to be paid as a present ransom. To raise this sum, he was forced not only to empty the public treasures (v. 15), but to take the golden plates off from the doors of the temple, and from the pillars, v. 16. Though *the temple sanctified the gold* yet, the necessity being urgent, he thought he might be as bold with that as his father David did with the bread of the presence. His father Ahaz had plundered the temple in contempt of it, 2 Chron. 28:24. He had repaid with interest what his father took; and now, with all due reverence, he only begged leave to borrow it in an exigency and for a greater good.

I. Jerusalem besieged by Sennacherib's army, v. 17. He sent three of his great generals with a great army against Jerusalem. Is this the great king, the king of Assyria? Let him never be named with honor that could do such a dishonorable thing as this, to take Hezekiah's money, which he gave him on the condition he should withdraw his army, and then to advance against his capital city.

II. Hezekiah, and his princes and people, berated by the field commander, the chief speaker of the three generals, and one who had the most satirical genius. He was instructed what to say by Sennacherib, who intended to pick a new quarrel with Hezekiah. He had promised, on the receipt of Hezekiah's money, to withdraw his army, and therefore could not for shame make a forcible attack against Jerusalem immediately; but he sent the field commander to persuade Hezekiah to surrender it, and, if he should refuse, to besiege it, and to take it by storm. The field commander had the impudence to desire audience of the king himself at the conduit of the upper pool, outside the walls; but Hezekiah had the prudence to decline a personal treaty. *And sent three* commissioners to hear what he had to say. One interruption they gave him in his discourse, which was only to desire that he would speak to them now in Aramaic, and they would consider what he said and report it to the king, and, if they did not give him a satisfactory answer, then he might appear to the people, by speaking *in Hebrew*, v. 26. Hilkiah did not consider what an unreasonable man he had to deal with, else he would not have made this request, for it did but exasperate the field commander, v. 27. Against all the rules of decency and honor he menaces the soldiers, persuades them to desert or mutiny, threatens if they hold out to reduce them to the last extremities of famine, and then goes on to persuade Hezekiah, and his princes and people, to surrender the city.

1. He magnifies his master the king of Assyria. Once and again he calls him, *the great king, the king of Assyria*, v. 19, 28. But to those who by faith see the King of Kings in his power and glory even the king of Assyria looks ignoble and little, Ps. 82:6, 7.

2. He endeavors to make them believe that it will be much for their advantage to surrender. If they would capitulate, seek his favor with a present and cast themselves on his mercy, he would give them very good treatment, v. 31. If they would surrender upon discretion, though they must expect to be prisoners and captives, yet it would really be happy for them to be so.

(1) Their imprisonment would be to their advantage, for *then every one of them will eat from his own vine* (v. 31); though the property of their estates would be vested in the conquerors, yet they should have the free use of them.

(2) Their captivity would be much more to their advantage: *I will take you to a land like your own*; and what the better would they be for that, when they must have nothing in it to call their own?

3. That which he aims at especially is to convince them that it is to no purpose for them to resist: *On what are you basing this confidence of yours?* v. 19. To the people he says (v. 29), *Do not let Hezekiah deceive you into your own ruin, for he cannot deliver you; you must either bend or break.*" Three things he supposes Hezekiah might trust in, and he endeavors to make known the insufficiency of these: —

(1) His own military preparations: *You say you have strategy and military strength*; and we find that so he had, 2 Chron. 32:3. But this the field commander turns off with a slight. With the greatest haughtiness he challenges him to produce 2,000 men who know how to manage a horse, and will venture to give him 2,000 horses if he can. He falsely insinuates that Hezekiah has no men fit to be soldiers, v. 23.

(2) His alliance with Egypt. He supposes that Hezekiah trusts in Egypt for chariots and horsemen (v. 24), because the king of Israel had done so, and of this confidence he truly says, It is *a splintered reed* (v. 21), it will not only fail a man when he leans on it, but *it will pierce his hand and wound him*, Ezek. 29:6, 7. So is the king of Egypt, he says.

(3) His interest in God, v. 22. He supported himself by depending on the power and promise of God; with this he encouraged himself and his people (v. 30): *The Lord will surely deliver us*, and again, v. 32. This the field commander was aware that this was their great support, and therefore his endeavors to shake this, as David's enemies, who used all the methods they had to drive him from his confidence in God (Ps. 3:2; 11:1), and thus did Christ's enemies, Matt. 27:43. Three things the field commander suggested to discourage their confidence in God, [1] That Hezekiah had forfeited God's protection, and thrown himself out of it, by *removing the high places and altars*, v. 22. Here he measures the God of Israel by the gods of the heathen, who delighted in the multitude of altars and temples, and concludes that Hezekiah has given a great offence to the God of Israel, in confining his people to one altar. [2] That God had given orders for the destruction of Jerusalem at this time (v. 25): *Have I come without word from the lord?* This is all banter and extravagant boasting. He made this pretence to terrify the *people on the wall*. [3] That if Jehovah, the God of Israel, should undertake to protect them from the king of Assyria, yet he was not able to do it. With this blasphemy he concluded his speech (v. 33-35). See here, *First*, His pride. When he conquered a city he reckoned himself to have conquered its gods, and valued himself highly because of it. *Secondly*, His profaneness. The God of Israel was not a local deity, but the God of the whole earth. The tradition of the Jews is that the field commander was an apostate Jew, which made him so ready in the Jews' language; if so, his ignorance of the God of Israel was the less excusable and his enmity the less strange, for apostates are commonly the most bitter and spiteful enemies.

Lastly, We are told what the commissioners on Hezekiah's part did.

1. They held their peace, not for lack of something to say both on God's behalf and Hezekiah's. But the king had commanded them not to answer him, and they observed their instructions.

2. They tore their clothes in detestation of his blasphemy and in grief for the despised afflicted condition of Jerusalem, the reproach of which was a burden to them.

3. They faithfully reported the matter to the king, their master, and *told him what the field commander had said*.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

The Jews met the taunts of Rabshakeh with silence. It was wise policy. It is infinitely better to hand over our cause to God, and leave him to answer for us and avenge our wrongs. He will undertake our case, if we will but leave it unreservedly in His hands.

When our Lord was threatened, He remained calm and quiet. "As a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not his mouth," Isa. 53:7, R. V. We are bidden to follow His steps and to do as He did, silently committing our cause to Him who never fails to vindicate those who put their trust in Him. (F. B. Meyer)

What wise step did Hezekiah take in the beginning of his reign?

2 Chron. 29:2

Do you think the fall of Israel (Samaria, Northern Kingdom) was good incentive for King Hezekiah and his advisors to root out idolatry?

2 Chron. 29:3, 19-35 Jer. 26:17-19 Mic. 3:1, 12

What mistake did Hezekiah make in dealing with Sennacherib?

2 Kings 19:1-37

The contents of the field commander's speech brought to Hezekiah.

I. Hezekiah revealed a deep concern at the dishonor done to God by the field commander's blasphemy. When he heard it he *tore his clothes and put on sackcloth*, v. 1. Royal robes are not too good to be torn, nor royal flesh too good to be clothed with sackcloth, in humiliation for indignities done to God and for the perils and terrors of his Jerusalem. The king was in sackcloth, but many of his subjects were in soft clothing.

II. He *went into the temple of the Lord*, to meditate and pray. He was not considering what answer to return to the field commander, but refers the matter to God. "*You will answer, Lord, for me.*"

III. He sent to the prophet Isaiah, by honorable messengers, to desire his prayers, v. 2-4. Eliakim and Shebna were two of those who had heard the words of the field commander and were able to acquaint Isaiah with the case. The messengers were to go in sackcloth, because they were to represent the king, who was so clothed.

1. Their errand to Isaiah was, "*Pray for the remnant that still survives*, that is, for Judah, which is but a remnant now that the ten tribes are gone—for Jerusalem, which is but a remnant now that the fortified cities of Judah are taken." When we desire the prayers of others for us we must not think we are excused from praying for ourselves. When Hezekiah sent to Isaiah to pray for him he himself *went into the temple of the Lord* to offer up his own prayers. When the interests of God's church are brought very low, so that there is but a remnant left, then it is time to *pray for that remnant*.

2. Two things are urged to Isaiah, to engage his prayers for them: —

(1) Their fears of the enemy (v. 3). "*We are ready to perish; if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*"

(2) Their hopes in God. To Him they look, on Him they depend, to appear for them. "He has heard and known the blasphemous words of the field commander, and therefore, it may be, He will hear and rebuke them. We hope He will. Help us with your prayers to bring the cause before Him, and then we are content to leave it with Him."

IV. God, through Isaiah, sent to Hezekiah, to assure him that He would glorify himself in the ruin of the Assyrians. Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, not to enquire concerning the event, but to desire his assistance in his duty. He encouraged Hezekiah, who was much dismayed: *Be not afraid of what you have heard*; they are but words (though boastful and fiery words), and words are but wind. He promised to frighten the king of Assyria worse than the field commander had frightened him: "*I am going to put a spirit in him*" (that breath of pestilence breath which killed his army).

The field commander, having delivered his message and received no answer left his army before Jerusalem, under the command of the other generals, and went to the king for further orders. He found him besieging Libnah, a city that had revolted from Judah, *ch.8:22*. However, he was now alarmed with the rumor that the king of the Cushites, who bordered on the Arabians, was coming out against him with a great army, v. 9. This made him very desirous to gain Jerusalem with all speed. To take it by force would cost him more time and men than he could well spare, and therefore he renewed his attack against Hezekiah to persuade him tamely to surrender it.

I. Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah, a berating letter, a blasphemous letter, to persuade him to surrender Jerusalem, "*Do not let the god you depend on deceive you,*" v. 10. To terrify Hezekiah, and drive him from his anchor, he magnifies himself and his own achievements. How proudly he boasts,

1. Of the lands he had conquered (v. 11): *All countries*, and destroyed utterly! So far was he from destroying all countries that at this time the land of Cush, and Tirhakah its king, were a terror to him.

2. Of the gods he had conquered, v. 12.

3. Of the kings he had conquered (v. 13), *the king of Hamath and the king of Arpad*. Whether he means the prince or the idol, he means to make himself appear greater than either.

II. Hezekiah was not so haughty as not to receive the letter. When he had read it he was not in such a rage as to write an answer to it in the same provoking language; but he immediately went up to the temple, presented himself, and then *spread the letter out before the Lord* (v. 14); not as if God needed to have the letter shown to him, but in this way he signified that he acknowledged God in all his ways. In the prayer which Hezekiah prayed over this letters

1. He adores the God whom Sennacherib had blasphemed (v. 15), calls him the God of Israel, because Israel was his special people, and *the God enthroned between the cherubim*, because there was the unique residence of his glory on earth, but he gives glory to Him as *God over all the kingdoms of the earth*, and not, as Sennacherib fancied him to be, *the God of Israel only*, and confined to the temple.

2. He appeals to God concerning the insolence and profaneness of Sennacherib (v. 16).

3. He admits Sennacherib's triumphs over the gods of the heathen, but distinguishes between them and the God of Israel (v. 17, 18): He had indeed *thrown their gods into the fire; for they were not gods*.

4. He prays that God will now glorify himself in the defeat of Sennacherib and the deliverance of Jerusalem out of his hands (v. 19): "*Now, deliver us; and let all the world know, and be made to confess, that you alone are God, the self-existent sovereign God, and that all pretenders are vanity and a lie.*"

The gracious answer which God gave to Hezekiah's prayer. In general, God assured him that his prayer was heard, his prayer against Sennacherib, v. 20.

I. Confusion and shame to Sennacherib and his forces. It is here foretold that he should be humbled and broken. Sennacherib is here represented,

1. As the scorn of Jerusalem, v. 21. He thought himself the terror of the daughter of Zion, that chaste and beautiful virgin, and that by his threats he could force her to submit to him: "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head behind your back!" By this word God intended to silence the fears of Hezekiah and his people.

2. As an enemy to God. Hezekiah pleaded this: "Lord, he has insulted you," v. 16. "He has," God declares, "and I take it as against myself (v. 22): *Who is it you have insulted?* Is it not the Holy One of Israel, whose honor is dear to Him, and who has power to vindicate it, which the gods of the heathen have not?"

3. As a proud vainglorious fool, who *mouthed empty, boastful words*, and *boasted of gifts he did not give*, by his boasts, as well as by his threats, reproaching the Lord. For,

(1) He magnified his own achievements out of measure (v. 23, 24): *You have said* so and so. What a mighty figure does Sennacherib think he makes! Driving his chariots to the tops of the highest mountains, forcing his way through woods and rivers, breaking through all difficulties, making himself master of all he had a mind to.

(2) He took to himself the glory of doing these great things, whereas they were all *the Lord's doing*, v. 25, 26. And as for the desolations you have made in the earth, and particularly in Judah, you are but the instrument in God's hand, a mere tool: it is I *who brought it to pass*. Sennacherib's boasts here are expounded in Isa. 10:13, 14, *By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom*, etc.; and they are answered (v. 15), *Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it?*

4. As under the check and rebuke of that God whom he blasphemed. All his motions were,

(1) Under the divine cognizance (v. 27): *"I know where you stay, and what you do secretly devise and plan, the noise and bluster you make: I know it all."*

(2) Under the divine control (v. 28): *"I will put my hook in your nose, you great Leviathan (Job 41:1, 2), my bit in your mouth, you great Behemoth. I will restrain you, manage you, turn you where I please, send you home like a fool as you came."*

II. Salvation and joy to Hezekiah and his people. This shall be a sign to them of God's favor, and that He is reconciled to them, and *His anger's turned away* (Isa. 12:1), that a good result will be brought to their present distress.

1. Provisions were scarce and dear; and what should they do for food? The fruits of the earth were devoured by the Assyrian army, Isa. 32:9, 10ff. Why, they shall not only dwell in the land, but *certainly they will be fed*. *"This year you will eat what grows by itself, and you shall reap what you did not sow."* But the next year was the sabbatical year, when the land was to rest, and they must neither sow nor reap. What must they do that year? Why, *Jehovah Jireh—The Lord will provide*. And then, the third year, their farming should return into its former channel, and they should sow and reap as they used to do.

2. The country was laid waste, families were broken up and scattered, and all was in confusion; how should it be otherwise when it was over-run by such an army? As to this, it is promised that *a remnant of the house of Judah* shall yet again be, planted in their own habitations, shall increase and grow rich, v. 30. See how their prosperity is described: it is *taking root below, and bearing fruit above*. Such is the prosperity of the soul: it is taking root downwards by faith in Christ, and then being fruitful in fruits of righteousness.

3. The city was shut up, none went out or came in; but now the remnant in Jerusalem and Zion shall go forth freely, and there shall be none to hinder them, or make them afraid, v. 31. Great destruction had been made both in city and country, but in both there was a remnant that escaped, which symbolized the saved remnant of Israelites indeed (as appears by comparing Isa. 10:22, 23, which speaks of this very event, with Rom. 9:27, 28), and they shall go forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

4. The Assyrians were advancing towards Jerusalem, and would in a little time besiege it in form, and it was in great danger of falling into their hands. But it is here promised that, though the enemy had now encamped before the city, yet they should never *enter the city*, no, nor so much as *shoot an arrow* into it (v. 32, 33),—that he should be forced to retreat with shame.

5. The honor and truth of God are engaged for the doing of all this. These are great things, but how will they be effected? Why, *the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this*, v. 31. His zeal,

(1) For his own honor (v. 34): "I will do it for my own sake, to make myself an everlasting name." God's reasons for mercy are taken from within himself.

(2) For his own truth: "I will do it for my servant David's sake; not for the sake of his merit, but the promise made to him and the covenant made with him, those sure mercies of David."

The word was no sooner spoken than the work was done.

I. The army of Assyria was entirely routed. Hezekiah had not force sufficient to sally out against them and attack their camp, nor would God do it by sword or bow. It was *not by the sword of a mighty man or of a common man*, that is, not of any man at all, but of an angel, that the Assyrian army was to fall (Isa. 31:8). Josephus says it was done by an epidemic disease, which was instant death to them. The number slain was very great, 185,000 men, and the field commander, it is likely, among the rest. When the besieged *got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies*, scarcely a living man among them. Some think the 76th Psalm was penned on this occasion, where we read that *valiant men lie plundered, they sleep their last sleep*, their long sleep, v. 5.

II. In this way the king of Assyria was put into the utmost confusion. Ashamed to see himself, after all his proud boasts, thus defeated and disabled, *He broke camp, withdrew and returned*; the manner of the expression intimates the great disorder and distraction of mind he was in, v. 36. And it was not long before God cut him off too, by the hands of *two of his own sons*, v. 37. The God of Israel had done enough to convince him that he was the only true God, whom therefore he ought to worship; yet he persists in his idolatry, and seeks his false god for protection against a God of irresistible power. His sons who murdered him were allowed to escape, and would be looked on as the more excusable in what they had done if it is true (as some have suggested) that he was now vowing to sacrifice them to his god. His successor was another son, *Esarhaddon*, who did not aim, like his father, to enlarge his conquests, but rather to improve them; for he it was who first sent colonies of Assyrians to inhabit the country of Samaria, as appears, Ezra 4:2, where the Samaritans say it was *Esarhaddon who brought them there*.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

That bowed form of Hezekiah before the altar of God, while his servants and elders were conferring with Isaiah, is a beautiful emblem of the true way of meeting trouble. And it is very blessed when our cause is so closely identified with God's that we can appeal to Him to intervene for his own sake, v. 4.

All through this crisis, Isaiah acted the part of a patriot and a saint. His intrepid figure stands out in bold relief amid the storm. He even dared to compose a funeral ode for the burial of this imperious tyrant. In all literature there is nothing more sublime than Isaiah 10:11-14. When bitter and threatening words are flung at us, let us go up to the house of God. See Psa. 73:17. Let us get in touch with some holy soul, of the type of Isaiah, and ask for his prayers on our behalf. The prayer of a righteous man is very effectual. To stand in God's secret place is to be in the calm center of the cyclone. Around us the elements may rage and the people imagine a vain thing; but they shall pass away as the chaff of the threshing-floor, while not a hair of our head shall perish. (F. B. Meyer) **Who was the firmest figure in this crises in Judah? Why?**

2 Kings 19:6-7 Ps. 73:17 Isa. 10:11-14

What scripture verse or verses would be good comfort after Sennacherib's challenge?

2 Kings 19:20-34 Ps. 46:11 Isa. 10:5-15

2 Kings 20:1-21

The historian, having shown us the blaspheming Sennacherib destroyed in the midst of the prospects of life, here shows us the praying Hezekiah delivered in the midst of the prospects of death;

I. Here is Hezekiah's sickness. *In those days*, that is, in the same year in which the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem. Some think it was at the time that the Assyrian army was besieging the city or preparing for it. Others think it was soon after the defeat of Sennacherib. Hezekiah, in the midst of his triumphs, is seized with sickness. He was sick with the plague, for we read of the boil or plague-sore, v. 7. The same disease which was killing to the Assyrians was trying to him. Hezekiah, recently favored by heaven more than most men, yet is near death.

II. Warning brought him to prepare for death. It is brought by Isaiah. The prophet tells him,

1. That his disease is mortal, and, if he is not recovered by a miracle of mercy, will certainly be fatal: *You are going to die; you will not recover*.

2. That therefore he must, with all speed, get ready for death: *Put your house in order*. Put the heart in order by renewed acts of repentance, and faith, and resignation to God, with cheerful farewells to this world and welcomes to another; and put the house in order, make your will, settle your estate, put your affairs in the best posture you can, for the ease of those who shall come after you.

III. His prayer at this point: *He prayed to the Lord*, v. 2. Is anyone sick? Let him be prayed for, let him be prayed with, and let him pray. Hezekiah had found the prayers of faith bring in answers of peace. He had now received the sentence of death within himself, and, if it was reversible, it must be reversed by prayer. If the sentence was irreversible, yet prayer is one of the best preparations for death, because by it we gain strength and grace from God to enable us to finish well. Observe,

1. The circumstances of this prayer.

(1) He *turned his face to the wall*, probably as he lay in his bed. This he did perhaps for privacy; he could not retreat to his closet as he used to do, but he turned from the company who were around him, to converse with God. Or, as some think, he turned his face towards the temple, to show how willingly he would have gone up there, to pray this prayer (as he did, ch. 19:1, 14), if he had been able.

(2) He *wept bitterly*. Some gather from this that he was unwilling to die. It is in the nature of man to have some dread of the separation of soul and body. There was also something unique in Hezekiah's case: he was now in the midst of his usefulness, had begun a good work of reformation, which he feared would, through the corruption of the people, fall to the ground, if he should die. Let Hezekiah's prayer interpret his tears, and in *that* we find nothing that intimates him to have been under any of that fear of death which has either bondage or torment.

2. The prayer itself: "*Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully; and either spare me to live, that I may continue thus to walk, or, if my work is done, receive me to that glory which you have prepared for those who have thus walked.*" Hezekiah does not pray, "Lord, spare me," or "Lord, take me; God's will be done;" but, *Lord, remember me; whether I live or die, let me be yours.*

IV. The answer which God immediately gave to this prayer of Hezekiah. The prophet had got but to the middle court when he was sent back with another message to Hezekiah (v. 4, 5), to tell him that he should recover. Upon Hezekiah's prayer God did that for him which otherwise he would not have done. God here calls Hezekiah *the leader of his people*, to intimate that he would grant him reprieve for his people's sake. He calls himself *the God of David*, to intimate that he would grant him reprieve out of a regard for the covenant made with David. In this answer,

1. God honors his prayers: *I have heard your prayer and seen your tears.*

2. God exceeds his prayers; he only begged that God would remember his integrity, but God here promises,

(1) To restore him from his illness; *I will heal you.*

(2) To restore him to such a degree of health that *on the third day he should go up to the temple of the Lord*, to return thanks.

(3) To add fifteen years to his life.

(4) To deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria, v. 6. This was the thing which Hezekiah's heart was set on as much as his own recovery, and therefore the promise of this is here repeated.

V. The means which were to be used for his recovery, v. 7. Isaiah was his physician. He ordered an outward application, a very cheap and common thing: "*Apply a poultice of figs to the boil*, to ripen it and bring it to a head, that the matter of the disease may be discharged that way." It is our duty, when we are sick, to make use of such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God, but tempt him. Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised, for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man.

VI. The sign which was given for the encouragement of his faith.

1. He begged it, not in any distrust of the power or promise of God, but because he looked on the things promised to be very great things and worthy to be so confirmed. Hezekiah asked, *What will be the sign*, not that I shall go up to the thrones of judgment or up to the gate, but *up to the temple of the Lord*? He desired to recover that he might glorify God *in the gates of the Daughter of Zion*. It is not worth while to live for any other purpose than to serve God.

2. It was put to his choice whether the sun should go back or go forward. It is supposed that the degrees were half hours, and that it was just noon when the proposal was made, and the question is, "Shall the sun go back to its place at seven in the morning or forward to its place at five in the evening?" He humbly desired the sun might go back ten degrees, because, though either would be a great miracle, yet, it being the natural course of the sun to go forward, its going back would seem more strange, and would be more significant of Hezekiah's *being restored as in the days of his youth* (Job 33:25) and the lengthening out of the day of his life. It was accordingly done, at the prayer of Isaiah (v. 11): God brought the sun back ten degrees, which appeared to Hezekiah by the going back of the shadow on the stairway of Ahaz, which, it is likely, he could see through his chamber window; and the same miracle was observed everywhere, even in Babylon, 2 Chron. 32:31. Whether this retrograde motion of the sun was gradual—which would make the day ten hours longer than usual—or whether it darted back suddenly, and, after continuing a little while, was restored again to its usual place, so that no change was made in the state of the heavenly bodies (as some think)—we are not told.

I. An embassy sent to Hezekiah by the king of Babylon, to congratulate him on his recovery, v. 12. The kings of Babylon had thus far been subject to the kings of Assyria, and Nineveh was the royal city. We find Babylon subject to the king of Assyria, *ch. 17:24*. But by degrees things were so changed that Assyria became subject to the kings of Babylon. This king of Babylon sent to compliment Hezekiah on a double account.

1. On account of religion. The Babylonians worshipped the sun, and, perceiving what honor their god had given Hezekiah, in going back for his sake, they thought themselves obliged to do honor to him likewise.

2. On account of civil interest. If the king of Babylon was now meditating a revolt from the king of Assyria, it was wise to get Hezekiah into his interest. He found himself obliged to Hezekiah, and his God, for the weakening of the Assyrian forces, and had reason to think he could not have a more powerful and valuable ally than one that had so good an interest in the upper world.

II. The kind entertainment Hezekiah gave to these ambassadors, v. 13.

1. He was too fond of them. He *received them*. Though they were idolaters, yet he was eager to come into an alliance with the king their master.

2. He was too fond of showing them his palace, his treasures, and his armory, that they might see, and might report to their master, what a great king he was.

III. The examination of Hezekiah concerning this matter, v. 14, 15. Isaiah, who had often been his comforter, is now his reprover. "Who are these? What is their business?" Hezekiah not only submitted to the examination but made an ingenuous confession: *There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them*. Why then did he not bring them to Isaiah, and show him to them who was the best treasure, and who by his prayers had been instrumental in all those wonders which these ambassadors came to enquire into?

IV. The sentence passed against him for his pride and vanity. The sentence is (v. 17, 18),

1. That the treasures he was so proud of should hereafter become a prey.

2. That the king of Babylon, with whom he was so fond of an alliance, should be the enemy that should make a prey of them. The sins of Manasseh, his idolatries and murders, were the cause of that calamity; but it is now foretold to Hezekiah, to convince him of the folly of his pride. Hezekiah was fond of assisting the king of Babylon to rise, and to reduce the exorbitant power of the kings of Assyria; but he is told that his royal descendants shall become the king of Babylon's slaves. Babylon will be the ruin of those who are fond of Babylon.

V. Hezekiah's humble and patient submission to this sentence, v. 19. It is not only just, but good; for he will bring good out of it, and do me good by the foresight of it.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of Hezekiah's life and story, v. 20, 21. In 2 Chron. ch. 29:32 much more is recorded of Hezekiah's work of reformation and it seems that in the civil chronicles there were many things recorded of his might and the good deeds he did for Jerusalem, particularly his bringing water by pipes into the city. But this historian leaves him *resting with his fathers*, and a son in his throne who proved very rebellious. Wicked Ahaz was the son of a godly father and the father of a godly son; holy Hezekiah was the son of a wicked father and the father of a wicked son.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

What a contrast between Hezekiah and the Apostle Paul! To the great Christian hero, death seemed infinitely desirable. He was ready to be offered; it would be gain to depart and be with Christ. But Hezekiah, who had walked before God in truth and with a perfect heart, turned his face to the wall and wept sore as the shadow of death fell upon him. Could anything prove more conclusively how much we owe to the Lord Jesus, who abolished death for those who trust him? If Hezekiah had been taken away by early death, he would never have incurred the terrible sentence of v. 16, etc. (F. B. Meyer)

Was Hezekiah's request to God a wise one?

2 Kings 20:16-18 Matt. 24:44 1 Cor. 4:7

2 Kings 21:1-26

A short but sad account of the reigns of two of the kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon.

The beauty of Jerusalem is stained, and all her glory, all her joy, sunk and gone. These verses give such an account of this reign as make it, in all respects, the reverse of the last, and, in a manner, the ruin of it.

I. Manasseh began young. He was but *twelve years old when he became king* (v. 1), born when his father was about forty-two years old, three years after his sickness. But being young,

1. He was puffed up with his honor, and thinking himself very wise, valued himself on his undoing what his father had done.

2. He was easily influenced and drawn aside by seducers. Those who were enemies to Hezekiah's reformation, and retained an affection for the old idolatries, flattered him, and used his power at their pleasure.

II. He reigned long, longest of any of the kings of Judah, fifty-five years. This was the only very bad reign that was a long one: in the beginning of his reign for some time affairs continued to move in the course that his father left them in, and in the latter end of his reign, after his repentance, religion advanced again. Though he reigned long, yet some of this time he was a prisoner in Babylon.

III. He reigned very badly.

1. In general,

(1) *He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.*

(2) *He followed the detestable practices of the nations* (v. 2) and as did Ahab (v. 3), indeed (v. 9), he *did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed.*

2. More particularly,

(1) *He rebuilt the high places his father had destroyed*, v. 3.

(2) He set up other gods, *Baal and Asherah*, and all the host of heaven, the sun and moon, the other planets, and the constellations; these he worshipped and served (v. 3), gave their names to the images he made, and then did homage to them. To these he built altars (v. 5), and offered sacrifices, no doubt, on these altars.

He sacrificed his own son in the fire, by which he dedicated him as a votary (devotee) to Molech, in contempt of the seal of circumcision by which he had been dedicated to God.

(4) He made the devil his oracle, and *consulted mediums and spiritists* (v. 6) like Saul. Conjurers and fortune-tellers (who pretended, by the stars or the clouds, lucky and unlucky days, good and bad omens, the flight of birds, or the entrails of beasts, to foretell things to come) were his intimates.

(5) We find afterwards (v. 16) that he shed innocent blood. The *blood of the prophets* is, in a particular manner, charged against Jerusalem, and it is probable that he put to death many of them. The tradition of the Jews is that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn in two; and many think the apostle refers to this in Heb. 11:37.

3. Things are here mentioned as aggravations of Manasseh's idolatry:

(1) That he set up his images and altars *in the temple of the Lord* (v. 4), in the two courts of the temple (v. 5), in the very temple of which God had said to Solomon, *Here I will put my Name*, v. 7.

(2) That in this way he greatly slighted the word of God, and his covenant with Israel.

The doom of Judah and Jerusalem is read in verses 10-18. The prophets were sent, in the first place, to teach them the knowledge of God, to remind them of their duty. If they did not succeed in that, their next work was to reprove them for their sins, that they might repent. If in this they did not prevail, but sinners went on obstinately, their next work was to foretell the judgments of God, that the terror of them might awaken those to repentance who would not be made aware of the obligations of his love.

I. A recital of the crime. The indictment is read on which the judgment is grounded, v. 11.

II. A prediction of the judgment God would bring upon them for this: *They have done evil*, and therefore *I am going to bring disaster on them* (v. 12). It should make a great noise in the world and occasion many speculations. When God lays judgment to the plumb line it shall be *the plumb line used against the house of Ahab*, marking out for the same ruin to which that wretched family was devoted. See Isa. 28:17. *I will wipe it out as one wipes a dish*. The city should be emptied of its inhabitants, which had been the filth of it, as a dish is emptied when it is wiped: "They shall all be carried captive, the *land shall enjoy her sabbaths*, and be laid aside as a dish when it is wiped." This should be in order to the purifying, not the destroying, of Jerusalem. The dish shall not be dropped, not broken to pieces, or melted down, but only wiped. Sin is spoken of here as the alpha and omega of their miseries.

This is all we have here of Manasseh; he stands convicted and condemned; but in the book of Chronicles we hear of his repentance, and acceptance with God. He was buried, it is likely by his own order, *in his palace garden* (v. 18); for, being truly humbled for his sins, he judged himself *no more worthy to be called a son*, a son of David, and therefore not worthy to have even his dead body buried *in the tombs of his fathers*. And better it is, and more honorable, for a sinner to die repenting, and be buried in a garden, than to die unrepentant, and be buried in the abbey.

The short and inglorious reign of Amon, the son of Manasseh—a son not born until he was forty-five years old.

1. His reign was very wicked: *He forsook the God of his fathers* (v. 22), disobeyed the commands given to his fathers. He trod in the steps of his father's idolatry, and revived that which he, in the latter end of his days, had put down.

2. His end was very tragic. He having rebelled against God, his own servants *conspired against him and assassinated him*, when he had reigned but two years, v. 23. Two things the people of the land did, by their representatives,

(1) They brought justice against the traitors who had slain the king, and put them to death; for, though he was a *bad* king, he was *their* king, and it was a part of their allegiance to him to avenge his death.

(2) They did kindness to themselves in *making Josiah his son king in his place*, encouraged, it may be, by the indications he gave, even in his early days, of a good disposition. Now they made a happy change from one of the worst to one of the best of all the kings of Judah.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

It seems incredible that the good Hezekiah should have had such a son; but the young prince was evidently under the power of that reactionary party which, during Hezekiah's reign, had been kept in check only by the strong influence of Isaiah. Hence, on becoming king, Manasseh reintroduced the worst forms of idolatry which had disgraced the nations of Canaan and were rife in neighboring countries. It was the height of presumptuous impiety to place an Asherah, such as Ahab made, 1 Kings 16:32, in the very precincts of the Temple, and to patronize the Chaldean astrologers who poured into the country from Babylon. See Ezekiel 8.

Vigorous protests were raised against shameful abominations by Joel, Hosea, Isaiah, Nahum and Habakkuk; but in vain. Nothing could stay the mad fanaticism of the people for licentious rites, and their doom became inevitable. The gentile voice of love was of none avail, and the brazen clangor of Babylonian captivity must speak in tones that could not be silenced. For Manasseh's end consult 2 Chron. 33. Surely none need despair, since he found mercy. But alas! nothing can restore the years that the locust hath eaten. (F. B. Meyer) Second Kings 21:6 says that Manasseh practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. **What does the word of God say about these things?**

Lev 19:26, 31 Duet. 18:10-14 2 Kings 17:17

2 Kings 22:1-20

Concerning Josiah we are here told,

I. That he was very young when he began to reign (v. 1), only eight years old. Josiah, being young, had not received any bad impressions from the example of his father and grandfather, but soon saw their errors, and God gave him grace to take warning by them. See Ezek. 18:14ff.

II. That he *did what was right in the eyes of the Lord*, v. 2. See the sovereignty of divine grace—the father passed by and left to perish in his sin, the son a chosen vessel. Nothing is too hard for that grace to do. There are errors on both hands, but God kept him in the right way; he fell neither into superstition nor profaneness.

III. That he took care for the repair of the temple. This he did in the eighteenth year of his reign, v. 3. Compare 2 Chron. 34:8. He began much sooner to *seek the Lord* (as appears, 2 Chron. 34:3), but it is to be feared the work of reformation went slowly on and met with much opposition. He sent Shaphan, the secretary of state, to Hilkiah the high priest, to take an account of the money that was collected for this use by the doorkeepers (v. 4), for, it seems, they took much the same way of raising the money that Joash took, *ch.* 12:9. This money, so collected, he ordered him to lay out for the repair of the temple, v. 5, 6. And now, it seems, the workmen (as in the days of Joash) acquitted themselves so well that *there was no need to account for the money entrusted to them* (v. 7), which is certainly mentioned to the praise of the workmen.

IV. That, in repairing the temple, *the Book of the Law* was happily found and brought to the king, v. 8, 10. Some think this book was the autograph, or original manuscript, of the five books of Moses, under his own hand; others think it was only an ancient and authentic copy.

1. It seems, this Book of the Law was lost or missing. Perhaps it was carelessly mislaid and neglected, thrown into a corner (as some throw their Bibles), by those who did not know the value of it, and forgotten there; or it was maliciously concealed by some of the idolatrous kings who buried it, in hopes it would never see the light again; or, as some think, it was carefully laid up by some of its friends, lest it should fall into the hands of its enemies. Whoever were the instruments of its preservation, we ought to acknowledge the hand of God in it. If this was the only authentic copy of the Pentateuch then in being, we now have reason to thank God, on our knees, for that happy providence by which Hilkiah found this book at this time, found it when *he did not seek it*, Isa. 65:1. God's care of the Bible is a plain indication of his interest in it.

2. Whether this was the only authentic copy in existence or not, it seems the things contained in it were new both to the king himself and to the high priest; for the king, at the reading of it, tore his clothes. If the Book of the Law was lost, it seems difficult to determine what rule *Josiah* went by in doing that which was *right in the eyes of the Lord*, and how the priests and people maintained the rites of their religion. I am apt to think that the people generally took up with abstracts of the law, like our abridgments of the statutes, a sort of ritual, directing them in the observances of their religion, but leaving out what they thought fit, and particularly the promises and threatenings (Lev. 26 and Deut. 28, etc.). These were the portions of the law which *Josiah* was so much affected with (v. 13), for these were new to him. No summaries, extracts, or collections, out of the Bible (though they may have their use) can be effective to convey and preserve the knowledge of God and his will like the Bible itself.

3. It was a great instance of God's favor, and a sign for good to *Josiah* and his people, that the Book of the Law was thus seasonably brought to light, to direct and quicken that blessed reformation which *Josiah* had begun. The translating of the scriptures into common languages was the glory, strength, and joy of the Reformation. It is observable that they were about a good work, repairing the temple, when they found the Book of the Law. Those who do their duty according to their knowledge shall have their knowledge increased.

4. Hilkiah the priest was exceedingly well pleased with the discovery. "O," he says to Shaphan, "rejoice with me, for *I have found the Book of the Law*, that jewel of inestimable value. Here, carry it to the king; it is the richest jewel of his crown. Read it before him. He walks in *the way of David his father*."

The Book of the Law is not laid up in the king's cabinet as a piece of antiquity, a rarity to be admired, but it is read before the king. Those render the truest honor to their Bibles who study them and converse with them daily, feed on that bread and walk by that light.

I. The impressions which the reading of the law made on *Josiah*. He had long thought the case of his kingdom bad, by reason of the idolatries and impieties that had been found among them, but he never thought it so bad as he perceived it to be by the Book of the Law now read to him. The tearing of his clothes signified the rending of his heart.

II. The application he made to God at this point: *Go and inquire of the Lord for me*, v. 13.

1. Two things we may suppose he desired to know:—"Enquire,

(1) What we shall do; what course we shall take to turn away God's wrath and prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved."

(2) "What we may expect and must provide for." He acknowledges, "*Our fathers have not obeyed to the words of this book*; if this is the rule of right, certainly our fathers have been much in the wrong. Certainly *great is the anger that burns against us*; if this is the word of God, as no doubt it is, and He will be true to His word, as no doubt He will be, we are all undone."

2. This enquiry *Josiah* sent,

(1) By some of his great men, who are named, v. 12, and again v. 14.

(2) To Huldah the prophetess, v. 14. Miriam helped to lead Israel out of Egypt (Micah 6.4), Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God, and her being a wife was no prejudice at all to her being a prophetess; *marriage is honorable in all*. It was a mercy to Jerusalem that when Bibles were scarce they had prophets, as afterwards, when prophecy ceased, that they had more Bibles. The king's messengers made Huldah their oracle, probably because her husband had a place at court (for he was keeper of the wardrobe). They had, it is likely, consulted her on other occasions, and had found that the word of God in her mouth was truth. She was near, for she dwelt at Jerusalem, in the second rank of buildings from the royal palace. The Jews say that she prophesied among the women, the court ladies, who it is probable had their living quarters in that place.

III. The answer he received from God to his enquiry. Huldah returned it in the dialect of a prophetess, speaking from him before whom all stand on the same level—*Tell the man who sent you to me*, v. 15.

1. She let him know what judgments God had in store for Judah and Jerusalem (v. 16, 17): *My anger will burn against this place*.

2. She let him know what mercy God had in store for him.

(1) Notice is taken of his great tenderness and concern—*Your heart was responsive*. He received the impressions of God's word, trembled at it and yielded to it. This is tenderness of heart, and thus he *humbled himself before the Lord*. Those who most fear God's wrath are least likely to feel it.

(2) A reprieve is granted until after his death (v. 20): *I will gather you to your fathers*. God promised him he should not live to see it, which would have been but a small reward for his eminent piety if there had not been another world in which he should be abundantly recompensed, Heb. 11:16. He died in the love and favor of God, which secure such a peace as no circumstances of dying, no, not dying in the field of war, could alter the nature of, or break in against.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

During the process of renovation a copy of the Book of the Law was discovered, and Shaphan read it before the king. It is supposed that the passage which he recited and which so greatly moved his soul, was Deuteronomy 28 to 30, where are enumerated the awful consequences that would follow the failure to observe God's law. What ruthless havoc had Manasseh wrought, that all the copies of the Law had become destroyed! It reminds us of the wholesale burning of the Bible in Tyndale's day! The housebreaker is always careful to extinguish the light that might reveal his presence and lead to his identification. Let us not hesitate to preach the whole counsel of God, and not hide the inevitable doom of the ungodly. It is by the Word that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin. (F. B. Meyer) Josiah's reaction to the reading of the Book of the Law was to repent immediately and seek the Lord's will for direction. **What was the Lord's response to this?**

2 Kings 22:17-20 2 Kings 23:26-27

2 Kings 23:1-37

Josiah had received a message from God that there was no preventing the ruin of Jerusalem, but he did not therefore sit down in despair. Here we have the preparations for reformation.

1. He summoned a general assembly of the states, the elders, the magistrates or representatives of Judah and Jerusalem, to meet him *in the temple of the Lord*, with the priests and prophets, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers, that it might become a national act.

2. Instead of making a speech to this convention, he ordered the Book of the Law to be read to them; indeed, it should seem, he read it himself (v. 2), as one much affected with it and desirous that they should be so too. Besides the convention of the great men, he had a congregation of the *men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem* to hear the law read. If the people would be only as steadfastly resolved to obey by law as he is to govern by law, the kingdom will be happy.

3. Instead of proposing laws for the confirming of them in their duty, he proposed an association by which they should all jointly engage themselves to God, v. 3. The Book of the Law was the book of the covenant, that, if they would be to God a people, he would be to them a God; they here engage themselves to do their part, not doubting but that then God would do his. The covenanters were, in the first place, the king himself, who stood by his pillar (2 Kings 11:14) and publicly declared his consent to this covenant. *All the people likewise pledged themselves to the covenant*.

An account of such a reformation as we have not met with in all the history of the kings of Judah, such thorough riddance made of all the abominable things and such foundations laid of a glorious good work. Most of the people, after all, hated to be reformed.

I. What abundance of wickedness there was, and had been, in Judah and Jerusalem.

1. Even in the house of the Lord, that sacred temple which Solomon built, and dedicated to the honor and for the worship of the God of Israel, there were found vessels, all manner of utensils, for the worship of Baal, *and Asherah and all the starry hosts*, v. 4. Though Josiah had suppressed the worship of idols, yet the utensils made for that worship were all carefully preserved, even in the temple itself.

2. Just *at the entrance to the temple of the Lord* was a stable for horses kept for a religious use; they were holy horses, *dedicated to the sun* (v. 11), as if he needed them who *like champions rejoice to run their course* (Ps. 19:5), making their religion to conform to the poetical fictions of the chariot of the sun. Some say that those horses were to be led forth in pomp every morning to meet the rising sun, others that the worshippers of the sun rode out on them to adore the rising sun; it should seem that they drew the chariots of the sun, which the people worshipped.

3. *In the temple of the Lord* also there were *the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes*, where all manner of lewdness and filthiness, even that which was most unnatural, was practiced, and under pretence of religion too, in honor of their impure deities. Those who dishonored their God were justly left thus to dishonor themselves, Rom. 1:24ff. There were

women who *did weaving for Asherah* (v. 7), tents which encompassed the image of Venus, where the worshippers committed all manner of lewdness, and this *in the temple of the Lord*.

4. There were many idolatrous altars found (v. 12), some in the palace, *on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz*. The roofs of their houses being flat, they made them their high places, and set up altars on them (Jer. 19:13; Zeph. 1:5), domestic altars.

5. There was *Topheth, in the valley of Ben Hinnom*, very near Jerusalem, where the image of Molech (that god of unnatural cruelty, as others were of unnatural uncleanness) was kept, to which some sacrificed their children, burning them in the fire, others dedicated them, making them to pass through the fire (v. 10). It is supposed to have been called *Topheth* from *toph*, a drum, because they beat drums at the burning of the children, that their shrieks might not be heard.

6. There were *high places east of Jerusalem, which Solomon had built*, v. 13. There were also high places all the kingdom over, from *Geba to Beersheba* (v. 8), and *shrines at the gates—at the entrance to the gate of Joshua*.

7. There were idolatrous priests, who officiated at all those idolatrous altars (v. 5), who wore black. See Zeph. 1:4. Those who sacrificed to Osiris, or who wept for Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14), or who worshipped the infernal deities, put on black garments as mourners.

8. There were conjurers and wizards, and such as *dealt with mediums and spiritists*, v. 24.

II. What a full destruction good Josiah made of all those relics of idolatry.

1. He ordered Hilkiah, and the other priests, to clear the temple. Away with all the vessels that were made for Baal. They must all be burnt, and the ashes of them carried to Bethel. That place had been the common source of idolatry, for there was set up one of the calves.

2. The idolatrous priests were all put down. Those of them who were not of the house of Aaron, or had sacrificed to Baal or other false gods, he put to death, according to the law, v. 20. He *slaughtered them on their own altars*, the most acceptable sacrifice that ever had been offered on them. Those who were descendants from Aaron, and yet had burnt incense in the high places, but to the true God only, he forbade ever to approach the altar of the Lord; but he allowed them to *eat unleavened bread with their fellow priests*, with whom they were to reside, that unleavened bread (heavy and unpleasant as it was), was better than they deserved, and that would serve to keep them alive.

3. All the images were broken to pieces and burnt. The Asherah pole (v. 6), some goddess or other, was reduced to ashes, and *scattered the dust over the graves of the common people* (v. 6), the common burial place of the city. By the law a ceremonial uncleanness was contracted by the touch of a grave, so that in casting them here he declared them most impure. He *cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones*; as he carried the ashes of the Asherah poles to the graves, to mingle them with dead men's bones, so he carried dead men's bones to the places where the images had been, and put them in the place of them, that, both ways, idolatry might be rendered loathsome, and the people kept both from the dust of the images and from the ruins of the places where they had been worshipped.

4. All the wicked houses were suppressed, those nests of impiety that harbored idolaters, the houses of the male shrine prostitutes, v. 7. The high places were in like manner broken down and leveled with the ground (v. 8). Topheth, which, contrary to other places of idolatry, was in a valley, whereas they were on hills or high places, was likewise defiled (v. 10), was made the burial place of the city. Concerning this we have a whole sermon, Jer. 19:1, 2ff., where it is said, *They will bury the dead in Topheth*, and the whole city is threatened to be made like Topheth.

5. The horses that had been dedicated to the sun were taken away and put to common use, and the chariots of the sun he burnt with fire.

6. The mediums and spiritists were put away, v. 24.

III. How his zeal extended itself to the cities of Israel that were within his reach. The ten tribes were carried captive and the Assyrian colonies did not fully people the country, so that, it is likely, many cities had put themselves under the protection of the kings of Judah, 2 Chron. 30:1; 34:6. These he here visits, to carry on his reformation.

1. He defiled and demolished Jeroboam's altar at Bethel; with the high place and the grove that belonged to it, v. 15, 16. The golden calf, it should seem, was gone (*your calf, O Samaria, has cast you off*), but the altar was there. This was, (1) Defiled, v. 16. Josiah, in his pious zeal, was ransacking the old seats of idolatry, and spied the tombs in the mount, in which probably the idolatrous priests were buried. These he opened, took out the bones, and *burnt them on the altar*, v. 20. Thus he polluted the altar, desecrated it, and made it odious.

(2) It was demolished. He broke down the altar and all its trappings (v. 15), burnt what was combustible, and *ground it to powder* and made it *as dust before the wind*.

2. He destroyed all the houses of the high places, all those houses of Satan that were *in the towns of Samaria*, v. 19.

3. He carefully preserved the tomb of that man of God who came from Judah to foretell this. This was that good prophet who *pronounced against the altar of Bethel these very things*, and yet was himself slain by a lion, but to show that God's displeasure against him went no further than his death, God so ordered it that when all the graves around his were disturbed his was safe (v. 17, 18) and no man moved his bones.

IV. We are here told what a solemn Passover Josiah and his people kept after all this. When they had cleared the country of the old leaven they then applied themselves to the keeping of the feast. We have not such a particular account of this Passover as of that in Hezekiah's time, 2 Chron. 30. But, in general, we are told that not even *since the days of the judges* in any of the previous reigns, *had any such Passover been observed* (v. 22). This Passover, it seems, was extraordinary for the number and devotion of the communicants, their sacrifices and offerings, and their exact observance

of the laws of the feast. God was pleased to recompense their zeal in destroying idolatry with uncommon signs of his presence and favor. All this concurred to make it a distinguished Passover.

I. It is here acknowledged that Josiah was one of the best kings who ever sat on the throne of David, v. 25. As Hezekiah was a matchless example of faith and dependence on God in distress (*ch.* 18:5), so Josiah was a matchless example of sincerity and zeal in carrying on a work of reformation.

1. He *turned to the Lord from whom his fathers had revolted*. He did what he could to turn his kingdom also to the Lord.

2. He did this *with his heart and soul*.

3. He did it with *all his heart, and all his soul, and all his might*—with vigor, and courage, and resolution.

4. He did this *in accordance with all the Law of Moses*. In all he did, he walked by rule.

II. Despite this he was cut off by a violent death in the midst of his days, and his kingdom was ruined within a few years after. Following on such a reformation as this, one would have expected nothing but the prosperity and glory both for king and kingdom; but, quite to the contrary, we find both under a cloud.

1. Even the reformed kingdom continues marked for ruin. For all this (v. 26) *the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger*. That is certainly true, which God spoke through the prophet (Jer. 18:7, 8), that if a nation, doomed to destruction, *repents of its evil, God will relent and not inflict the disaster he planned* as punishment; and therefore we must conclude that Josiah's people, though they submitted to Josiah's power, did not heartily take in Josiah's principles. They were turned by force, and did not voluntarily *turn from their evil way*, but still continued their affection for their idols; and therefore he who knows men's hearts would not recall the sentence, which was, That Judah should be removed, as Israel had been, and Jerusalem itself cast off, v. 27. Yet even this destruction was intended to be their effective reformation; so that we must say that the disease had come to a crisis, and was ready for a cure.

2. As an evidence of this, even the reforming king is cut off in the midst of his usefulness—in mercy toward him, that he might not see the evil which was coming upon his kingdom. The king of Egypt waged war with the king of Assyria: so the king of Babylon is now called. Josiah's kingdom lay between them. He therefore thought himself concerned to oppose the king of Egypt, and check the growing, threatening, greatness of his power. Therefore *Josiah marched out to meet him in battle*, and was killed in the first engagement, v. 29, 30. We must adore God's righteousness in taking away such a jewel from an unthankful people who did not know how to value it. They greatly lamented his death (2 Chron. 35:25), urged to it by Jeremiah, who told them the meaning of it, and what a threatening omen it was.

Jerusalem did not see a good day after Josiah was laid in his grave, but one trouble came after another, until within twenty-two years it was quite destroyed. Of the reign of two of his sons here is a short account; the former we find a prisoner and the latter subject to the, king of Egypt. This kind of Egypt having slain Josiah, bent all his force against his family and kingdom.

I. Jehoahaz, a younger son, was first made king by *the people of the land*, probably because he was of a more warlike genius than his elder brother, and likely to succeed against the king of Egypt and to avenge his father's death. He did badly, v. 32. He did *just as his wicked fathers had done*. Though he had not time to do much, yet he had chosen his patterns. He was but three months a prince, and was then made a prisoner and lived and died so.

II. Eliakim, another son of Josiah, was made king by the king of Egypt. The crown of Judah had thus far always descended from a father to a son, and never, until now, from one brother to another. The king of Egypt, having used his power in making him king, further showed it in changing his name; he called him *Jehoiakim*, a name that had reference to Jehovah, for he had no intention to make him renounce or forget the religion of his country. Of this Jehoiakim we are here told the king of Egypt made him poor, exacted from him a vast tribute of 100 *talents of silver and a talent of gold* (v. 33), which, with much difficulty, he squeezed out of his subjects and gave to Pharaoh, v. 35. Despite the rebukes of Providence he was under, by which he should have been convicted, humbled, and reformed, he *did evil in the eyes of the Lord* (v. 37).

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Encouraged by the prophets Zephaniah, Urijah, and perhaps Jeremiah, Josiah set himself to the work of thorough reform, in which he endeavored to carry his people. The various items mentioned here prove how deeply the heart of the nation had become corrupted. In the very temple itself were altars and vessels for the unholy rites of Baal and Ashtaroah. Multitudes of black-hooded priests filled the streets. At the temple gates were the horses and chariots of the sun-worship. Around the hills glittered idol shrines. These were all swept away.

Though these reforms were carried through by the king's strong hand, the generality of the nation remained idolatrous and corrupt, and yielded a feigned rather than a felt repentance. See Jer. 3:10; 4:3, 4, 14; 5:1-3, etc. Therefore judgment could not be averted. External reformation is not enough to secure the permanence of national life. We must rend our hearts rather than our garments, Joel 2:13. There is a sorrow that needs not to be repented of, and a sorrow which "worketh death," 2 Cor. 7:10. (F. B. Meyer) **How would you explain Josiah's early death after initializing such a great reformation?**

2 Kings 24:1-20

We have here the first mention of *Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon (v. 1), that head of gold. He was a potent prince, and one who was the terror of the mighty; and yet his name would not have been known in sacred writ if he had not been employed in the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews.

I. He made Jehoiakim his subject and kept him in subjection three years, v. 1. Nebuchadnezzar began his reign in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In his eighth year he made him his prisoner, but restored him on his promise of faithfulness to him. That promise he kept about three years, but then rebelled, probably in hopes of assistance from the king of Egypt.

II. When he rebelled Nebuchadnezzar sent his forces against him to destroy his country, bands of Babylonians, Arameans, Moabites, Ammonites, who were all now in the service and pay of the king of Babylon (v. 2), and likewise retained, and now showed, their ancient enmity toward the Israel of God. Two things God intended in allowing Judah to be thus harassed: —

1. The punishment of the sins of Manasseh, which God now brought upon *the third and fourth generation*. So long he waited before he brought them, to see if the nation would repent; but they continued unrepentant. Though Manasseh repented, and we have reason to think even the persecutions and murders he was guilty of were pardoned, yet, as they were national sins, they lay still charged against the land, crying for national judgments. Perhaps some were now living who were aiding and abetting. See what need nations have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they suffer for them.

III. The king of Egypt was likewise subdued by the king of Babylon, and a great part of his country taken from him, v. 7. He dares not *march out from his own country again*. Afterwards he attempted to give Zedekiah some relief, but was obliged to retreat, Jer. 37:7

IV. Jehoiakim, seeing his country laid waste and himself ready to fall into the enemy's hand, as it should seem, died of a broken heart, in the midst of his days (v. 6).

The history of king Jehoiachin's *exile*, as it is called, Ezek. 1: 2. He came to the crown, not to have the honor of wearing it, but the shame of losing it.

I. His reign was short and inconsiderable. He reigned but three months, and then was removed and carried captive to Babylon. Yet this young prince reigned long enough to show that he justly suffered for his fathers' sins, for he trod in their steps (v. 9).

II. The calamities that came upon him, and his family, and people, in the very beginning of his reign,

1. Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon, v. 10, 11.

2. Jehoiachin immediately surrendered; lacking the faith and piety of an Israelite, he had not the resolution of a man, of a soldier, of a prince. He and his royal family delivered themselves up prisoners of war.

3. Nebuchadnezzar rifled the treasuries both of the temple and of the state, and carried away the silver and gold of both, v. 13. Now the word of God by Isaiah was fulfilled (*ch. 20:17*), *Everything in your palace will be carried off to Babylon*.

4. He carried away a great part of Jerusalem into captivity. There had been some carried away eight years before this, in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar and the third of Jehoiakim, among whom were Daniel and his companions. See Dan. 1:1, 6. Now he carried off,

(1) The young king himself and his family (v. 15), and we find (*ch. 25:27-29*) that for thirty-seven years he continued a confined prisoner.

(2) All the great men, the princes and officers.

(3) All the military men, the *fighting men* (v. 14), *the leading men of the land* (v. 15), *the fighting men who were strong and fit for war*, v. 16.

(4) All the craftsmen and smiths who made weapons of war. In this captivity Ezekiel the prophet was carried away (Ezek. 1:1, 2).

III. The successor whom the king of Babylon appointed in the place of Jehoiachin. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah king, the son of Josiah; and to let all the world know, that he was his creature, he changed his name and called him *Zedekiah*, v. 17. This Zedekiah was the last of the kings of Judah. The name which the king of Babylon gave him means *The justice of the Lord*. He rebelled against the king of Babylon (v. 20). This was the most foolish thing he could do, and hastened the ruin of his kingdom.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Note the entail of Manasseh's sin. He had lived, had been forgiven, and had died years before, but Judah was irretrievably implicated in his sins. The poison had eaten into the national heart, and for the innocent blood which had been shed like water there had been no amends. Notice the emphatic statement that Nebuchadnezzar and the other enemies who came against the land were deliberately carrying out the divine chastenings. They were, as Isaiah puts it, the rod of God's anger and the staff of his indignation, Isa. 10:5. How often does God still use evil men as his instruments to chasten us! The best way of escaping them is to commit ourselves to God.

Jehoiachin followed the evil path of his predecessors. Again Jerusalem was besieged and Deuteronomy 28:48 began to be fulfilled. The ill-advised revolt of the young king ended in bitter disappointment, as Jeremiah had foretold, Jer. 22:24, 25; and the final tragedy came on quickly, in spite of the insistence of the false prophets that the sacred vessels of the temple should be returned from Babylon, Jer. 27:16. Finally, a sad procession issued from the gate of the doomed city, and the king, his nobles and officials, presented themselves before the enemy, sitting on the ground, clothed in black, their faces covered in their mantles, Jer. 13:18. They were at once deported to Babylon with thousands more. The treasures in the temple and the palace were rifled; and a cry of agony and astonishment arose from Jeremiah and the whole land. See Jer. 22: 24, 28; some add Psalms 42 and 43.

Zedekiah, Josiah's youngest son, enticed into a league with neighboring nations against the conqueror, brought upon himself and his people a yet more disastrous overthrow. How foolish man's wisdom becomes when he departs from the living God! "A wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed," Jas. 1:6. (F. B. Meyer) **Is God's judgment of Israel fairly complete at this point or is there more to the judgments upon Israel in the years ahead?**

2 Kings 25:1-30

Zedekiah in rebellion against the king of Babylon (*ch.* 24:20), scheming and endeavoring to shake off his yoke.

I. The king of Babylon's army laid siege to Jerusalem, v. 1. Two years this siege lasted; at first the army retreated, for fear of the king of Egypt (Jer. 37:11), but, finding him not so powerful as they thought, they soon returned.

II. During this siege the famine prevailed (v. 3).

III. At length the city was taken by storm: it was *broken through*, v. 4. The besiegers made a breach in the wall, at which they forced their way into it.

IV. The king, his family, and all his great men, made their escape in the night, by some secret passages, v. 4. Information was given to the Babylonians of the king's flight, and they soon overtook him, v. 5.

1. He was brought to the king of Babylon, and tried by a council of war for rebelling against him to whom he had sworn fidelity.

2. His *sons were killed before his eyes*.

3. His eyes were put out, by which he was deprived of the light of the sun. Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah should be brought to Babylon, Jer. 32:5; 34:3. Ezekiel prophesied that he should not see Babylon, Ezek. 12:13. He was brought there, but, his eyes being put out, he did not see it.

4. He was *bound with bronze shackles* and so *taken to Babylon*. For his greater disgrace, they led him bound.

About a month after (compare v. 8 with v. 3) Nebuzaradan was sent with orders to complete the destruction of Jerusalem. This space God gave them to repent, after all the previous days of his patience, but in vain.

1. The city and temple are burnt, v. 9. That house which David prepared for, and which Solomon built at such a vast expense—that house which had the eye and heart of God perpetually on it (1 Kings 9:3) must be turned into ashes. By the burning of the temple God would show how little he cares for the external pomp of his worship when the life and power of religion are neglected. The people trusted in the temple, as if that would protect them in their sins (Jer. 7:4). It is observable that the second temple was burnt by the Romans the same month, and the same day of the month, that the first temple was burnt by the Babylonians, which, Josephus says, was the tenth of August.

2. The walls of Jerusalem are demolished (v. 10), as if the victorious army would be revenged against them for having kept them out so long. These walls were never repaired until Nehemiah's time.

3. The rest of the people are carried away captive to Babylon, v. 11. Only the poor of the land were left behind (v. 12) to till the ground and dress the vineyards for the Babylonians. Sometimes poverty is a protection; for those who have nothing have nothing to lose.

4. The bronze vessels, and other appurtenances of the temple, are carried away, those of silver and gold being most of them gone before. Those two famous columns of bronze, *Jachin* and *Boaz*, which signified the strength and stability of the house of God, were broken to pieces and their bronze was carried to Babylon, v. 13.

5. Several of the great men are slain in cold blood. This completed the calamity: *So Judah went into captivity, away from her land*, about 860 years after they were put in possession of it by Joshua. Sin kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, and now turned *them* out.

I. The dispersion of the remaining people. The city of Jerusalem was quite laid waste. Some people were in the land of Judah (v. 22) and had weathered the storm, and had *their lives given them for a prey*. The king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, one of themselves, to be their governor and protector under him, a very good man, and one who would make the best of the bad, v. 22. His father Ahikam was one who countenanced and protected Jeremiah when the princes had vowed his death, Jer. 26:24. It is probable that this Gedaliah, by the advice of Jeremiah, had gone over to the Babylonians, and had conducted himself so well that the king of Babylon entrusted him with the government. He did not reside at Jerusalem, but at Mizpah, in the land of Benjamin, a place famous in Samuel's time. There those came who had fled from Zedekiah (v. 4) and put themselves under his protection (v. 23). Gedaliah, though he had not the pomp and

power of a sovereign prince, yet might have been a greater blessing to them than many of their kings had been. Yet this hopeful settlement is dashed to pieces, not by the Babylonians, but by some of themselves. Ishmael, who was of the royal family, envying Gedaliah's advancement and the happy settlement of the people under him, wickedly slew him and all his friends, both Jews and Babylonians. The Babylonians had reason enough to be offended at the murder of Gedaliah; but if those who remained had humbly remonstrated, alleging that it was only the act of Ishmael and his party, those who were innocent of it would not have been punished for it: but contrary to the counsel of Jeremiah, they all went to Egypt, where, it is probable, they mixed with the Egyptians by degrees, and were never heard of more as Israelites. Thus was there a full end made of them by their own folly and disobedience, and Egypt had the last of them that the last verse of that chapter of threats might be fulfilled, Deut. 28:68, *The Lord will send you back to Egypt*. These events are related at more length by the prophet Jeremiah, Jer. 40 to 45.

II. The reviving of the captive prince. Of Jehoiachin or Jeconiah, who surrendered himself (*ch.* 24:12), we are here told that as soon as Evil-Merodach came to the crown, upon the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar, he released him out of prison (where he had lain thirty-seven years, and was now fifty-five years old), *spoke kindly to him* (*v.* 28), gave him princely clothing instead of his prison-garments, maintained him in his own palace (*v.* 29), and allowed him a pension for himself and his family in some measure corresponding to his rank, *a regular allowance as long as he lived*. To have honor and liberty after he had been so long in confinement and disgrace was like the return of the morning after a very dark and tedious night. Let none say that they shall never see good again because they have long seen little but evil; the most miserable do not know what blessed turn Providence may yet give to their affairs, Ps. 90:15. However the death of afflicted saints is to them such a change: it will release them out of their prison, shake off the body, that prison-garment, and it will send them to the throne, to the table of the King of kings, the glorious liberty of God's children. Evil-Merodach thought his father made the yoke of his captives too heavy, and therefore, with the tenderness of a man and the honor of a prince, made it lighter. The Jews say that this Evil-Merodach had been himself imprisoned by his own father, when he returned from his madness, for some mismanagement at that time, and that in prison he developed a friendship with Jehoiachin, in consequence of which, as soon as he had it in his power, he showed him this kindness as a sufferer, as a fellow-sufferer. Some suggest that Evil-Merodach had learned from Daniel and his fellows the principles of the true religion. Thirty-six of the seventy years were now past, and now to see their king thus advanced would be a comforting pledge to the captive people of their own release in due time, in the set time. When therefore we are perplexed, let us not be in despair.

(NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

As the final catastrophe approaches, the historian becomes more minute in his dates, marking the *month* and the *day*. From Ezekiel 24:1 we gather that on the very day when the foe made his appearance before Jerusalem, the fact was revealed to Ezekiel in Babylon, and the fate of the city made clear. Jeremiah besought Zedekiah to submit, but to no purpose, Jer. 38:17. The siege lasted eighteen months, and its calamities may be gathered from Lamentations 2:20, 21; 4:3-20. Finally famine triumphed, Lam. 4:8, 10; Ezek. 5:10. A third of the population perished of hunger and plague, Ezek. 5:12.

Such is the divine judgment upon sin. God pleads long with man, but if man will not turn, then God whets his sword, and becomes terrible in his retribution. Amid all this catastrophe, however, we recall the tears of the book of Lamentations, like those of Jesus afterward. There is that in God which sorrows as he chastises, and causes him to say, "How shall I make thee as Admah, and set thee as Zeboim?" Deut. 29:23; Hos. 11:8. Notice how, in putting out the eyes of Zedekiah, two prophecies which appeared to be contradictory were reconciled and fulfilled, Jer. 32:5; 34:3; and Ezek. 12:13.

The temple, after 420 years of varying fortune, was burned to the ground, and the remainder of its treasures carried off. A few years after, Nebuchadnezzar set up an image of gold on the plains of Dura, Dan. 3:1. It has been suggested that this image was probably made from the metal removed from the Holy City; and this may have been an additional reason for the refusal of the Jews to worship as the king demanded.

We have no information respecting the disposition of the Ark. It may have been hidden by Jeremiah or by some other pious priest, who took the precaution of conveying it and the sacred documents it contained to a place of safety. How wonderful it would be if, in the restoration of the Jews to their ancient city,—an event that may be near at hand,—remains of the Ark of the Covenant should yet be discovered in connection with the vast subterranean vaults beneath the temple site! These tragic events are a powerful commentary upon the ancient text that sin is a reproach to any people, Prov. 14:34. Let modern cities and civilizations beware; for if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare those which have been grafted in among them. See Rom. 11:18-25.

Thus at last the city, which had been full of people, sat solitary, bewailed by Jeremiah in exquisite elegies. The poorest only were left, under Gedaliah, the constant friend of Jeremiah. See Jer. 40:6. His brief rule brought a gleam of light, a transient relief from the long monotony of disaster and despair. But the dastardly murder of this noble man by Ishmael, who was jealous of him, added the last bitter ingredient to the already bitter cup of the harried remnant, Jer. 40 and 41. Notwithstanding Jeremiah's earnest protestations, they finally deserted their own land, and settled in Egypt, Jer. 44:1.

Thus ended the kingdom of Judah, and thereafter the Jews became a scattered people. Though the return under Ezra seemed likely to renew their kingdom, this also was a transient dream which ended in their final overthrow in A. D. 70. Note how pathetically, in the last paragraph, the chronicler snatches at the one small crumb of comfort left, in the pity providentially shown to Jehoiachin by the Babylonian king. God had not forgotten the sure mercies of David! (F. B. Meyer) **What prophecies are we awaiting to be fulfilled and is there a possibility that the Ark of the Covenant remains hidden ready to be put in the temple at Jerusalem?**

**The United Kingdom
(about 1020-926 B. C.)**

Saul
David
Solomon

**The Divided Kingdom
(about 926-586 BC)**

The Northern Kingdom

Kings of Israel (prophet)

Jeroboam I, 22 years (1 Ki. 12-14)

Nadab, 2 years (15)
Baasha, 24 years (15, 16)
Elah, 2 years (16)
Zimri, 7 days (16)
Omri, 12 years (16)
Ahab, 22 years (16-22)
Ahaziah, 2 years (22, 2 Ki. 1)
Omri, 12 years (1 Ki. 16)
Jehoram, 12 years (2 Ki. 3; 9)

Jehu, 28 years (9; 10; 12)

Jehoahaz, 17 years (13)
Jehoash, 16 years (13)
Jeroboam II, 41 years (14)
Amos, Hosea)
Zachariah, 6 months (15) (Hosea)
Shallum, 1 month (15) (Hosea)
Menahem, 10 years (15) (Hosea)
Pekahiah, 2 years (15) (Hosea)
Pekah, 20 years (15, 16) (Hosea)
Hoshea, 9 years (17) (Hosea)

Assyrian Captivity

722/721 B.C.

The Southern Kingdom

Kings of Judea (prophet)

Rehoboam, 17 years (1 Ki. 12-14)
Abijam, 3 years (15)
Asa, 41 years (15)

Jehoshaphat, 25 years (22)

Jehoram, 8 years (2 Ki. 8)
Ahaziah, 1 year (8; 9)
Athaliah, 6 years (11) (Obadiah?)

Joash, 40 years (12; 13) (Joel?)
Amaziah, 29 years (14)
(Jonah, Azariah (Uzziah), 52 years (15)
(Isaiah)

Jotham, 16 years (15) (Isaiah)
(Micah)

Ahaz, 16 years (16) (Isaiah, Micah)

Hezekiah, 29 years (18-20) (Isaiah, Micah)
Manasseh, 55 years (21)
Amon, 2 years (21)
Josiah, 31 years (22; 23)
(Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah)
Jehoahaz, 3 months (32)
Jehoiakim, 11 years (23; 24) (Jeremiah, Daniel)
Jehoiachin, 3 months (24; 25) (Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel)
Zedekiah, 11 years (24; 25) (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah?)

Babylonian Captivity

587/586 B.C.

