



**The
Mission
and Miracles
of Elisha**

**Part
Five**

A. W. Pink



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11. The Tenth Miracle Continuing

That to which we devoted much of our attention in previous meditations was *the requirement* made upon Naaman, because that demand and his compliance therewith is the hinge on which this miracle turns, as the response made by the sinner to the call of the Gospel settles whether or not he is to be cleansed from his sin. This does not denote that the success or failure of the Gospel is left contingent upon the will of men, but rather announces that *order of things* which God has instituted: an order in which He acts as Moral Governor and in which man is dealt with as a moral agent. In consequence of the fall, man is filled with enmity against God and is blind to his eternal interests. His will is opposed to God's and the depravity of his heart causes him to forsake his own mercies. Nevertheless, he is still a responsible creature, and God treats him as such. As His Moral Governor, God requires obedience from him, and in the case of His elect He obtains it, not by physical compulsion but by moral persuasion, not by mere force but by inclining them to free concurrence. He does not overwhelm by Divine might, but declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4).

What has just been pointed out above receives striking illustration in the incident before us. When God's requirement was made to Naaman, it pleased him not: he was angry at the prophet and rebellious against the instructions given him. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" was a definite test of obedience, calling for the surrender of his will unto the Lord. Everything

was narrowed down to that one thing: would he bow before and submit to the authoritative Word of God? In like manner every person who hears it is tested by the Gospel to-day. The Gospel is no mere “invitation” to be heeded or not as men please, and grossly dishonouring to God is it if we consider it only as such. The Gospel is a Divine proclamation, demanding the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against Heaven. God “now *commandeth* all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). And again we are told, “And this is His *commandment*: that ye believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). The Gospel is “for faith obedience” (Rom. 1:5) and Christ is “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb. 5:9). To those “that *obey not* the Gospel” the Lord Jesus will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance (2 Thess. 1:7-8). If men will not bow to Christ’s sceptre, they shall be made His footstool.

It was this very obedience that Naaman was reluctant to render: so much so that he was on the point of returning to Syria unhealed. Yet that could not be. In the Divine decree he was marked out to be the recipient of God’s sovereign grace. As yet Naaman might be averse from receiving grace in the way of God’s appointing, and the Devil might put forth a supreme effort to retain his victim; but whatever be the devices of the human heart or the malice of his Enemy, the counsel of the Lord must stand. When God has designs of mercy toward a soul, He sets in operation certain agencies which issue in the accomplishment of His purpose. The flesh may resist and Satan may oppose, but it stands written “Thy people *shall* be willing in the day of Thy power” (Psa. 110:3). That “day” had now arrived for Naaman, and speedily was this made manifest. It pleased God to exercise His “power” by moving the Syrian’s servants to remonstrate with him and by making effectual their expostulation. “My father” they said, “if the prophet had bade thee do some great thing, wouldst not thou have done it? how much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean. *Then* went he down”

and did as Elisha ordered.

“Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God” (2 Kings 5:14). “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, but active. 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 had wrought in him—by means of the pleading of his attendants—overcoming his reluctance. It was an act of *self-abasement*. “He went down and dipped” signifies three things: he descended from his chariot, he waded into the waters, he was submerged beneath them, and thus did he own his vileness before God. No less than “seven times” must he plunge into that dark stream, thereby acknowledging his *total* uncleanness. A person only slightly soiled may be cleansed by a single washing, but Naaman must dip seven times to make evident how great was his defilement. The “seven times” also intimated that God required *complete* submission to His will: nothing short of full surrender to Him is of any avail.

“Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God.” It is of deep importance that we grasp the exact purport of this second clause, otherwise we shall miss one of the principal lines in this Gospel picture. Note well then that it was *not* “according to the pleading of his attendants”—the last thing mentioned in the context. Had Naaman acted simply to please *them*, he might have dipped himself in Jordan seventy times and been no better off for it. Nor does it read “according to the saying of *Elisha*,” for it looks infinitely higher than that. “According to the saying of the man of God” signifies, according to the declaration of God Himself through His prophet. 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” (verse 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 him, and none ever will. That which has been spoken through the prophets and apostles is the Word of Him “that cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). He cannot falsify His Word. He cannot depart from it, alter it, or break it. “Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89). Forever, too, is it settled on earth: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of My lips” (Psa. 89:34). God has *promised* to receive, welcome, own, justify, preserve, and bring to Heaven, all who will take Him at His simple Word: who will rely upon it unconditionally and without reservation, setting to their seal that He is true. The warrant for us to believe lies in the promise itself, as it did for Naaman. The promise says, “you *may*,” the promise says, “you *must*,” the promise says, “you are shut up to me” (Gal. 3:23). And I—I say, “Lord, I believe.” Faith is a taking God at His Word—His undecieving and infallible Word—and trusting in Jesus Christ as my Saviour. If you have not already done so, delay no longer, but trust Him now, and wash in that “Fountain” which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child and he was clean.” Let it be duly noted that there was no lengthy

interval between the faith-obedience of Naaman and his healing, in fact no interval at all. There was no placing of him upon probation before his disease was removed: his cleansing was instantaneous. Nor was his cleansing partial and effected only by degrees: he was fully and perfectly healed there and then, so that not a single spot of his leprosy remained. And that is exactly what the glorious gospel of God announces and promises: “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from *all* sin” (1 John 1:7). The moment a sinner claims Christ as His own, His perfect righteousness is placed to his account. The moment any sinner really takes God at His Word and appropriates the Gospel promise, he is—without having to wait for anything further to be done for him or in him—entitled to and fit for Heaven, just as was the dying thief. If he be left here another hundred years he may indeed enter into a fuller understanding of the riches of Divine grace, but he will not become one iota fitter for Glory. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath* made us meet [not is now doing so] to be partakers of the Inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him—and he said, Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant” (verse 15). When a work of grace is wrought upon a person it is soon made evident by him. Mark the radical and blessed transformation which had been produced in Naaman’s heart as well as in his body. He might have hastened back at once to Syria, but he did not. Previously he had turned his back upon Elisha in a rage, but now he sought his face in gratitude. Formerly he had despised the “waters of Israel” (verse 12), now he acknowledged the God of Israel. All was completely changed. The proud and haughty Syrian was humbled, terming himself the prophet’s “servant.” The bitterness of his legalistic heart which had resented a way of deliverance that placed him on the same level as paupers had received its death wound. The enmity of his carnal mind against

God and his hatred of His prophet, together with his leprosy, were all left beneath Jordan's flood, and he emerged a new creature—cleansed and lowly in heart. No longer does he expect the prophet to seek him out and pay deference to him: instead he at once betook himself to Elisha and honoured him as God's servant—a lovely figure of a saved sinner desiring fellowship with the people of God.

Sixth, *its sequel*. Let us look more closely at the actions of the cleansed Naaman. First, he “returned to the man of God.” Nor did he seek him in vain: this time he came forth in person, there being no longer any occasion to communicate through his servant. Second, Naaman was the first to speak, and he bore testimony to the true and living God: “Behold, now *I know* there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.” He had listened to no lectures on evidences of the Divine existence, nor did he need to; effectively is a soul taught when it is made partaker of saving grace. Naaman was as sure now as Elisha himself that Jehovah is God, and He alone. Third, this testimony of Naaman's was not given in private to the prophet, but openly before “all his company.” Have you, my reader, made public profession of your faith? “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16): does a like witness issue from your lips, or are you attempting to be a “secret disciple” of His? Fourth, Naaman now wished to bestow a present on Elisha as an expression of his gratitude: are you ministering to the temporal needs of God's servants?

Yes, my reader, where a work of Divine grace has been wrought its subject soon makes the same evident to those around him. One who has fully surrendered to God cannot hide the fact from his fellows; nor will he wish to. A new life within cannot but be made manifest in a new life without. When Zaccheus was made a partaker of God's so-great salvation he gave half his goods to the poor and made fourfold restitution to those he had robbed (Luke 19:8). When Saul of Tarsus was converted he at once said, “Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?” and henceforth a walk of loving obedience unto Him marked the

grand transformation. No sooner was the Philippian jailor made savingly acquainted with Christ than he who had made fast in the stocks the feet of the sorely-beaten apostles “washed their stripes” and, after being baptised “brought them into his house and set meat before them” (Acts 16). Is it thus with you? Does your everyday conduct testify what Christ has done for you? or is your profession only like unto a leafy tree without any fruit on it?

“But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused” (verse 16). Naaman was now taught the *freeness* of God’s grace—just as Joseph (type of Christ as the Bread of Life) gave orders for the sacks of his brethren to be filled with corn and their money to be returned and placed in their sacks (Gen. 42:25). When God gives to sinners, He gives freely. It was for a truly noble reason then that Elisha declined the blessing from Naaman’s hand: he would not sully or compromise the blessed truth of Divine grace. “He would have Naaman return to Syria with this testimony, that the God of Israel had taken nothing from him but his leprosy! He would have him go back and declare that his gold and silver were useless in dealing with One who gave all for nothing” (Things New and Old). God delights in being the Giver: if you wish to please Him, continue coming before Him as a receiver. Listen to David, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits? I will *take* the cup of salvation and *call* upon His name” (Psa. 116:12, 13)—in other words, he would “render” to Him by receiving more!

By his response Elisha showed Naaman that the servant of God looks upon the wealth of this world with holy contempt. “Gratitude to the Lord will dictate liberality to the instruments of His mercies. But different circumstances will render it necessary for them to adopt different measures. The ‘man of God’ will never allow himself to covet any one’s gold or silver, or apparel; but be content with daily bread, and learn to trust for tomorrow. Yet sometimes he will understand that the proffered kindness is

the Lord's method of supplying his necessities, that it will be fruit abounding to the benefit of the donor, and that there is a propriety in accepting it as a token of love; but as others, the gift will be looked on as a temptation, and he will perceive that the acceptance of it would degrade his character and office, dishonour God, and tend exceeding to the injury of the giver. In this case he will decidedly refuse it. This is particularly to be adverted to in the case of the great, when they first turn their thoughts to religious subjects. From knowledge of the world, they are apt to suspect all their inferiors of mercenary designs, and naturally suppose that ministers are only carrying on a trade like other men; while the conduct of too many so-called confirms them in the sentiment. There is but one way of counteracting this prejudice, and that is by evidencing a disinterested spirit, and not asking anything, and in some cases refusing to accept favours from them, until they have attained a further establishment in the faith; and by always persevering in an indifference to every personal interest" (Thomas Scott).

"And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord" (verse 17). Once the true God is known (verse 15) all false ones are repudiated. Observe carefully his "be given" and "thy servant." He does not offer to purchase this soil, nor does he as "captain of the hosts" of Syria's victorious army demand it as a right. Grace had now taught him to be a *recipient* and conduct himself as a *servant*. Beautiful is it to see the purpose for which he wanted this earth: it was not from a superstitious veneration of the soil, but that he might honour God. This exhibits, once more, the great and grand change which had been wrought in Naaman. His chief concern now was to be a worshiper of the God of all grace, the God of Israel, and to this end he requests permission to take home with him sufficient soil of the land of Israel to build an altar. And is not the application of this unto ourselves quite apparent. When a soul has tasted that

the Lord is gracious, the spirit of worship possesses him, and he will reverently pour out his heart's adoration unto Him.

The order of Truth we have been considering is deeply instructive. First, we have a cleansed leper, a sinner saved by grace, (verse 14). Then an assured saint: "I know" (verse 15), and now a voluntary worshiper (verse 17). That is the unchanging order of Scripture. No one that ignores the cleansing blood of Christ or "the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26) can obtain any access to the thrice holy God. And none who doubts his acceptance in the Beloved can offer unto the Father that praise and thanksgiving which are His due, and therefore believers are bidden to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22). As we have passed from one detail to another we have sought to make definite application unto ourselves. Let us do so here. Naaman was determined to erect an altar unto the Lord in his own land. Reader, are you the head of a household? and do you claim to be a Christian? Then suffer this question: Have you erected an "altar" in your home? Do you gather the family around you each day and conduct worship? If not, you have good reason to call into question the genuineness of your profession. If God has His due place in your *heart*, He will have it in your *home*.

"In this the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon the Lord forgive thy servant in this thing" (verse 18). This presents a real difficulty, for as the verse reads it quite mars the typical picture and seems utterly foreign to all that precedes. It is true that Naaman was a converted heathen, yet he had himself acknowledged that "there is no God in all the earth but in Israel," so however great his previous ignorance, he was now enlightened. His desire to erect an altar unto Jehovah would appear to quite preclude the idea that he should in the next breath suggest that he play the part of a

temporiser and compromiser and then presumptuously count on the Lord's forgiveness. One who is fully surrendered to the Lord makes no reservation: he cannot, for His requirement is "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and *Him only* shalt thou serve;" and again, "touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." And still more difficult is it for us to understand Elisha's "Go in peace" (verse 19) if he had just been asked to grant a dispensation for what Naaman himself evidently felt to be wrong.

Is there then any legitimate method of removing this difficulty? Though he does not adopt it himself, Thomas Scott states that many learned men have sought to establish an alternative translation: "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant: that when my master *went* into the house of Rimmon to bow down himself there, that I bowed down myself there—the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." We do not possess sufficient scholarship to be able to pass judgment on this rendition, but from what little we do know of the Hebrew verb (which has no present tense) it strikes us as likely. In this case, Naaman's words look backward, evidencing a quickened conscience, confessing a past offense; rather than forward and seeking a dispensation for a future sin. But if that translation be a cutting of the knot rather than an untying of it, then we must suppose that Elisha perceived that Naaman was convinced that the thing he anticipated was not right, and so instead of rebuking him, left that conviction to produce its proper effect, assured that in due course when his faith and judgment matured he would take a more decided stand against idolatry.

12. Eleventh Miracle

The eleventh miracle of Elisha is so closely connected, and so intimately bound up with the tenth, that it will scarcely be out of place for us to bring forward the final division of the foregoing and use it as the introduction to this one. Though we dwelt at more than customary length on the healing of Naaman, and

pointed out much as we went along that was typical in connection with the same, yet there still remains several details of interest which deserve separate notice, and unto them we now turn. First, the cleansing of Naaman supplied a striking display of *the sovereignty of God*. This was emphasised by the Lord Jesus in His first public discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth, when He reminded His hearers, “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus (Elisha) the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27). It is ever thus with Him whose thoughts are so different from and whose ways are so high above ours that, when acting in the freeness of His grace, He passes by others and singles out the most unlikely to be the recipients of His high favours (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Second, the cleansing of Naaman afforded a blessed foreshadowment of the Divine mercy reaching out unto *the Gentiles*, for Naaman was not an Israelite, but a Syrian; nevertheless, he was made to learn the humbling lesson that if Divine grace was to be extended to him, such grace proceeds 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 large 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.

Third, the cleansing of Naaman provided a full adumbration of “the way of salvation” or what is *required of the sinner* in order to his cleansing. First, we have a picture of how fallen man

appears in the eyes of the thrice holy God—a leper, one condemned by His Law, a loathsome object, unfit for the Divine presence, a menace to his fellows. Then we behold his self-righteousness and self-importance, as he came expecting to purchase his healing, and was angry at the prophet’s refusal to show him deference. Next, we learn of the demand made upon him: he must descend from his chariot, and go and wash seven times in the Jordan. There must be the setting aside of his own thoughts and desires, the humbling of proud self, the acknowledgement of his total depravity, full surrender to God’s authority and faith’s laying hold of the promise “and the flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:10). Finally, we behold the immediate and complete transformation: “and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child” (2 Kings 5:14) with a corresponding change of heart and conduct toward Elisha and his God.

Ere passing from this most fascinating incident, one further word on the particular waters into which Naaman was required to dip. It was not in the river Kishon, nor the pool of Bethesda, but the Jordan. Why? The answer to that question reveals the striking accuracy of our type. As leprosy (emblem of sin) was in question, the *curse* must be witnessed to. Sin has called down the curse of the One against whom it has raised its defiant head (Gen 3). The curse is God’s judgment upon sin, and that judgment is *death*. It is this, of which the Jordan ever speaks. It was not because its waters possessed any magical properties or healing virtue: the very name Jordan means “judgment.” Those who heeded our Lord’s forerunner “were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their SINS” (Mark 1:5)—immersion beneath its waters was the acknowledgement that death was their due. Therefore did the Saviour allude to His death as a “baptism” (Luke 12:50), for at the cross, He was overwhelmed by the judgments of God (Psa. 42:7; 88:7), and when a sinner believes the Gospel and appropriates Christ as his Substitute, God regards him as having passed through His judgment of sin,

so that he can now say, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20), and in his baptism as a believer, there is a symbolical showing forth of that fact.

The miracle which is to now to engage our attention is of quite another order, the differences between them being most striking. We will, therefore consider, first, its *contrasts*. The subject of the foregoing miracle was a heathen idolater, now it is the prophet's own servant. The one sought unto the prophet for relief; the other pursued the relieved one and virtually demanded tribute from him. There we behold 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; in the other, 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 behold the goodness of God acting in a way of mercy; here we see His severity acting in holy justice. The former closes with the recipient of Divine grace returning home as a devout worshipper; the latter ends with a pronouncement of God's curse on the transgressor and on his seed forever.

Second, its *subject*. 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 unto the man of God on behalf of her dead son and cast herself at his feet, "Gehazi came near to thrust her away" (2 Kings 4:27) and his master bade him, "Let her alone." Then the prophet instructed his servant to go before him and lay his staff upon the face of the child (2 Kings 4:29). Elisha could successfully smite the waters of Jordan with Elijah's mantle because "the spirit of Elijah" rested upon him (2 Kings 2:15), but being devoid of the Spirit, the prophet's staff was of no avail in the prayerless hands of Gehazi (2 Kings 4:31). In 2 Kings 4:43, we behold 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 all of a piece and in keeping with his name, which significantly enough means, “Denier” [someone who rejects the existence, truth, or validity of something].

Third, its *occasion*. “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 Kings 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” (2 Kings 5:5). No doubt, a part of this was designed for travelling 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 (2 Kings 5:15, 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 honour of Jehovah and the glory of His grace counted nothing with him.

Every word in the above verse repays careful attention. It opens not with the usual “And,” but the ominous “But,” intimating 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 the more excuseless his wicked conduct, for it was not the act of an ignorant person, but of one well instructed in the ways of righteousness. Second, it emphasises 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 therein are far graver than those of others. But Gehazi had no concern for the glory of God, so he cared nothing for the reputation of Elisha.

What has just been pointed out above definitely refutes one of the widespread delusions of our day, namely, that it is their unfavourable surrounding which is responsible for the degenerate conduct of so many of the present generation: social improvement can only be effected by improving the wage and homes of the poor. And is the behaviour 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 makes the slums, and not the slums which ruin the people. God's Word teaches it is "out of the heart" of fallen man (Mark 7:21-23), and not from his faulty environment that proceeds all which defiles human nature. Nor it is any more warrantable for any person to attempt throwing the blame for his downfall on being obliged to mingle with evil characters. Gehazi was isolated from all bad companions placed in the most favourable 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" (Eccl. 8:11), the Gospel and not better "social amenities" is their 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 2 Kings 5:20, "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 make capital out of 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?*” (2 Kings 5:21). It is solemn to observe that God put no hindrance in the ways of him who had devised evil. He could have moved Naaman to quicken his pace and so out-distance Gehazi. But He did not: an indication that He had given him up to his heart’s lusts. It is ever a signal mark of Divine mercy when the Lord deigns to interfere with our plans and thwart 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.

Fourth, its *aggravation*. “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” (2 Kings 5:22). 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 realise 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 favourite 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 Kings 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 ought at his hands, 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 be a religious one. There have ever been religious leeches who consider the righteous are legitimate prey for them to fatten upon. Whilst it is a Christian duty to relieve the genuinely poor, and there are few such today, yet we are not to encourage idleness, nor suffer ourselves to 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” (2 Kings 5:24). He took pains to carefully conceal his ill-gotten gains in a “secret place” (margin), no doubt congratulating himself of his shrewdness—reminding us of the hiding themselves of our first parents (Gen. 3:8) and of Achan (Jos. 7:21). “But he went in, and stood before his master” (2 Kings 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 went no whither.” There was no repentance, but a daring brazening of it out.

Fifth, its *justice*. “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 olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white* as snow” (2 Kings 5:26, 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, sully God’s free grace. From the words that follow, Elisha indicated that he knew how Gehazi designed to use the money—intending to leave his service and set up as a farmer. His punishment was a condign one: he had coveted something of Naaman’s—he should have that which would henceforth symbolically portray the polluted state of his soul.

Sixth, its *significance*. Space obliges us to abbreviate. That Gehazi fully deserved the frightful punishment which was visited upon him, and that the form it took was a case of what is termed ‘poetic justice’ will be evident to every spiritual mind: nevertheless, there was a severity of dealing with him which is more noticeable than in other cases. Nor is the reason far to seek. God was incensed at his having so grievously compromised the display of His free grace. The Lord is very jealous of His types. Observe how He moved Joseph to restore the money to the sacks of his brethren when they came to obtain food from Egypt (Gen. 42:25): because he was there foreshadowing Christ as the Bread of life—given to us “without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). The failure of Moses was far more than a losing of his temper: it was a marring of a blessed type. Note “smite the rock” in Exodus 17:6, but only “*speak*” to it in Numbers 20:8—Christ was to be “smitten” (Isa. 53:4) but once! As Moses suffered premature death for his fault, so Gehazi was smitten with leprosy for his.

Seventh, its *lessons*. We can but mention three. First, there is a sharply-pointed example here of the bitter fruits borne by the nourishing of a covetous spirit, and a fearful exemplification of that word, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10). How we need to pray, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding

vanity” (Psa. 119:37). Second, there is a most solemn warning against putting a stumbling block in the way of a babe in Christ. Naaman had only recently come to know Jehovah as “the God of all grace” and that was another reason why He dealt so severely with Gehazi, *see* Matthew 18.6! Third, there is a searching test for those of us who are engaged exclusively in God’s service, though delivered from the love of money, we may *seek* the good opinion and praise of men.

13. Twelfth Miracle

We have entitled this series of articles, “The Mission and Miracles of Elisha,” and as we pointed out in our Introductory paper, much the larger part of what is recorded of the life of this prophet is devoted to a description of the miracles performed by him and the circumstances or occasions which gave rise to them. Excepting that which occupied our attention in the first two or three articles, when we contemplated the preparing and enduing of him for his work, very little indeed has been said about Elisha’s mission or ministry up to the point we have now reached in his history. Yet here and there, brief hints have been given us of that which engaged most of his energies. Those hints centre around the several brief mentions made of “the sons of the prophets” and the relation which Elisha sustained to them, a further reference to whom is found in the passage, which is now to be before us. As we pointed out under the previous series on Elijah, Israel had fallen on bad times and their spirituality was at a low ebb. Idolatry was rampant and God’s judgments fell frequently upon them—in the form of suffering the surrounding nations to invade their land (1 Kings 20:1, 26; 22:1; 2 Kings 1:1; 5:2).

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 emphasise 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 Kings 2:3, 5) and yet another at Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38). It is from the last reference we learn that Elisha was wont to sojourn with them for a season and preach or lecture to them, as their “sitting before him” signifies (Deut. 33:3; Luke 2:46; 10:39); and from the repeated mention of “the people” in this connection (2 Kings 4:41, 42) we gather that these seminaries also served as more general places of assembly whither 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” (2 Kings 4:40) and “master” (2 Kings 6:5).

First, *its connection*. “And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us” (2 Kings 6:1). By means of the opening “And” the Holy Spirit has linked together the miracle recorded at the end of chapter 5 and the one we are now to consider. As in previous instances, it points to both comparisons and contrasts. Each miracle concerned those who were intimately connected with Elisha—in the one case, his personal attendant; in the other, his students. Each occurred at the same place—in the immediate vicinity of the Jordan. Each was occasioned by dissatisfaction with the position its subjects occupied—the one reprehensible, the other commendable. But there, it was the unfaithful Gehazi; while here, it was the devoted sons of the prophets. In the one, Gehazi took matters into his own hands; in the other, they deferentially asked permission of their master. In the former, an act of theft was committed; in the latter, a borrowed article was recovered. In that, a curse descended upon the guilty one; in this, an article was retrieved from the place of judgment.

Second, *its occasion*. “And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us” (2 Kings 6:1). There does not appear to us to be anything in this verse, which justifies the conclusion that some

have drawn from it, namely, that these young men were discontented with their quarters and lusted after something more congenial. Charity always requires us to place the best construction on the projects and actions of our fellows. The motives which prompt them lie beyond our purview, and therefore, are outside of our province; and actions are to be condemned only when it is unmistakably clear that they are evil in their nature or tendency. Had these students given expression to a covetous desire, surely Elisha had reproved them; certainly, he would not have encouraged their plan, as the sequel shows he did.

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 Kings 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” (2 Kings 6:1)—they had 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, 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 becomingly pointed out to him the exigency of the situation.

“Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell” (2 Kings 6:2). Had their desire for more spacious quarters proceeded from carnal ambition, they had aspired to something more imposing than a wooden building; nor is it at all likely that in such a case, they had volunteered to do the work themselves—rather had they suggested going around with collecting cards,

soliciting gifts from the people, so that they might have the money to hire others to erect a more commodious seminary for them. “They were humble men who did not affect that which was gay or great. They did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for the great in the *other* world to be content with mean things in *this*” (Matthew Henry). Alas, that Protestants have so often aped the Romanists in making a show before the world.

“And he answered, Go ye” (2 Kings 6:2), which he surely had not done if they had become discontented with their humble quarters and were lusting after some thing more agreeable to the flesh. That reply of Elisha’s was something more than a bare assent to their proposal or permission for them to execute the same; it was also a real testing of their hearts. Those who are accustomed to judge harshly of others might infer that these young men had grown tired of the strict discipline which Elisha must have enforced, and had found irksome the pious and devotional type of life he required from them, and that this idea of making for the Jordan was but a cover for their determination to get away from the man of God. In such a case, they had promptly availed themselves of his grant, bidden him farewell, and promptly taken their departure.

But we may learn something more from this answer, “Go ye:” it gives us a sidelight on the prophet’s own character, manifesting as it does his *humility*. He at once perceived the reasonableness of their request and concurred with them therein, whereas a proud and haughty man had quickly resented any suggestion coming from those under his charge or care. Thus, an important practical lesson is here inculcated: superiors ought not to deem themselves above receiving and weighing ideas from their inferiors, and when discerning the wisdom of the same and recognising they could be carried out to advantage, 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 disdainful the counsel of his wife or employees.

“And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants” (2 Kings 6:3). Very blessed is this, revealing as it does the happy relations, which existed between them and of the veneration and love these students had for their master. Such meekness and graciousness on the part of superiors, as we have alluded to above, is not unappreciated by their inferiors. Right nobly did they respond to the test contained in Elisha’s “Go ye,” by begging him to accompany them on their expedition. And how such a request on their part refutes the evil inference which some might draw from their original proposal—jumping to the conclusion that they were tired of Elisha’s company and merely devised this plan as a pretext to get away from him. A warning to us not to surmise evil of our fellows, giving point to Christ’s admonition, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

Third, *its location*: the Jordan. “And he answered, I will go. So he went with them” (2 Kings 6:3, 4). 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 Kings 6:4). Very commendable was this. But how unlike the pampered and spoiled young people of our generation who have been encouraged to expect that some one else will do everything for them, that they should be waited on hand and foot by their seniors. These young men were willing and ready to put their own shoulder to the work. They did not seek to shelter behind a false conception of their sacred calling and indulge a foolish pride or papish-like exaltation of their office by concluding that such a thing was beneath their dignity, considering themselves far too superior to engage in manual labour. No, instead of hiring others to do it, they performed the task themselves.

“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” (2 Kings 6:5). 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 action, which were not intended by us. It was no design of this man that he should lose the head of his axe: that he did so was accidental on his part.

Fourth, its *purpose*: To recover a borrowed article. “And he cried and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” How strange that such a thing should happen while in the performance of duty! Yet the Lord had a wise and good reason for permitting the same, and mercifully prevented the death of another (Deut. 19:5). It is to be duly noted that he did not regard Elisha as being too great a man to be troubled about such a trifling matter, but as an honest person deeply concerned over the loss, and assured of his master’s sympathy, he at once informed him. His “alas” seems to denote that he regarded his loss as final and had no expectation it would be retrieved by a miracle. The lesson for us is plain: even though (to our shame) we have no faith, of His showing Himself strong on our behalf, it is ever our duty and privilege to spread before our Master everything that troubles us.

***“Not one concern of ours is small
If we belong to Him,
To teach us this, the Lord of all
Once made the iron to swim” – John Newton.***

Fifth, its *means*. “And the man of God said” (2 Kings 6:6)—observe the change 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 in him. “And

he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim” (2 Kings 6:6). There was no proportion between the means and the end—to demonstrate the power was of God! The Hebrew word for “stick” is a generic one. It is rendered “tree” 162 times, being the same word as in Exodus 15:25; Deuteronomy 21:22—quoted in Galatians 3:13! It is also translated “wood” 103 times, as in Genesis 6:14, the shittim “wood” used in connection with the frame and furniture of the Tabernacle, and in verse 4 of our passage. Evidently, it was a small tree or sapling Elisha cut down, and the above references make clear its typical import.

Sixth, *its meaning*. 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 ought 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), yea, “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 as informing the believer *how lost blessing* 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 of 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): unbosom 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” (Psa. 118:5) God has provided for us. 2. The recognition that to enter therein involves effort from us (2 Kings 6:2), labour on our part. 3. Seek the oversight of a servant of God in this (2 Kings 6:3) if he be available. 4. Observe very carefully the particular place to which we must betake ourselves if such spiritual enlargement is to be ours. It is “the Jordan” and that speaks of *death*: 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.

Seventh, *its lessons*. 1. See the value of requesting our Master’s presence even when about to engage in manual labour. 2. Be conscientious about borrowed articles—*books* for example! We should be more careful about things loaned us than those which are our own. 3. Despise not those engaged in manual labour: Elisha did not. 4. Let not the servant of God disdain what may seem trifling opportunities to do good. 5.

Remember your Father cares for His people in their minutest concerns. 6. Is anything too hard for Him who made the iron to swim? 7. What encouragement is here for us to heed, Philippians 4:6!

14. Thirteenth Miracle

In the incident which is to be before us, we behold 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 counsellors, he decided to encamp in a certain place through which the king of Israel was wont 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 thereof; and heeding the same, the king was preserved from the snare set for him. It is required of us that, as we have opportunity, we "do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10). True, the Christian is not endowed with the extraordinary gifts of an Elisha; nevertheless, he has a responsibility toward his king or ruler. Not only is he Divinely commanded to "Honour 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). Coming now to our miracle.

First, its *connection*. "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 chapter 5, taking chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 as a parenthesis, thereby emphasising 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 signal favour had been rendered to him, aggravated his offence and made the 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-dyed 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, as supplying a picture of the sinner's redemption. Viewing it thus, what is the next thing we should expect to meet with? Why, the rage of the Enemy, and this is adumbrated by the attack of the king of Syria. Second, that miracle may also be regarded as showing the Christian how a lost blessing is to be retrieved. And when the believer has peace, joy, 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, that 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 Benhadad 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 can stop them from executing their desires and devices, but the restraining hand of God. Neither solemn warnings nor kindly favours—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”—not asked 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. Fain would we hope that it was *against* the remonstrance of Naaman, rather than with his approval the king now acted. Yet what daring impiety to attack a people whose God wrought such marvels! If he was impressed by the healing of the general, the impression speedily faded. “Saying, in such and such a place shall be my camp.” From the sequel, it would appear that this particular “place” was one through which the king of Israel had occasion to frequently pass; thus, he 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 always, and where he is most likely to gain an advantage over us. But carefully as he made his plans, this king reckoned without the Most High.

Second, its *occasion*. “And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down” (2 Kings 6:9). Yes, the king of Syria had left the living God out of his calculations: He is fully acquainted with the thoughts and intention 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 his enemy in battle and enable him to vanquish him. Instead, He prompted His servant to give his royal master warning and made the same effectual unto 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: “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He 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” (2 Kings 6:9).

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, as 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 (1 Pet. 5:8). 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. Ere 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 2 Kings 6:8 and the connecting “And” of verse 9 require—and complete the line of thought set out in our third 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 an one will receive and heed Divine warning.

“And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God (not “Elisha!”) told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice” (2 Kings 6:10). Here we see the king’s scepticism (compare 2 Kings 5:7): he had some respect for the prophet’s message or he had disregarded it; yet, he had not full confidence therein or he had not “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

no groundless one. 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 fellows 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 *test* his warnings, investigating them in the light of Scriptures, "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 shew 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, God had no place in his thoughts, and therefore, he sought a natural explanation. Instead of recognising that God was on the side of Israel, and blaming himself, he was chagrined at the failure of his plan, suspected there was 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 recognised 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 acknowledgement that He was the One who revealed such secrets unto 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, save His own people.

Third, its *location*, namely, Dothan, which was to the west of Jordan, in the north-east portion of Samaria. Significantly enough, Dothan means “double feast” and from Genesis 37:16 and 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 recognise 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 the bosses of His buckler and made him feel his own impotency. Typically, this verse illustrates the persistency 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, the Devil makes special efforts to silence those who successfully warn the one he would fain take captive.

“Therefore sent he thither horses and chariots, and a great host [of infantry]: and they came by night, and compassed the city about” (2 Kings 6:14). That he had some realisation of the power Elisha wielded is evident by the strength and silence of the force, he now sent forth to take him prisoner; yet, 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 conviction 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 sin career. The surrounding of Dothan “by night” illustrates the truth that the natural man prefers the darkness to the light, and typically signifies that our Adversary follows a policy of stealth and secrecy, ever seeking to take us unawares—especially when we are *asleep*.

Fourth, its *subject*. “And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how 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, was he now 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! how 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” (see 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 affrighted him. And did we never entertain a similar hope? and when our hope was not realised, did we never give utterance to an unbelieving “Alas! how shall we do?”—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 our self, 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 realisation of *that* will dispel our doubts and quieten our fears. “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Fifth, its *means*. “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 affrighted 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 the same 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 a child of His who asks in simple faith and unselfish concern for another.

Sixth, its *marvel*. “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” (2 Kings 6:16): the invisible guard was now made visible in 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” (Psa. 34:7) and of “Are they [the “angels” of the previous verse] 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 that occasion because of the Syrian horses and chariots which “encompassed 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 verse 14; that they were angels may also be gathered from a comparison with Hebrews 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8.

Seventh, its *meaning*. 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 world 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 quieted with a calm and confident “Fear not,” backed 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.

The fifth of seven booklets.

