



The Mission and Miracles of Elisha

**Part
One**

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1. Introduction

That which occupies the central and dominant place in what the Spirit has been pleased to record of the life of Elisha are the *miracles* performed by and connected with him. Far more miracles were wrought by him or were granted in answer to his prayers than by 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 the implication and signification of the same. 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* by them indicates the state into which they 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 and owned the Lord but the masses were worshippers 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 sceptical to recognize His existence and subscribe to His supremacy.

In our introductory article on the life of *Elijah* we pointed out what is implied and denoted by the *prophetic* office and mission. We think now it is fitting that we should make a few remarks upon the reason for and meaning of *miracles*. The two partake of much the same nature, for prophecy is really an oral miracle, while miracles are virtually prophecies (forthtellings of God) in action. As God only sends forth one of His Prophets 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 favoured 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 those displays of Divine power that Moses was a Prophet sent from God, they had never 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 favour of His people: one in the *water* 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 having 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 being forced to testify, “I find no fault in

Him?” Did not His conduct on the Cross demonstrate that He was no impostor—the centurion and his fellows owning “truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 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 their traditions and therefore did Christ reveal the wisdom and power of God as none other before or since by a series of miracles which warranted Him 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 supplying the key both to their implication and their signification. 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 the 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 as it were 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 signification 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 compare with Num. 35:30). Thus two is also the number of *witness*, 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 compare with Rev. 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 Zarephath and rewarded her by restoring her son to life (1 Kings 17:25), so Elisha was entertained by a woman at Shunem (2 Kings 4:8-10) and repaid her by restoring her son to life (4:35-37).

Striking as are the points of agreement between the two Prophets, yet the contrasts in their careers and works are just as vivid and certainly more numerous. The one appeared suddenly and dramatically upon the stage of public action without a word being told us of from whence he sprang or how had previously been engaged—but of the other the name of his father is recorded and 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 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 (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 being taken to Heaven in a chariot of fire and the other falling sick in old age and dying 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 signification of miracles, we shall be the less surprised. As we have pointed out, a state of general infidelity and idolatry forms their background and thus the reason for and purpose of them breaking through the darkness and making Himself manifest to His people who 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 benignity. 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 now are: 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 hope 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 though the present order of "civilization" is doomed to destruction, we know not what favours 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 and if such is the case then black as is the present outlook and blacker as it may 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 have the times of Elijah 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, but rather 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 directing 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?

His Call.

In our introductory article we sought to point out the close connection there is between the missions and ministries of Elijah and Elisha—let us now consider the personal relation that existed between the two Prophets themselves. This is something more than a point of interest: it throws light upon the character and career of the latter, and it enables us to discern the deeper spiritual

meaning which is to be found in this portion of the Word. There was a twofold relation between them: one official and the other more intimate. The former is seen in 1 Kings 19:16 where we learn that Elijah was commanded to “anoint Elisha to be Prophet,” and it is worthy of note that while it is generally believed all the Prophets were officially “anointed” yet Elisha’s case is the only one expressly recorded in Scripture. Next we learn that immediately following his call Elisha “went after Elijah and ministered unto him” (19:21), so the relation between them was that of master and servant, confirmed by the statement that he “poured water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kings 3:11).

But there was more than an official union between these two men: the ties of affection bound them together. There is reason to believe that Elisha accompanied Elijah during the last ten years of his earthly life, and during the closing scenes we are shown how closely they were knit together and how strong was the love of the younger man to his master. During their lengthy journey from Gilgal to the Jordan, Elijah said to his companion, again and again, “Tarry ye here, I pray thee,” but nothing could deter Elisha from spending the final hours in the immediate presence of the one who had won his heart or make him willing to break their communion: so they “still went on, and talked” (2 Kings 2:11). Observe how the Spirit has emphasized this: first “they went down to Bethel” (verse 2), but later “they *two* went on” (verse 6), “they two stood by Jordan” (verse 7), “they two went on dry ground” (verse 8), refusing to be separated. And when they *must* be, Elisha cried, “My father! my father” (verse 12)—a term of endearment. And in token of his deep grief “took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces.”

As the invariable rule of Scripture, it is the *first* mention which supplies the key to all that follows: “Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be Prophet in *thy room*” (1 Kings 19:16). Those words signify something more than that he was to be his successor. Elisha was to take Elijah’s place and act as his accredited representative. This is confirmed by the fact that when he found Elisha, Elijah “cast his mantle upon him” (verse

19), which signified the closest possible identification. It is very remarkable to find that when Joash, the king of Israel, visited the dying Elisha he uttered the self-same words over him as the Prophet had used when Elijah was departing from this world. Elisha cried “My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof”—the real defence of Israel (2 Kings 2:12). And Joash said, “O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof” (2 Kings 13:14): that not only marked the identification of Elisha with Elijah, but the identification as actually *owned* by the king himself.

Another detail which serves to manifest the relation between the two Prophets is found in the striking reply made by Elisha unto the question of his master: “Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken from thee,” namely, “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (2 Kings 2:9). That his request was granted appears clear from the sequel: “if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee,” and verse 12 assures us, “and Elisha saw it.” Moreover, when the young Prophets saw him smite the waters of the Jordan with his master’s mantle so that they “parted hither and thither,” (verse 14) they exclaimed, “The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha” (verse 15). The “double portion” was that which pertained to the firstborn or oldest son and heir: “But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a *double* portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength: the right of the firstborn is his” (Deut. 21:17), and compare with, 1 Chronicles 5:1.

Elisha, then, was far more than the historical successor of Elijah: he was appointed and anointed to be his *representative*—we might almost say his “ambassador.” He was the man who had been called by God to take Elijah’s place before Israel. Though Elijah had left this scene and gone on High, his ministry was not to cease: true, he was no longer here in person but he would be so in spirit. Elisha was to be in “his room” (1 Kings 19:16), for the starting point of his mission was the ascension of his master. Now what, we may ask, is the spiritual significance of this? What is the important instruction to be found in it for us today? Surely the

answer is not far to seek. The relation between Elijah and Elisha was that of *master* and *servant*. Since the anointing of Elisha into the prophetic office is the only case of its kind expressly recorded in Scripture, are we not required to look upon it as a representative or *pattern* one? Since Elijah was a figure of Christ, is it not evident that Elisha is a type of those servants specially called to represent Him here upon earth?

The conclusion drawn above is manifestly confirmed by all the preliminary details recorded of Elisha ere he entered upon his life's work. Those details may all be summed up under the following heads: his call, the testing to which he was submitted and from which he successfully emerged, the oath he was required to follow, and the special endowment which he received equipping him for his service. The closer these details are examined and the more they be prayerfully pondered, the more evidently will it appear to anointed eyes that the experiences through which Elisha passed are those which substantially each genuine servant of Christ is required to encounter. Let us consider them in the order named. First, the call of which he was the recipient. This was his induction into the sacred ministry. It was a clear definite call by God, the absence of which makes it the height of presumption for anyone to invade the holy office.

The summons which Elisha received to quit his temporal avocation and henceforth devote the whole of his time and energies to God and His people is noted in, "So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who, plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth; and Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him" (1 Kings 19:19). Observe how that here, as everywhere, God took the initiative: Elisha was not seeking unto God. But the Lord through Elijah sought him out. Elisha was not found in his study but in the field, not with a book in his hand, but at the plow. As one of the Puritans said when commenting thereon, "God seeth not as man seeth, neither does He choose men because they *are* fit, but He fits them because He hath chosen them." Sovereignty is stamped plainly upon the Divine choice, as appears also in the calling of

the sons of Zebedee while “mending their nets” (Matt. 4:21), of Matthew while he was “sitting at the receipt of custom” (Matt. 9:9), and Saul of Tarsus when persecuting the early Christians.

Though Elisha does not appear to have been seeking or expecting a call from the Lord to engage in His service, yet it is to be noted that he was *actively engaged* when the call came to him, as was each of the others alluded to above. The ministry of Christ is no place for idlers and drones who wish to spend much of their time driving around in cars or being entertained in the homes of their members and friends. No, it is a vocation which calls for constant self-sacrifice, which entails the burning of the midnight oil and which demands tireless devotion to the performance of duty. Those, then, who are most likely to be sincere and energetic in the ministry are those who are industrious and business-like in their temporal avocation. Alas, how many who wish to shirk their natural responsibilities and shelve hard work have entered the ministry to enjoy a life of comparative ease.

“Elisha” means “God is Saviour” and his father’s name “Shaphat” signifies “judge.” “Abelmeholah” is literally “meadow of the dance” and was a place in the inheritance of Issachar, at the north of the Jordan valley. Elisha’s father was evidently a man of some means for he had “twelve yoke of oxen” engaged in plowing, yet he did not allow his son to grow up in idleness as so often is the case with the wealthy. It was while Elisha was usefully engaged in the performance of duty, undertaking the strenuous work of plowing, that he was made the recipient of a Divine call unto special service. This was indicated by the approach of the Prophet Elijah and his casting his mantle—the insignia of his office—upon him. It was a clear intimation of his own investiture of the Prophetic office. This call was accompanied by Divine power, the Holy Spirit moving Elisha to accept the same, as may be seen from the promptness and decidedness of his response.

Before we look at his response let us consider the very real and stern *test* to which Elisha was subjected. The issue was clearly drawn: to enter upon the prophetic office, to identify himself with Elijah meant a drastic change in his manner of life. It meant the

throwing up of a lucrative worldly position—the leaving of the farm—for the servant and soldier of Jesus Christ *must not* “entangle himself with the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:4)—Paul’s labouring at “tent-making” was quite the exception to the rule and a sad reflection upon the parsimoniousness of those to whom he ministered. It meant the breaking away from home and natural ties. Said the Lord Jesus, “he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37): if such immoderate affection was an effectual bar to Christian discipleship (Luke 14:26) how much more so from the Christian ministry? The test often comes at this very point: it did so with the present writer, who was called to labour in a part of the Lord’s vineyard thousands of miles from his native land, so that he saw not his parents for the space of thirteen years.

There was first, then, the testing of Elisha’s affections, but he shrank not from the sacrifice he was now called upon to make. “And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah.” Note the alacrity, the absence of any reluctance. And he said, “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother and I will follow thee.” Observe his humble spirit: he had already taken the *servant’s* place, and would not even perform a filial duty without first receiving permission from his master. Let any who may be exercised in mind as to whether or not they have received a call to the ministry search and examine themselves at this point, to see if such a spirit has been wrought in them. The nature of Elisha’s request shows clearly that he was not a man devoid of natural feelings, but an affectionate son, warmly attached to his parents. So far from being an excuse for delaying his obedience to the call, it was a proof of his promptness in accepting it and of his readiness to make a deliberate break from all natural ties.

“And he (Elijah) said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?” (verse 20). It was as though the Prophet said: Do not act impulsively, but sit down and count the cost ere you definitely commit yourself. Elijah did not seek to influence or persuade him: it is not to me but to God you are accountable—it is

His call which you are to weigh. He knew quite well that if the Holy Spirit were operating He would complete the work and Elisha would return to him. O that the rank and file of God's people would heed this lesson! How many a young man, never called of God, has been pressed into the ministry by well-meaning friends who had more zeal than knowledge? None may rightly count upon the Divine blessing in the service of Christ unless he has been expressly set apart thereto by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2). One of the most fearful catastrophes which has come upon the churches (and those terming themselves "assemblies") during the past century has been the repetition of what God complained of old: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran" (Jer. 23:21). To intrude into the sacred office calls down Heaven's curse (2 Sam. 6:6, 7).

But Elisha's acceptance of this call from God not only meant the throwing up of a comfortable worldly position and the breaking away from home and natural ties. It also involved his following or casting in his lot with one who was very far from being a popular hero. Elijah had powerful enemies who more than once had made determined attempts on his life. Those were dangerous times, when persecution was not only a possibility but a probability. It was well, then, for Elisha to sit down and count the cost: by consorting with Elijah he would be exposed to the malice of Jezebel and all her priests. The same is true in principle of the Christian minister. Christ is despised and rejected of men, and to be faithfully engaged in His service is to court the hostility not only of the secular but of the religious world as well. It was on religious grounds that Jezebel persecuted Elijah, and it is by the false prophets of Christendom and their devotees that the genuine ministers of God will be most hated and hounded. Nought but love for Christ and His people enable him to triumph over his enemies.

"And he returned back from him and took a yoke of oxen and slew them and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen and gave unto the people and they did eat" (1Kings 19:21). This farewell feast was a token of joy at his new calling and an expression of gratitude to God for His distinguishing favour. The

burning of the oxen's tackle was a sign that he was bidding a final adieu to his old employment. Those oxen and tools of industry, wherein his former labours had been bestowed, were now gladly devoted to the celebration of the high honour of being called to engage in the service of God Himself. Those who rightly esteem the sacred ministry will freely renounce every other interest and pleasure, though called upon to labour amid poverty and persecution; yea, they who enter into the work of our heavenly Master without holy cheerfulness are not at all likely to prosper therein. Levi the publican made Christ "a great feast in his own house" to celebrate his call to the ministry, inviting a great company thereto (Luke 5:27-29).

"Then he arose and went after Elijah." See here the power of the Holy Spirit! The evidence of God's effectual call is a heart made willing to respond thereto. Divine grace is able to subdue every lust, conquer every prejudice, surmount every difficulty. Elisha left his worldly employment, the riches to which he was heir, his parents and friends, and threw in his lot with one who was an outcast here. Thus it was with Moses, who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26). Love for Christ and His saints, faith in His ultimate "Well done," were the motive-springs of his actions. And such must actuate one entering the ministry today.

"Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him" (1 Kings 19:21). That was the final element in this initial test. Was he prepared to take a subordinate and lowly place, to become a servant, subjecting himself to the will of another? That is what a servant is: one who places himself at the disposal of another, ready to take orders from him, desirous of promoting *his* interests. He who would be given important commissions must prove himself. Thus did God approve of Stephen's service to the poor (Acts 6:5) by later permitting him to address the leaders of the nation (Acts 7:1, 2). Because Phillip "disdained not to serve

tables” (Acts 6:2, 5) he was advanced to the rank of missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 8:5, 26). On the other hand, Mark was discontented to be merely a servant of an Apostle (Acts 15:37, 39) and so lost the opportunity of being trained for personal participation in the most momentous missionary journey ever undertaken. Elisha became the servant of God’s servant, and we shall see how he was rewarded.

His Testing.

Last month we pointed out that the peculiar relation which existed between Elijah and Elisha foreshadowed that which pertains to Christ and His servants, and that the early experiences through which Elisha passed are those which, substantially, each genuine minister of the Gospel is called upon to encounter. All the preliminary details recorded of the Prophet ere his mission commenced must have their counterpart in the early history of any who is used of God in the work of His kingdom. Those experiences in the case of Elisha began with a definite call from the Lord, and that is still His order of procedure. That call was followed by a series of very real testings, which may well be designated a preliminary course of discipline. Those testings were many and varied. They were seven in number, which at once indicates the thoroughness and completeness of the ordeals through which Elisha went and by which he was schooled for the future. If we are not to ignore here the initial one there will of necessity be a slight overlapping between this section and what was before us last month.

First, the testing of his *affections*. This occurred at the time he received his call to devote the whole of his time and energies to the service of God and His people. A stern test it was. Elisha was not one who had failed in temporal matters and now desired to better his position, nor was he deprived of those who cherished him and so anxious to enter a more congenial circle. Far from it. He was the son of a well-to-do farmer, living with parents to whom he was devotedly attached. Response to Elijah’s casting of the prophetic mantle upon him meant not only the giving up of

favourable worldly prospects but the severing of happy home ties. The issue was plainly drawn. Which should dominate?—zeal for Jehovah or love for his parents? That Elisha was very far from being one of a cold and unfeeling disposition is clear from a number of things. When Elijah bade him remain at Bethel, he replied, “I will not leave thee” (2 Kings 2:2). And when his master was caught away from him he evidenced his deep grief by crying out, “my father! My father” and by rending his garments asunder (verse 12).

No, Elisha was no stoic, and it cost him something to break away from his loved ones. But he shrank not from the sacrifice demanded of him. He “left the oxen” with which he had been plowing and “ran after Elijah” asking only, “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee” (1 Kings 19:20). Permission being granted, a hasty and farewell speech was made and he took his departure. The sacred narrative contains no mention that he ever returned home even for a brief visit. Dutiful respect, yea tender regard, was shown for his parents, but he did not prefer them before God. The Lord does not require His servants to callously ignore their filial duty, but He does claim the first place in their hearts. Unless one who is contemplating an entrance into the ministry is definitely prepared to accord Him that, he should at once abandon his quest. No man is eligible for the ministry unless he is ready to resolutely subordinate natural ties to spiritual bonds. Blessedly did the spirit prevail over the flesh in Elisha’s response to this initial trial.

Second, the testing of his sincerity. This occurred at the outset of the final journey of the two Prophets. “And it came to pass when the Lord would take up Elijah into Heaven by a whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee” (2 Kings. 2:1, 2). Various reasons have been advanced by the commentators as to why the Tishbite should have made such a request. Some think it was because he wished to be alone, that modesty and humility would not suffer that his companion should witness the very great honour which was about to be bestowed upon him. Others suppose it was

because he desired to spare Elisha the grief of a final leave-taking. But in view of all that follows and taking this detail in connection with the whole incident, we believe these words of the Prophet bear quite a different interpretation, namely, that Elijah was now making proof of Elisha's determination and attachment to him. At the time of his call Elisha had said, "I will follow thee," and now he was given the opportunity to go back if he were so disposed

There was one who accompanied the Apostle Paul for awhile, but later Paul had to lament, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world and is departed into Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10). Many have done likewise—daunted by the difficulties of the way, discouraged by the unfavourable response to their efforts, their ardour cooled and they concluded they had mistaken their calling. Or, because only small and unattractive fields opened to them, they decided to better themselves by returning to worldly employment. To what numbers do those solemn words of Christ apply: "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Far otherwise was it with Elisha. No fleeting impression had actuated him when he declared to Elijah, "I will follow thee," and when he was put to the proof as to whether or not he was prepared to follow him to the end of the course, he successfully stood the test and gave evidence of his unwavering fidelity. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," was his unflinching response. O for like stability!

Third, the testing of his *will* or resolution. From Gilgal Elijah and his companion had gone on to Bethel, and there he encountered a subtle temptation, one which had prevailed over any whose heart was not thoroughly established. "And the sons of the Prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, Know thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?" (2 Kings 2:3). Which was as much as saying, Why think of going on any further, what is the use of it, when the Lord is on the point of taking him from thee? And mark it well, they who here sought to make him waver from his course were not the agents of Jezebel but those who were on the side of the Lord.

Nor was it just one who would deter Elisha, but apparently the whole body of the Prophets endeavoured to persuade him that he should relinquish his purpose. It is in this very way God tries the metal of His servants—to make evident to themselves and others whether they are vacillating or steadfast, whether they are regulated wholly by His call and will or whether their course is directed by the counsels of men.

A holy independence is to mark the servant of God. Thus it was with the chief of the Apostles: “I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal. 1:16). Had he done so, what trouble would he have made for himself! Had he listened to the varied advice the other Apostles would proffer, what a state of confusion his own mind had been in! If Christ is my Master, then it is from Him, and from Him alone, I must take my orders. Until I am sure of His will I must continue to wait upon Him. Once it is clear to me, I must set out on the performance of it and nothing must move me to turn aside. So it was here. Elisha had been Divinely called to follow Elijah and he was determined to cleave to him unto the end, even though it meant going against the well-meant advice and offending the whole of his fellows. “Hold ye your peace” was his reply. This was one of the trials which the present writer encountered over thirty years ago when his pastor and Christian friends urged him to enter a theological seminary, though they knew that deadly error was taught there. It was not easy to take his stand against them, but I am deeply thankful I did so.

Fourth, the testing of his *faith*. “And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here I pray thee, for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho” (2 Kings 2:4). “Tarry *here*.” They were at Bethel, and this was a place of sacred memories. It was here that Jacob had spent his first night as he fled from the wrath of his brother. Here he had been favoured with that vision of the ladder whose top reached unto Heaven and beheld the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Here it was Jehovah had revealed Himself and given him precious promises. When he awakened, Jacob said, “Surely the LORD is in this place....this is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of Heaven” (Gen. 28). Delectable

spot was this: the place of Divine communion. Ah, one which is supremely attractive to those who are spiritually-minded and therefore one which such are entirely loath to leave. What can be more desirable than to abide where such privileges and favours are enjoyed! So felt Peter on the holy mount. As he beheld Christ transfigured and Moses and Elijah talking with Him, he said, "Lord, it is good to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—let us remain and enjoy such bliss. But that could not be.

God still tests His servants at this very point. They are in some place where the smile of Heaven manifestly rests upon their labours. The Lord's presence is real, His secrets are revealed to them and intimate communion is enjoyed with Him. If he followed his own inclinations he would remain there, but he is not free to please himself—he is the servant of Another and must do *His* bidding. Elijah had announced, "the LORD hath sent me to Jericho." And if Elisha was to "follow" him to the end, then to Jericho he, too, must go. True, Jericho was far less attractive than Bethel, but the will of God pointed clearly to it. It is not the consideration of his own tastes and comforts which is to actuate the minister of Christ but the performance of duty—no matter where it leads to. The mount of transfiguration made a powerful appeal unto Peter, but at the base thereof there was a demon-possessed youth in dire need of deliverance (Matt. 17:14-18)! Elisha resisted the tempting prospect, saying again, "I will not leave thee." O for like fidelity!

Fifth, the testing of his *patience*. This was a two-fold one. When the two Prophets arrived at Jericho the younger one suffered a repetition of what he had experienced at Bethel. Once again "the sons of the Prophets" from the local school accosted him, saying, "Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?" Elijah himself they left alone, but his companion was set upon by them. It is the connection in which this occurs that supplies the key to its meaning. The whole passage brings before us Elisha being tested first in one way and then at another. That he should meet with a repetition at Jericho of what he had

encountered at Bethel is an intimation that the servant of God needs to be specially on his guard at this point. He must not put his trust even in “princes,” temporal or spiritual, but cease entirely from man, trusting in the Lord and leaning not unto his own understanding. Though it was annoying to be pestered thus by these men, Elisha made them a courteous reply, yet one which showed them he was not to be turned away from his purpose: “Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace.”

“And Elijah said unto him, Tarry I pray thee here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan” (2 Kings 2:6). This he said to prove him, as the Saviour tested the two disciples on the way to Emmaus when He “made as though He would have gone further” (Luke 24:29). Much ground had been traversed since they had set out together from Gilgal. Was Elisha growing tired of the journey or was he prepared to persevere unto the end? How many grow weary of well-doing and fail to reap because they faint. How many fail at this point of testing and drop out when Providence appears to afford them a favourable opportunity of so doing. Elisha might have pleaded: I may be of some service here to the young Prophets, but of what use can I be to Elijah at the Jordan? Philip was being greatly used of God in Samaria (Acts 8:12) when the angel of the Lord bade him arise and go south “unto Gaza, which is *desert*” (verse 26). And he arose and went, and God honoured his obedience. And Elisha said to his master, “I will not leave thee,” no, not at the eleventh hour—and great was his reward.

Sixth, the testing of his *character*. “And it came to pass, when they were gone over (the Jordan) that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee” (2 Kings 2:9). Here is clear proof that Elijah had been making trial of his companion when he had at the different stopping places bade him, “Tarry here,” or remain behind, for certainly he had extended no such an offer as this had he been disobedient and acting in self-will. Clearly the Tishbite was so well-pleased with Elisha’s devotion and attendance that he determined to reward him with some parting blessing: “Ask what I shall do for thee.” If this was not the most searching of all the tests certainly it was the most

revealing. What was his heart really set upon? What did he desire above all else? At first glance it seemed surprising that Elijah should fling open so wide a door and offer to supply anything his successor should ask. But not only had they spent several years together, Elisha's reaction to the other testings convinced him that this faithful soul would ask nothing which was incongruous or which God could not give.

“And Elisha said, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” He rose above all fleshly and worldly desires, all that the natural heart would crave, and asked for that which would be most for the glory of God and the good of His people. Elisha sought neither wealth nor honours, worldly power or prestige. What he asked for was that he might receive that which marked him out as Elijah's firstborn, the heir of his official patrimony (Deut. 21:17). It was a noble request. The work to which he was called involved heavy responsibilities and the facing of grave dangers, and for the discharge of his duties he needed to be equipped with *spiritual* power. That is what every servant of God needs above everything else—to be “endued with power from on high.” The most splendid faculties, the ablest intellect, the richest acquirements count for nothing unless they are energized by the Holy One. The work of the ministry is such that no man is naturally qualified for it: only God can make any man meet for the same. For that endowment the Apostles waited upon God for ten days. To obtain it Elisha had to successfully endure the previous testings, pass through Jordan and keep his eye fixed steadily upon his master.

Seventh, the testing of his *endowment*. When we ask God for something it is often His way to test our earnestness and importunity by keeping us waiting for it, and then when He grants our request, to put our fidelity to the proof in the *use* we make of the same. If it is faith that is bestowed, circumstances arise which are apt to call into exercise all our doubts and fears. If it is wisdom which is given, situations soon confront us where we are sorely tempted to give way to folly. If it is courage which is imparted, then perils will have to be faced which are calculated to make the stoutest quake. When we receive some spiritual gift, God so orders

things that opportunity is afforded for the exercise of it. It was thus with Elisha. A double portion of Elijah's spirit was granted him and the Prophetic mantle of his master fell at his feet. What use would he make of it? As this comes before us next month (this booklet), suffice it now to say that he was confronted by the Jordan—he was on the wrong side of it and no longer was there any Elijah to divide asunder its waters!

We turn now from the testings to which Elisha was subjected unto *the course* which he had to take: the spiritual significance of his journey has also to receive its counterpart in the experiences of the servant of Christ. That journey began at *Gilgal* (2 Kings 2:1) and none can work acceptably in the kingdom of God until his soul is acquainted with what that place stands for. It was the first stopping-place of Israel after they entered Canaan, and where they were required to tarry ere they set out on the conquest of their inheritance (Josh. 5:9). It was there that all the males who had been born in the wilderness were circumcised. Now "circumcision" speaks of separation from the world, consecration to God, and the knife's application to the flesh. Figuratively it stood for the cutting off of the old life, the rolling away of "the reproach of Egypt." There is a circumcision "of the heart" (Rom. 2:29) and it is that which is the distinguishing mark of God's spiritual children as circumcision of the flesh had identified His earthly people. Gilgal then, is where the path of God's servant must necessarily begin: not until he unsparingly mortifies the flesh, separates from the world and consecrates himself unreservedly to God is he prepared to journey further.

From Gilgal Elisha passed on to "Bethel" which means "the house of God." As we have seen, it was originally the place of hallowed memories, but in the course of time it had been grievously defiled. Bethel had been horribly polluted, for it was there that Jeroboam set up one of his golden calves, appointed an idolatrous priesthood and led the people into terrible sin (1 Kings 12:28, 33; Amos 3:3-5). Elisha must visit this place so that he might be suitably affected with the dishonour done unto the Lord. History has repeated itself. The House of God, the professing

Church, is defiled and the servant of Christ must take to heart the apostate condition of Christendom today if his ministry is to be effective. From Bethel they proceeded to Jericho: a place that was under God's curse (Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34). The servant of God needs to enter deeply into the solemn fact that this world is under the curse of a holy God. And what is that "curse?" Death (Rom. 6:23), and it is of that the Jordan (the final stopping-place) speaks. That, too, must be passed through in the experience of his soul if the minister is to be effectual.

2. First Miracle

The relation between Elijah and Elisha was that of master (2 Kings 2:16) and servant (2 Kings 3:11), and thus it set forth that which exists between Christ and His ministers. For some time Elijah himself occupied the stage of action, but upon the completion of his mission and after a miraculous passage through Jordan he was supernaturally removed to Heaven. Thus it was with the One whom he foreshadowed: when the Saviour had finished the work given Him to do and had risen in triumph from the grave, He ascended on high. But men were appointed by Him to serve as ambassadors in the world from which He departed, to act in His name and perpetuate His mission. So it was with His type. Elisha was to succeed Elijah and carry forward what he had inaugurated. In order thereto he had been called by him. We saw last month how Elisha was subjected to a series of tests, which shadowed forth the disciplinary experiences by which the servant of Christ approves himself and through which he is schooled for his life's work. Then we viewed the path which Elisha was required to tread and pointed out briefly the spiritual significance thereof in connection with the preparatory history of the minister of the Gospel. One other preliminary feature remains for our consideration, namely, *the enduement* Elisha received.

It will be remembered that when Elijah had put to his companion that searching question, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee," Elisha had replied, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." This, we

believe, betokened three things. First, it revealed his modesty and humility, being an acknowledgment of his weakness and insufficiency. He was conscious of his unfitness for his mission and felt that nothing but a plentiful supply of the Spirit which had rested upon the Tishbite would avail for the tasks confronting him. Happy the young servant of Christ who is aware of his own impotency, for in felt weakness lies his strength. Happy the one who has experimentally learned the force of that word, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord” (Zech. 4:6). Second, if Elisha was to take Elijah’s place at the head of the schools of the Prophets, then he needed a superior endowment to theirs—a double supply of the Spirit of wisdom and power. Third, as the accredited servant of God he needed more than the rank and file of His people: not only the Spirit indwelling, but also the Spirit resting upon him.

We have only to turn to the final discourse of our Lord unto His Apostles, recorded in John 14-16, to discover the part which the Holy Spirit must play if His servants are to be duly equipped for their work. First, He declared he would pray the Father that another Comforter should be given them, who would abide with them forever (14:16). Then He promised this blessed Comforter, sent in His name, would teach them all things (15:26). It was by means of the Spirit of Truth given unto them that they would be enabled to bear testimony unto their Master (15:26, 27). He would guide them into all Truth, show them things to come, and glorify Christ by a fuller revelation to them of the mystery of His Person, office and work (16:13-15). In the book of Acts we see how those promises were made good. They were already *indwelt* by the Spirit of life (John 20:22) but the “power of the Holy Spirit was to come *upon* them” (Acts 1:8). This took place on the day of Pentecost, when “there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them. And they (the Apostles—1:26) were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4, 5).

This, then, is the deep need of the servant of Christ: that he be endowed by the Spirit, for without such an anointing his labours can only prove ineffectual. It was thus that Christ Himself was

furnished: Matthew 3:16; Acts 2:38, and the disciple is not greater than his Lord. Much has been said and written on this subject of the minister being endowed and empowered by the Holy Spirit and varied, indeed, are the directions given as to what must be done in order to enter into this blessing. Personally we have long been convinced that the position occupied by the Apostles was an entirely unique one, and therefore we are certainly not warranted in praying and looking for any supernatural endowment such as they received. On the other hand we must be careful of going to an opposite extreme and concluding there is no special and distinct anointing by the Spirit which the servants of God need today. Elisha shows otherwise, for his case is, we believe, a typical and representative one.

Taking it for granted, then, that most of our readers will concur in the last remarks, we proceed to the important question—What is required of the minister if he is to enjoy a double portion of the Spirit? In answering this inquiry we will restrict ourselves to what is recorded of Elisha. In his case there were two things: first, the passage through Jordan, for it is to be duly noted that Elijah did not ask him, “what shall I do for thee,” until they had gone through its divided waters! Now the Jordan stands for death (Jer. 12:5), and death must be experimentally passed through before we can know the power of resurrection. The minister has to *die to self*, to all self-pleasing and self-seeking before the Spirit of God will use him. Second, the Prophet had to keep his eye fixed steadily upon his master if his desire was to be realized (2 Kings 2:10). It is all summed up in those words of Paul, “not I, but Christ” (Gal. 2:20). Just in proportion as self is set aside and the magnifying of Christ be our aim and goal of my ministry, is the Holy Spirit likely to use me.

“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 asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind to Heaven, and Elisha saw it” (2 Kings 2:11, 12). Of course he did—God never disappoints those who renounce self and are occupied solely with Christ. Elijah had made the granting of Elisha’s

request upon this very thing: “if thou *seest me* when I am taken from thee it shall be so unto thee.” Additional incentive, then, had the young Prophet to keep his gaze steadfastly on his master. Those who follow on to know the Lord, will press forward in the race set before them. They will suffer nothing to turn them aside from fully following Christ. They are given to behold things which are hidden not only from the world but also from their half-hearted brethren. A view of the unseen is ever the reward which God grants unto faith and fidelity. It was so with Abraham (John 8:56), with Moses (Heb. 11:27), with Stephen (Acts 7:55), with John (Rev. 1:1).

But something more than spiritual vision was granted unto Elisha, namely, spiritual perception—he not only saw, but *understood* the significance of what he beheld. “And Elisha saw, and he cried, My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!” (2 Kings 2:12). Only as we ponder carefully the words of that sentence will the force of it be apparent. He did not say, “the chariot of *fire*,” nor even, “the chariot of *God*,” but “the chariot of *Israel*.” What did he mean? And why preface that explanation with the “My father! my father!?” He was interpreting for us the wondrous vision before him, the supernatural phenomenon described in the preceding verse. There was a Divine suitability in Elijah’s being removed from this scene in a chariot of fire driven by horses of fire. No other conveyance could have been more suitable and suggestive, though we have met no writer who appears to have grasped the significance of it. Why did God send a fiery chariot to conduct His servant to Heaven? Let us endeavour to find the answer to that question.

Scripture interprets Scripture and if we turn to other passages where “chariots” and “horses” are mentioned we shall obtain the key which opens to us the meaning of the one here before us. “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psa. 20:7). Good reason had Israel for saying that. Go back to the beginning of their national history. Behold them in their helplessness before the Red Sea as “Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Exod. 14:23)

menaced their rear. Ah, but behold the sequel! They are all safe on the other side, singing, “The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is His name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea....the depths have covered them....Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy” (Exod. 15:3-6). The ungodly may look to such things as horses and chariots for protection and prowess, but the saints will find their sufficiency in the name of the Lord their God.

Sad indeed is it to see how woefully the favoured nation of Israel failed at this very point. “They soon forgot His works,” yea, they “forgot God their Saviour” (Psa. 106:13, 21) and relied upon the arm of flesh. They even sought alliances with the heathen until one of their Prophets had to cry, “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD” (Isa. 31:1). Now set over against this our present passage and is not its meaning clear? As Elisha beheld that awe-inspiring sight his soul perceived the significance thereof: “My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof” (2 Kings 2:12). *Thou* my master, hast been in the hand of the Lord, Israel’s *real* chariot and horses, their true defence against Jezebel and Baal’s prophets which are bent on their destruction. The nation was too carnal, too much given to idolatry to recognize what they were losing in the departure of Elijah. But Elisha realized it was “the chariot of Israel” which was being taken from them.

This brings us then to *the time* when Elisha performed his first miracle. It was what men generally would deem a most unpropitious one, when the Prophet’s spirits were at their lowest ebb. His beloved master had just been taken from him and deeply did he feel the loss. “He took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces” (verse 12). That action was emblematic of his grief, as a comparison of Genesis 37:34 and Joshua 7:6 shows. Yet it was a temperate sorrow, a controlled sorrow, and not an inordinate one: he only rent his garment in two pieces—had he

done more they would have been wastefully ruined. His action may also have betokened Israel's rejection of Elijah (compare with 1 Sam. 15:26-28). But severe as was his loss and heavy as must have been his heart, Elisha did not sit down in despair and wring his hands with inconsolable dejection—repining over the loss of eminent ministers accomplishes no good to those left behind, but rather enfeebles them. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. The darkest hour of all is the best time to prove His sufficiency. This is what Elisha did now.

Second, consider now *the object* on which it is wrought. A formidable one it was, none less than the river Jordan. He had friends, the Prophets at Jericho, on the other side. The problem was how to come to them. Probably he was unable to swim, or surely he had done so, as miracles are not wrought where there is no urgent need for them. There was no boat to take him over—how then was he to cross it? A very real difficulty confronted him. Let us note that he looked the difficulty squarely in the face: he “went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan” (verse 13), instead of foolishly playing the part of ostrich, which buries its head in the sand when menaced by danger. To close our eyes to difficulties gets us nowhere, nor is anything gained by the underestimating or belittling of them. The Jordan was a challenge to Elisha's faith. So he regarded it and so he dealt with it. That is why God suffers His servants and saints to be confronted with difficulties: to try them and see of what mettle they are made.

Third, the *instrument* and means for it. “And he took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan” (verse 13). When his master's mantle fluttered to his feet he knew beyond doubt that Heaven had granted his request: not only had he seen Elijah at the moment of his departure, but the gift of his prophetic garment was an additional token of receiving a double portion of his spirit. And now came the test: what use would he make of his master's mantle! Testing always follows the bestowment of a Divine gift. After Solomon had asked the Lord for “an understanding heart” that he might judge His people wisely and well and “discern between good and

bad,” he was quickly confronted by the two women each claiming the living child as hers (1 Kings 3:9, 16). No sooner did the Spirit of God descend upon Christ than He led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Scarcely had the Apostles been endued with power from on high and begun to speak with other tongues, than they were charged with being “full of new wine.” So here: Elijah’s mantle fell at his feet, but before Elisha stretched the Jordan!

Fourth, the *mode* of it. This is of deep interest and importance, for it inculcated a truth of the greatest possible moment. “And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and smote the waters” (2 Kings 2:14). That was what the mantle had been given to him for: not to be idolized as a venerable memento but to be made practical use of. “Unto him that hath shall more be given” (Luke 8:18), which means unto him that has in reality, who evidences it in improving the same by putting it out to interest. By cleaving so steadfastly to his master, Elisha had already given proof that he was indwelt by the Spirit and now the double portion became his. This, too, he used, and used in the right way—he followed strictly the example his master had left him. In the context we are told, “Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters” (verse 8). Now his disciple did precisely the same thing. Is not the lesson for us as though it were written with a sunbeam? If the servant of Christ would work miracles, his ministry must be patterned closely after his Master’s example.

Fifth, the *meaning* of it. In view of all that had been before us this should now be apparent. As we have sought to show, Elisha is to be regarded as through the piece as the representative servant, as a figure of the ministers of Christ—in their call, their testings, the path they must tread, their spiritual enduement. The miracles he performed are not to be taken as exception to the rule. What then is the meaning and message of this first miracle—the smiting of and dividing asunder the waters of the Jordan? Clearly it is victory over death, *ministerial victory*. The servant of Christ is sent forth to address those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

What an undertaking! How is he to prevail over the slaves and subjects of Satan? As Elisha did over the Jordan! He must be Divinely equipped: he must obtain a double portion of the Spirit. By acting as Elijah did: using what has been given him from above. When Elisha smote the waters in the exercise of faith, he said, “Where is the LORD God of Elijah?”—give proof that Thou art with me, too.

Sixth, the *value* of it. “And when he also had smitten the waters they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over” (2 Kings 2:14). There was the proof that though Elijah was not present, the *God* of Elijah was! There was the proof that he had received a double portion of his master’s spirit. There was the proof that by using the same means as his master had employed, God was pleased to honour his faith and grant the same result. There was the proof of his power over death. Three times in Scripture do we read of a miraculous crossing of the Jordan—see Joshua 3:17 for the first—typifying, we believe, the victory of Christ over the grave, the deliverance of the Church from spiritual death, and the resurrection of their bodies in the day to come. Here then is how the minister of the Gospel furnishes proof of his calling and commission: by preaching the Word (the appointed means) in the power of the Spirit so that souls are born again. Such fruit is evidence that God is with him, granting him victory over death.

Seventh, the *recognition* of it. “And when the sons of the Prophets which were to view saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him” (2 Kings 2:15). The miracle they had witnessed convinced them, and they owned him as the successor or representative of Elijah. The parted waters of Jordan demonstrated the presence of the Holy Spirit. So the regeneration of souls make manifest that the servant of God has been endowed with power from on high, and those with spiritual perceptions will own and honour him as such, for faithful ministers are to be “esteemed very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thess. 5:13). If Romanists have gone to one extreme in unwarrantably exalting the priesthood and making it a barrier to prevent the

individual Christian having direct dealings with God Himself, the democratic spirit of our day has swung so far to the other side as to level all distinctions. Those who have received a double portion of the Spirit are to “be counted worthy of double honour” if they “rule well” (1 Tim. 5:17).

3. Second Miracle

“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” (1 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?” (verse 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, in verse 7 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 Jordan” (verse 7). Here again we cannot be certain what it was or how much they actually beheld. 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 mid-air would surely have been visible to them. Not necessarily so: 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 beholding 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, Had we 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” (Matt. 17:4)! Moreover it should be observed that they did not rashly take matters into their own hands, but respectfully submitted their request unto 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 had opened their eyes to behold what himself had been permitted to see—not all of the Twelve witnessed Christ’s transfiguration! Moreover, is there not 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 unto others. O 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” (verse 17). Let it not be forgotten that up to this time only one individual from all mankind has 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. By Elisha’s being “ashamed” we understand that he felt if he were to continue refusing them they would likely think that he was being influenced by an undue desire to occupy Elijah’s place of honour. “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).

This brings us to Elisha’s next miracle. First, let us consider the *order* of it. It was Elisha’s second one and the Scriptural significance of that numeral casts light upon this point. *One* expresses unity and sovereignty. It stands all alone, but where there are *two* another has come in. So in the first miracle Elisha acted alone and none contributed aught thereto. But here in this one Elisha is not alone: a second party is seen in connection with it—the “men of Jericho,” and they were required to furnish a “new cruse” with “salt therein” before the wonder was performed. Probably this very fact will prove a serious difficulty to the thoughtful reader. Those who have followed closely the preceding articles of this series will remember how we pointed out again and again that Elisha is to be regarded as a representative character, as a figure of the servants of Christ. Some may conclude the type fails us at this point, for it will be said, Surely you do not believe that ministers of the Gospel demand something at the hands of sinners in order to their being saved! Our answer will be given under the meaning of this miracle.

Second, let us take note of *the place* where this occurred: it was at Jericho. This, too, is very illuminating. Jericho had been the first city of the Canaanites to defy the children of Israel, for it was closed and barred against them (Josh. 6:1). Whereupon it was

pronounced “accursed” and orders were given that Israel should not appropriate anything in it unto themselves: “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing” (verse 18). By the power of Jehovah, Jericho was overthrown, following which His people “burnt the city with fire and all that was therein” (verse 24). After which the fearful denunciate went forth, “Cursed be the man before the LORD that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho” (verse 26). But both of those Divine prohibitions were flouted. The first by Achan, who “saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonian garment and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold” (7:21), which he covet and stole, for which he and his family were stoned to death and their bodies destroyed by fire.

The second prohibition was broken centuries later, in the reign of the apostate Ahab: “In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho” (1 Kings 16:34). Thus Jericho was the city of *the curse*. It was the *first* place in Canaan where defiance of the Lord and His people was displayed. It was there that Israel, in the person of Achan, committed their *first* sin in the land of promise. A fearful curse was denounced against the man who should have the nerve to rebuild the city. That there is an unmistakable parallel between these things and what occurred in *Eden* scarcely needs pointing out: but we must not anticipate. That which is now before us is the fact that, in defiance of the Divine threat, Jericho had recently been rebuilt—probably the attractiveness of its locality was the temptation to which Hiel yielded (as the pleasantness of the fruit in Eve’s eyes induced her to partake: Gen. 3:6), for we are told, “And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city *is pleasant*” (2 Kings 2:19).

Third, the *objects* of it, namely the springs of water. “And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water is naught and the ground is barren” (verse 19). Herein God had evidenced His displeasure on that accursed rebuilding of Jericho by making its water unwholesome and the ground barren, or as the margin

gives, “causing to miscarry.” The Jewish commentators understood this to mean that these waters caused the cattle to cast their young, the trees to shed their fruit before it was mature, and even the women to be incapable of bearing children. The Hebrew word which is rendered “the water is *naught*” (“*ra*”) is a much stronger one than the English denotes. In the great majority of cases it is translated “evil” (as in Gen. 6:5; Prov. 8:13), “bad” (as Gen. 24:50, etc) and “wicked” no less than thirty-one times. Its first occurrence is in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9)! But it signifies not only evil but that which is harmful or injurious to others, being translated “the *hurtful* sword” (Psa. 144:10).

Jericho, then, was pleasant for situation but there was no good water for its inhabitants or their flocks and herds. This was a serious matter, a vital consideration, for the Israelites were an essentially pastoral people—observe how often we find mention of the “wells” in their early history: Genesis 16:14; 21:25; 26:15, 22; 29:2; Numbers 21:16-18, etc. These men of Jericho then lacked the one thing needful. How this reminds us of another and later incident in the career of Elisha: “Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, *but* he was a leper” (2 Kings 5:1). In spite of his exalted position, his endowments, his exploits, he lacked the one thing needful—health. He was a leper and that neutralized, spoilt everything else. And thus it is with every man in his natural condition, however favoured by creation and by providence—the springs of his life are defiled.

Fourth, the *means used*: “And he said, Bring me a new cruse and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the springs of water, and cast the salt in there” (2 Kings 2:20, 21). The appropriateness of this particular means for counteracting the effects of the curse is at once apparent. Salt is the grand purifier and preserver. It is by means of the salty vapours which the rays of the sun distil from the ocean that the atmosphere of our earth is kept healthy for its inhabitants—that is why the sea

breezes act as such a tonic to the invalid and the convalescent. Salt prevents putrefaction, hence after the backs of prisoners were scourged salt was rubbed into the wounds—though extremely painful it prevented blood poisoning. Salt is the best seasoning for how insipid and unsavoury are many foods without a sprinkling of it. Salt is the emblem of Divine holiness and grace, and so we read of the “covenant of salt” (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5). Hence also the exhortation “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6)—with the savour of true piety. The ministers of Christ are therefore denominated “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13).

Fifth, the *instrument* of it. Obviously the salt itself could not heal those unwholesome waters, any more than the “rods” or twigs of the trees with their “white streaks” that Jacob pilled [peeled away the bark] in them and set before the flocks were able to cause the cattle to bring forth young ones that were “ringstreaked, speckled and spotted” (Gen. 30:37-39). Though the men of Jericho were required to furnish the salt and though the Prophet now cast the same into the springs, yet he made it clear this would avail nothing unless the blessing of Jehovah accompanied the same. *His* power must operate if anything good was to be accomplished, therefore we find that as Elisha cast in the salt he declared, “Thus saith the LORD, I have healed the waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or causing to miscarry” (2 Kings 2:21). Thereby the Prophet disclaimed any inherent power of his own: yet he was instrumentally employed of God, for the very next verse says, “So the waters were healed unto this day, according to *the saying* of Elisha which he spake!” “I have planted, Apollos watered (they were the instruments); but *God* gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6).

Sixth, the *meaning* or typical significance of it. The first key to this is found in the *order* of it. Under that point we intimated that probably some readers would find a difficulty in the men of Jericho being required to furnish the salt and be inclined to object, Surely the minister of the Gospel (for as figure of such Elisha is here to be viewed) does not demand anything at the hand of

sinners in order to their being saved. But such a difficulty—like most, if not all others—is self-created, and that through entertaining vague and general concepts instead of distinguishing sharply between things that differ. When we speak of “salvation,” we refer to something that is many-sided. If on the one hand we must guard most carefully against the error of man’s contributing anything unto his regeneration, on the other we must watch against swinging to the opposite extreme and denying that man is required to concur with God in connection with his reconciliation, preservation, etc. The typical picture which is here set before us is Divinely perfect, yet we need to view it closely if we are to see its details in their proper perspective.

The first miracle, the smiting of the Jordan, adumbrates the ministerial power of the evangelist over death, and in connection with the new birth man contributes nothing whatsoever unto it: see John 1:13. But this second miracle images a *later*, the second experience in the history of those truly converted. This miracle at Jericho speaks of neutralizing the effects of the curse, overcoming the power of innate depravity; and here the minister of the Gospel acts not alone, for in this matter there is the conjunction of both the Divine and the human elements. Thus the second key to its meaning lies in the *place* where it occurred. It is true that the conjunction of the Divine and human elements of conversion cannot be so closely defined as to express the same in any theological formula, nevertheless the reality of those two elements can be demonstrated both from Scripture and experience. We do not like the expression “man co-operating with God” for that savours too much of a dividing of the honour, but man’s “concurring with God” seems to be both permissible and necessary.

The third key is contained in the fact that these men of Jericho are represented as taking the initiative, coming unto Elisha, acquainting him with their need, supplicating his assistance! Apparently they knew from his dress that Elisha was a Prophet and as he no doubt still carried Elijah’s mantle, they hoped he would use his power on their behalf. The servant of God ought to

be readily identified by his (emblematic) “garments” or spiritual graces, easily accessible and approachable, one to whom members of a community will gladly turn to in their troubles. Elisha did not repulse them by saying this lay outside his line of things, that his concern lay only with the young Prophets. Instead he at once intimated his willingness to help. Yet something was required of them: compare 4:41 and 5:10 for further illustrations of the same principle. *They* were told to provide the “new cruse” with salt therein. That put them to the proof: it was a test as to whether they were willing to follow the Prophet’s instructions. They promptly heeded—how different from many who disregard the directions of God’s servants!

This miracle, then, does not give us a history of the servant of God going unto those who are utterly unconcerned, dead in trespasses and sins, but rather that of awakened souls, seeking help, acquainting the minister with their need. In the first miracle it is God acting in sovereign power, enabling His servant to ministerially triumph over death: here it is His servant addressing human responsibility. In bidding awakened and inquiring sinners provide a “new cruse and put salt therein” he is but saying to them, “Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezek. 18:31 and compare with James 4:8). These men of Jericho could not have procured the new cruse and the salt unless God had first placed it at their hands, and the sinner cannot bring a responsive and obedient heart unto the minister until God has previously quickened him. That this miracle is, instrumentally, attributed to the “saying of Elisha”—the Hebrew term (*dabar*) is rendered “word” in 1 Kings 17:2, 8—denotes that awakened sinners are delivered from the effects of the curse as they obey the instructions of God’s faithful servants.

Seventh, the *permanency* of it. “Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters: there shall not be from thence any more death or causing to miscarry: so the waters were healed unto this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spake” (1 Kings 2:21, 22). It was no superficial and temporary change that was wrought,

but an effectual and permanent one. “I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it” (Eccl. 3:14). Herein we see again the appropriateness of the *salt*, the emblem of incorruption—hence, used in the covenant to express its perpetuity. Placed in a “new cruse” and then cast into “the springs of water” we have a figure of the new and honest heart, out of which are “the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The nature of fallen men, even the most attractive specimens, is like unwholesome water and barren soil: it must be renewed by God before any good works can be produced—make the tree good and its fruit will be good. The miracle is attributed, instrumentally, not to the faith or the prayer of Elisha (though there was both), but to his *word*. By His response God avouched His Prophet and sustained his testimony in Israel.

The first of seven booklets.

