



**The
Mission
and Miracles
of Elisha**

**Part
Seven**

A. W. Pink



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17. Sixteenth Miracle

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17. Sixteenth Miracle

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

The signal deliverances which the Lord’s people experience under the workings of His special providence are just as truly manifestations of the wisdom and power of God as are what many theologians would technically term His “miracles,” and are so to be regarded by us. While strongly deprecating the modern tendency to deny and decry the supernatural, we shall not now enter into a discussion as to whether or not “the day of miracles be

past;” but this we do emphatically insist upon, that the day of Divine intervention is certainly *not past*. God is as ready to hear the cry of the righteous now as He was in the time of Moses and the Prophets, and to so graciously and definitely answer the prayer of faith as cannot be explained by so called “natural laws”—as this writer, and no doubt many of our readers, can bear witness. Whether you term His interpositions “miracles” or no, this is sure, the Lord still shows Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect (upright, sincere) toward Him (2 Chron. 16:9).

Second, *its connection*. This is intimated by the opening word of our narrative. That “then,” which occurs so frequently in the Scriptures, should never be hurried over carelessly. There is nothing meaningless, nor superfluous in God’s Word, and every syllable in it should be given its due force and weight. “Then” is a time-mark, emphasising the season or occasion when some particular event happened. To ascertain its significance, we should always pause and ask, “When?” and in order to find the answer, refer back to the immediate context—often obliging us to ignore a chapter division. By so doing, we are the better enabled to perceive the connection between two things or incidents; and often, the moral relation the one sustains to the other, not only of cause and effect, but of antecedent and consequent. In passing, we may point out that, “Then” is one of the key words of Matthew’s Gospel, with which should be linked, “when” and “from that time”—see Matt. 4:1, 17; 15:1, 21; 25, 1; 26:14. The deeper significance of many an incident is discovered by observing this simple rule: Asking the “then”—when?

In our present instance, the miracle we are about to contemplate is immediately linked to the one preceding it by this introductory, “Then.” There is, therefore, a close connection between them; yea, the one is the sequel to the other. When considering 2 Kings 7, we saw how wondrously Jehovah wrought in coming to the relief of the famished Samaritans, furnishing them with an abundant supply of food at no trouble or cost to themselves, causing their enemies to supply their needs by leaving their own huge stores behind them. But, as we pointed out, there was no recognition of the

Hand that had so kindly ministered unto them, no acknowledgement of His goodness, no praising Him for such mercies. He had no place in their thoughts, for they had grievously departed from Him and given themselves up to idolatry. Consequently, here as everywhere, we find inseparably linked together “unthankful, unholy” (2 Tim. 3:2). Where there is no true piety, there is no genuine gratitude; and where there is no thankfulness, it is a sure sign of the absence of holiness. This is a criterion by which we may test *our* hearts: Are we truly appreciative of the Divine favours, or do we accept them as a matter of course?

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

Third, *its nature*. God employs various methods and means in chastening an ungrateful people. Chief among His scourges are His “four sore judgments” (Ezek. 14:21); namely, “the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, (see verse 15) and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast” (Ezek. 14:21). In the

present instance, it was the second of these judgments. “Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years” (2 Kings 8:1). This, we regard as a miracle, and as connected with Elisha. First, because this pronouncement was a prophecy, a supernatural revelation which he had received from God, and then communicated to the woman. Second, because his announcement here is expressly said to be, “the saying of the man of God” (verse 2)—indicating he was acting in his official character. Third, because both in verses 1 and 5, this incident was definitely linked with an earlier miracle—the restoring of her dead son to life.

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

Fourth, *its duration*. This particular “famine” lasted no less than “seven years,” which was double the length of time of the one God sent on Samaria in the days of Elijah (Jam. 5:17). When men refuse to humble themselves beneath the mighty hand of God, He lays His rod more heavily upon them, as the successive plagues which He sent upon Egypt increased in their severity, and as the judgments mentioned in the Revelation are more and more

distressing in nature. Of old God called upon Israel “consider your ways” and complained that His House was neglected, while they were occupied only with rebuilding and attending to their own. But they heeded Him not, and accordingly He told them, “Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands” (Hag. 1:10, 11). Thus, it was now upon the rebellious and idolatrous Samaritans.

Fifth, its *beneficiary*. This was “the woman, whose son he [Elisha] had restored to life” (2 Kings 8:1). She was before us in 2 Kings 4. There we saw that she was one who had a heart for the servant of God, not only inviting him into her house for a meal whenever he passed by her place, but built and furnished for him the “prophet’s chamber” (2 Kings 4:8-10). Then we beheld her remarkable faith, for instead of wringing her hands in despair upon the sudden death of her child, she promptly rode to mount Carmel where Elisha then was, with the evident expectation that God would undertake for her in that extremity through His servant. Nor was her hope disappointed: A miracle was wrought, and her dead son quickened. But now that the seven years’ famine was imminent, Elisha did not keep to himself the knowledge he had received of the Lord, but put it to a good use, bethinking himself of the family, which had shown him kindness in his earlier days, warning her of the sore judgment that was about to fall upon the land of Samaria.

The prophet’s action contains important instruction for us, especially for those who are the ministers of God. First, we are shown that we are not to selfishly keep to ourselves the spiritual light God vouchsafes to us, but pass it onto those capacitated to receive it. Second, the servant of God is not to lose interest in those unto whom God made him a blessing in the past, but seek opportunities to further help them in spiritual things, particularly endeavouring to express his gratitude to those who befriended him

in earlier days—often, this can be most effectually accomplished by prayer for them, or by sending them a special word of greeting—see 2 Timothy 1:16; Romans 16:6. Elisha did not consider he had already discharged his indebtedness to this woman by restoring her son to life, but as a fresh emergency had arisen, he gave timely counsel. Third, here too, we see God honouring those who honoured Him: In the past, she had ministered to the temporal needs of His servant, and He had not forgotten this: Having received a prophet in the name of a prophet, she now received the prophet’s reward—light on her path.

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

“Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn.” How frequently are we reminded that here have we no continuing city, which should cause us to hold all earthly things with a very light hand. This incident also reminds us that the righteous are occasioned many inconveniences, because of the conduct of the wicked; nevertheless, the Lord evidences His particular care of His own when His judgments fall upon a nation. Observe to what a severe test this woman’s faith was now submitted. It was no small matter to leave her home and property, and journey with her household

into another land—the inhabitants of which had for so long time been hostile to the Israelites. It called for implicit confidence in the veracity of God’s servant. Ah, my reader, nothing but a genuine faith in God and His Word is sufficient for the human heart in such an emergency; but the mind of one who trusts Him will be kept in perfect peace.

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

“And she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years” (2 Kings 8:2). Not in the adjoining territory of Judah, be it noted, for probably even at that date, the Jews had “no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9)—it is sad, yet true, that a Christian will often receive kinder treatment at the hands of strangers than from those who profess to be the people of God. This Israelitish woman had not been warranted in taking refuge among the Philistines without Divine permission, for God had said unto Israel, “Ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev. 20:26); and therefore, did He declare, “The people shall dwell *alone*, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num. 23:9). But note well that it is not said that she and her household “settled down in the land of the Philistines,” but only that she “sojourned” therein—which means that she did not

make herself one with them, but lived as a stranger in their midst (compare Gen. 23:4, Lev. 25: 23).

“And sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.” That is surely remarkable, and very blessed. The Philistines had long been the enemies of Israel, and had recently made war the one with the other: Yet, here was this Israelitish woman and her household permitted to live peacefully in their midst, and her temporal needs supplied by them! In that, we must see the secret power of God working on her behalf and giving her favour in their eyes. The Lord never confounds those who truly trust Him, and as this woman had honoured His word through His prophet, so now He honoured her faith. Her ways pleased the Lord; and therefore, He made her enemies to be at peace with her. “And it came to pass at the seven years’ end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines” (2 Kings 8:3). This, too, is equally blessed. She had not found the society of the Philistines so congenial that she wished to spend the remainder of her days with them. But observe how it is worded: *Not* “when the famine was over” she returned to Samaria, but “at the seven years’ end,” mentioned by the prophet—the word of God through His servant was what regulated her!

“And she went forth *to* cry unto the king for her house and for her land” (2 Kings 8:3). It is not clear whether her property had reverted to the crown upon her emigration, or whether some one had unlawfully seized it and now refused to relinquish the same; but whichever it was, she did not shirk her duty, but actively discharged her responsibility. She was neither a believer in ‘passive resistance’ nor of looking to God to undertake for her while she shelved her duty—which had been highly presumptuous. Thomas Scott has pointed out how this verse illustrates “the benefit of magistracy,” and rightly added in connection therewith, “Believers may, on important occasions, avail themselves of their privileges as members of the community: Provided they are not actuated by covetousness or resentment, do not manifest a contentious spirit, and make no appeal in a doubtful or suspicious cause; and rulers should award justice without

respect of persons, and compel the injurious to restitution.” Had not this woman now appealed to the king for the restoration of her own property, she had condoned a wrong and refused to uphold the principles of righteousness.

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

Seventh, *its lesson*. In the course of our remarks, we have called attention to many details of this incident which we may profitably take to heart, but there is one outstanding thing in it which specially claims our notice; namely, the wonder-working providences of God on behalf of the woman—through Elisha, the Philistines, Gehazi, and the king of Israel. And thus, it is that He still acts on behalf of His own, making gracious provision for them in an evil day. Whatever be the means or the instruments He makes use of in providing a refuge for us in a time of trouble, it is as truly “*the LORD’s doing*,” and it should be just as “marvellous in our eyes” (Psa. 118:23)—especially when God constrains the wicked to deal kindly with us, as if He openly worked for us what are technically called “miracles.” At the close of the 107th Psalm, after recounting the various deliverances the Lord wrought for

those who cried unto Him, this comment is made: “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD” (Psa. 107:43). The greater pains we take to observe God’s hand undertaking for us by His providences, the better shall we understand His “lovingkindness,” and the more confidence shall we have in Him.

18. Seventeenth Miracle

The opening verse of 2 Kings 8 informs us that the Lord had called for a seven years’ famine on Samaria, and in our last, we considered one of the things which transpired during that “sore judgment” from Heaven. That which is now to engage our attention is not to be regarded as something which occurred after the expiration of the famine, but rather, as what took place at its beginning. After tracing out the experiences of the woman from Shunem, the Holy Spirit picks up the thread of verse 1 and informs us of the movements of the prophet himself. “And Elisha came to Damascus” (2 Kings 8:7). He, too, left Samaria, for it was no place for him, now that the indignation of the Lord was upon it. When God deals in judgment with a people, His temporal plagues are usually accompanied by spiritual deprivations often by “removing” His servants “into a corner” (Isa. 30:20), and then the people of God are left “as sheep that have no shepherd” (2 Chron. 18:16)—one of the acutest afflictions they can experience. It was thus with Israel in the earlier famine in the days of Ahab. There is no intimation that Elijah did any preaching during these three and a half years, for the Lord sent him to Cherith, and then to Zaraphath.

Sad indeed is the plight of any people when they are not only scourged temporally, but have their *spiritual* blessings taken from them too. During the times of the Judges, when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), we are told, “in those days; there was no open vision” (1 Sam. 3:1)—which signifies there was no accredited servant of God to whom the people could go for a knowledge of the Divine mind and will. So again, in the days of Ezekiel, it was announced, “Mischief shall

come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour;” and as the climacteric calamity: “Then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest” (Ezek. 7:26). Little as it is realised by the present generation, the most solemn, fearful, and portentous of all the marks of God’s anger is the *withholding* of a Spirit-filled, faithful and edifying ministry, for then, there is “a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). There is much more than appears on the surface in that short statement, “And Elisha came to *Damascus*” (2 Kings 8:7).

Solemn indeed is that brief and simple sentence, denoting as it does, that the prophet had *left Samaria*—left it because his ministry there was unwelcome, wasted. How often we find a parallel to this in the Gospels. At the very beginning of His public ministry, we read that Christ “came down to Capernaum” (Luke 4:31). Why? Because at Nazareth, they were “filled with wrath” at His teaching (Luke 4:28, 29). “And he entered into a ship, and passed over” (Matt. 9:1). Why? Because at Capernaum, the whole city “besought him that he would depart out of their coasts” (Matt. 8:34). He “withdrew himself from thence”—because the Pharisees had “held a council against him” (Matt. 12:14, 15). “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58). What follows? And He went round about their villages teaching (Mark 6:5, 6). “It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you...lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). When God calls a pastor to another charge, the church he has left has reason to search itself before the Lord as to the cause.

First, *its connection*. “And Elisha came to Damascus” (2 Kings 8:7). The opening “And” links the incident which follows (8:7-15) with the first verse of our chapter (8:1)—but more, as was the case in several previous instances, it points a series of striking contrasts between this (8:7-15), and the events recorded in the context (8:1-6). There (8:1-6), the central character was a godly woman; here (8:7-15), it is a wicked man. In the former, the prophet took the initiative, communicating with the woman; now, a king sends to

inquire of the man of God. There, his prophetic announcement was promptly credited; here, it is scornfully ridiculed (8:13). In that, the king's servant told him the truth (8:5); in this, another king's servant tells him a lie (8:13). There, God put forth His power and graciously provided for one of His own; here, He removes His restraining hand and suffers one of the reprobate to meet with a violent end. The previous miracle closed with the restoration of the woman's property to her; this, with a callous murder and the usurper occupying the throne.

Though there be nothing in the narrative to intimate specifically when it was that Elisha "came to Damascus;" yet, the introductory "And" seems to make it clear that the prophet took this journey during the "seven years of famine," and probably at an early stage of the same. As the Lord was not pleased on this occasion to work in a mysterious and extraordinary way for the temporal preservation of the woman of Shunem (as He had for the widow at Zarephath), but provided for her needs by the more regular, yet not less, wonderful orderings of Providence on her behalf—so it would seem that He did for His servant. And as she sojourned in the land of the Philistines, so he now sought refuge in the capital of Syria, even though that was the very country which had for so long been hostile to Samaria. Nor did he go into hiding there, but counted upon his Master protecting him, even in the midst of a people who had so often preyed upon Israel. That Elisha's presence in Damascus was no secret is clear from what follows.

Second, *its occasion*. "And Elisha came to Damascus" (2 Kings 8:7)—the most ancient city in the world, with the possible exception of Jerusalem. Josephus says that "it was founded by Uz, the son of Aram, and grandson of Shem." It is mentioned as early as Genesis 14:15, in the days of Abraham, 2000 B.C. It was captured and occupied in turn by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Paul commenced his ministry there (Act 9:19-22). It remains to this day. In the time of Ahab, Benhadad—after his defeat by the Samaritans and the sparing of his life—said to the king of Israel, "thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." Upon which Ahab said, "I will send

thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away” (1 Kings 20:34). Whether Benhadad ever made good his promise, Scripture does not inform us, but his “covenant” with Ahab certainly gave Elisha the right of asylum in Damascus.

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

Yes, God made use of Elisha while he sojourned in Damascus. But how varied, how solemnly varied are the several ways in which He is pleased to employ His servants. Not now was he commissioned to heal a leper, nor to restore a dead child to life, but rather to announce the death of a king. Herein, we have shadowed forth the more painful and exacting side of the minister’s duty. He is required to set before men the way of life, and the way of death. He is under bonds to faithfully make known the doom awaiting the wicked, as well as the bliss reserved for the righteous. He is to preach the Law, as well as the Gospel; to describe the everlasting torments of Hell, as well as the unending glory of Heaven. He is bidden to preach the Gospel to every creature, and announce in no uncertain tones, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be *damned*” (Mark 16:16). Only by so doing will he be warranted in

saying, “I am pure from the blood of all men. *For* I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” (Acts 20:26, 27).

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

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

condition and anxious to know the outcome of his illness.

It appears to have been the practice in those days for a king who was seriously ill to make a formal inquiry from one whom he regarded as endowed with supernatural knowledge. Thus, we read that when Jeroboam's son fell sick, he sent his wife to ascertain of Ahijah the prophet, "What shall become of the child" (1 Kings 14:3); and again, we are told that Ahaziah sent messengers to "enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease!" (2 Kings 1:2). From what is recorded in 1 Kings 20:23 and the sequel, we may conclude that Benhadad had lost confidence in his own "gods" and placed more reliance upon the word of Elisha; yet it is to be noted that he neither asked for his prayers, nor expressed any desire of a visit from him. Seriously sick as he felt himself to be, he was not concerned about his soul, but only of his body. Throughout the whole of his career, there is nothing to indicate he had the slightest regard for the Lord, but much to the contrary.

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

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

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

state of our hearts.

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

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

Fifth, *its challenge*. “And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2 Kings 8:13). Hotly did he resent such a charge, nor did he at that moment deem himself

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

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

Seventh, *its meaning*. This is so obvious that very few words are needed: It is the glaring contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful servant. Elisha had unflinchingly declared the counsel which he had received from the Lord, however unpalatable it was to his hearer. But Hazael gives us a picture of the hireling, the false prophet, the deceiver of souls. Ostensibly, he went forth in obedience to his master’s commission (2 Kings 8:9); in reality, he was playing the part of a hypocrite (2 Kings 8:11). When he delivered his message, he falsified it by withholding the most

pointed and solemn part of it (2 Kings 8:14). How many there are like him, uttering “smooth things” and remaining guiltily silent on the doom awaiting the wicked. As surely as Hazael slew Benhadad, the unfaithful preachers of our day are murdering souls. As Hazael became “king,” so the most faithless now occupy the seats of power in Christendom.

19. His Young Deputy

We regard the incident recorded in 2 Kings 9:1-10 as relating to the *missions* of Elisha, and in order to a better understanding of the same would refer the reader back to the first two articles [booklet one] of this series. There, we pointed out that the missions of Elijah and Elisha formed two parts of one whole, much the same as did those entrusted to Moses and Joshua. While there was indeed a striking difference between what was accomplished through and by Moses and the one who succeeded him, and while their respective missions may be considered separately, yet in the wider view, the latter should be regarded primarily as the *complement* of the former. Such was also the case with Elijah and Elisha. The analogy between Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha is not perfect in every detail, yet there is sufficient agreement in the broad outline as to enable us perceive more clearly the relation which the second sustained to the first in each of those two pairs: By such perception, not a little light is cast upon the ministries of those we are now more especially concerned with.

The very similarity of their names intimates a more than ordinary connection between them. According to that important rule of interpretation, the very first mention of Elisha in the Scriptures clearly defines his *relation* unto his predecessor. Unto Elijah the Lord said, “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 he was to be his successor in the prophetic office: Elisha was to take Elijah’s place as his accredited representative. This is confirmed by the fact that when he found Elisha, Elijah “cast his mantle upon him” (1 Kings

19:19), which denotes the closest possible identification between them. In perfect accord with that is the reply Elisha made when, later, he was asked by the one whose place he was to take, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken [not “from Israel,” but] away from thee”—namely, “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (2 Kings 2:9), which request was granted. 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.”

Elisha was the man called by God to take Elijah’s place before Israel. Though Elijah had left this scene and gone on high, yet his ministry was not to cease. True, he was no longer here in person, yet, he was so in spirit. The starting-point of Elisha’s ministry was the supernatural rapture of his master, and that the one was to carry on the work of the other was symbolically intimated by his initial act, for his first miracle was an exact duplication of the last one wrought by his predecessor, namely, the smiting and opening up of the waters of Jordan, so that he crossed over dry shod—the instrument used being Elijah’s own mantle (2 Kings 2:14)! The immediate sequel supplies further evidence in proof of what we have just pointed out: “And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho 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).

In 2 Kings 2:2, we read of “the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel” and in verse 5, we are also told of “the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho”—the latter numbering more than fifty (2 Kings 2:17). By that expression (a Hebrew-ism), we understand that these young men had been converted under the ministries of Elijah and Elisha—for the latter had accompanied the former for some years previous to his rapture—and who were organized into schools. As we saw in an earlier meditation, there was yet another school of them at Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), and from their “sitting before him” (compare Deuteronomy 33:3, Luke 2:46 and 10:39), it is evident that Elisha devoted much of his time to their instruction and edification. Their owning him as “thou man

of God” (2 Kings 4:40) and “master” (2 Kings 6:5) reveals plainly enough the relation which he sustained unto them, as does also their appeal to him for the enlarging of their living quarters (2 Kings 6:1). He acted then as their rector or superintendent, and gained both their respect and their affection.

In the course of our studies, we have seen how Elisha wrought more than one miracle for the benefit of these students. Thus, through his intervention on her behalf, he enabled the widow of one of the children of the prophets—who had appealed to him in her dire extremity—to pay off her debt and save her two sons from being made bondmen to her debtor (2 Kings 4:1-7). Next, he delivered a whole company of them from being poisoned when there was “death in the pot,” which they were about to partake of (4:35-41). Then he rescued the head of the axe borrowed by another of them (6:3-7). Not only were the schools of the “sons of the prophets” which were established by the Tishbite continued throughout the life of his successor, but in the above instances, we see how that Elisha acted toward them as Elijah would have done had he remained among them—using his extraordinary powers on their behalf as need arose and occasion required.

Let us now point out the *revelancy* of this somewhat lengthy preface to the incident we are now to contemplate. Our narrative opens by saying: “And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead: And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber; Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not” (2 Kings 9:1-3). That can only be rightly apprehended in the light of what has just been pointed out.

If we turn back to 1 Kings 19:15, 16, it will be found that Elijah received the following commission: “And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu

the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” Concerning the anointing of Hazael, Scripture is silent; that of Elisha was accomplished when Elijah “cast his mantle upon him” (1 Kings 19:19). At first sight, the long delay in the anointing of Jehu seems to present a difficulty, but if we take note of the particular work appointed for him to perform and compare an earlier passage, the difficulty is at once removed. Jehu was to be the Lord’s instrument of executing His vengeance on the wicked house of Ahab—a solemn announcement of which was made to that apostate monarch by Elijah in 1 Kings 21:21-24, and Jehu’s agency in connection therewith was intimated in 1 Kings 19:17.

Upon hearing that dreadful announcement from the lips of the Lord’s messenger, we are told that Ahab “rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (1 Kings 21:27). Because of that external humbling of himself before Jehovah, He declared unto the prophet, “I will not bring the evil in his days but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house” (1 Kings 21:29). Since that Divine decision was communicated to Elijah personally, we infer that it was tantamount to bidding him defer the anointing of Jehu. A respite having been granted unto Ahab—the commissioning of the one who was to execute the judgment—was also postponed. For the same reason, we conclude that since the time for the anointing of Jehu had not arrived before Elijah left this earth, that he transferred this particular duty to his successor, to the one who became “prophet in thy room” (1 Kings 19:16)—as the Lord Jesus is said to have baptized those who were immersed by His disciples acting under His authority (John 4:1, 2).

But now the question arises: Why did not Elisha personally perform the task assigned him by the one whose representative he was? Why entrust it to a deputy? The principal reason given by Matthew Henry (and adopted by Thomas Scott) is that, it was too dangerous a task for Elisha to undertake; and therefore, it was not fit that he should expose himself—that being so well known, he

had been promptly recognised, and therefore, he selected one who was more likely to escape observation. But such an explanation by no means commends itself to us, for it is entirely out of accord with everything else recorded of Elisha. The one who had spoken so boldly to King Jehoram (2 Kings 3:13, 14), who was not afraid to give offence unto the mighty Naaman (2 Kings 5:9-11), who had calmly sat in the house when the king had sworn he should be slain that day (2 Kings 6:31, 32), and who possessed such power from God as to be able to smite with blindness those who sought to take him captive (2 Kings 6:18), was hardly the one to shrink from an unpleasant task and invite another to face peril in his stead.

Since the Scriptures do not implicitly reveal to us the grounds on which Elisha here acted, none may attempt to dogmatically define the same. The most any writer can do is to form his own judgment from what is revealed, state his opinion, and submit it to the readers. Personally, we prefer to interpret Elisha's action on this occasion in the light of the particular stage which had now been reached in his career. Nothing more is recorded about him after this incident save what immediately preceded his death. It appears then, that for some reason unknown to us (for he lived many years afterward), that he was about to retire from the stage of public action, and therefore that he would prepare the "sons of the prophets" and perhaps this one more particularly to take a more prominent part in the public life of Israel, and consequently was placing more responsibility upon them. It is not to be lost sight of—that it was also an important and distinguished mission this young man was now entrusted with, and that a high honour was conferred upon him.

"And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead" (2 Kings 9:1). Elisha is not here designated "the man of God," because no miracle was involved in what follows. Only here is he termed, "Elisha the prophet," and only in 1 Kings 18:36 was his predecessor called "Elijah the prophet"—it intimated the *identification* of the one

with the other. Elisha's calling one of the children of the prophets to him manifests the *relation* which he sustained unto them—namely, as one having authority over them (compare our article on 2 Kings 6:1-7 [booklet five and the twelfth miracle]). In the light of what was pointed out in the preceding paragraph, we may see in Elisha's action an *example* which elderly ministers of the Gospel may well emulate—endeavouring to promote the training of their younger brethren, seeking to equip them for more important duties after they will have left this scene—on the principle which Paul acted upon: “And the things that thou hast heard of me...the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

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

That purpose was not only to anoint and make him king, but to deliver an announcement which would to most temperaments be very unpleasant. But the minister of God—be he young or old—is not free to pick and choose either his sphere of labour, or the message he is to deliver. No, being but a “servant,” he is subject

only to the will of his Master, and therefore, any self-seeking or self-pleasing is nothing else than a species of insubordination. Implicit obedience to the Lord—no matter what it may involve or cost him in this life—is what is required of him; and only by rendering such obedience, will he be rewarded in the next life by hearing from the lips of Christ Himself that commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25:21, 23). O that each young minister of Christ who reads these lines may be constrained to earnestly seek enabling grace that he may live and act now with the Day to come before him.

“Then take the box of oil, and pour *it* on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not” (2 Kings 9:3). The young prophet was to make it unmistakably clear that he was acting in no private capacity, nor even as an agent of Elisha, but under the immediate authority of Jehovah Himself. It is most important that the minister of Christ should similarly conduct himself. He is to make it evident that he is commissioned by Heaven, not delivering a message of his own devising, nor acting as the agent of his denomination—only thus, is *God* honoured and only thus, will His servant preserve his true dignity and speak with Divine authority. When he has fulfilled his charge, then let him “tarry not”—that is, hang around in order to listen to the compliments of his hearers. Mark that kingship is of Divine appointment and institution (compare Prov. 8:15), and therefore, are God’s people bidden to “honour the king” (1 Pet. 2:17). It is one of the marks of an apostate and degenerate age when “dominion” is despised and “dignities” are evil spoken of (Judges 8).

“So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramothgilead” (2 Kings 9:4). Observe how the Holy Spirit has emphasised his youth! Often the babe in Christ is more pliable and responsive than an older Christian. Note that there is nothing to show he asked for an easier task, objected to this one on the score of his youth, nor that he felt “unworthy” for such a mission—which is more often the language of pride than of humility, for

none is “worthy” to be commissioned of the Almighty. It is entirely a matter of sovereign grace, and in nowise one of personal merit, that any one is called to the ministry. Said the apostle Paul, “I was made a minister, according to the gift of the *grace* of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power” (Eph. 3:7). Though he at once added, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). He referred to a two-fold “grace”—in calling and equipping him. When God calls one to His service, He also *furnishes* him—illustrated in this incident by “the box of oil” put into the young prophet’s hand.

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

That which is recorded in 2 Kings 9:7-10, was evidently included in the commission which the young man had received from the Lord through Elisha, and which he now faithfully discharged. The fact that the prophet here made such an announcement, appears to supply strong confirmation of what was pointed out in our opening paragraphs—namely, that this deputy of Elisha was acting in the stead of Elijah, or as his representative, for if it be compared with 1 Kings 21:21-24, it will be found that it is practically an echo of the Tishbite’s own words to Ahab. In the charge here given to Jehu, we are shown how he was to be God’s

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

"And he opened the door, and fled" (2 Kings 9:10). This was most praiseworthy and should be duly taken to heart by us. The servant of God is not free to please himself at any point, but must carry out the orders he has received to the last letter of them. Most probably, had this young man lingered, Jehu—after receiving such a high favour at his hands—had evidenced his appreciation by bestowing some reward upon him, or at least feasted him at his royal table. But Elisha had bidden him, "open the door"—as soon as he had performed his errand—"flee, and tarry not" (2 Kings 9:3); and here, we see his implicit obedience to his master. O that we may in all things render unqualified compliance with *our* Master's will. It is not without significance that in the very next verse, the young prophet is scornfully referred to as "this mad fellow" (2 Kings 9:11) by one of the servants of the king—for the unregenerate are quite incapable of assessing at their true value the motives which prompt the faithful minister of Christ, and judging him by their own standards, regard him as crazy. But what is the contempt and ridicule of the world, if we have the approbation of the Lord? Nothing, and less than nothing—especially if we *expect* it, as we should do.

20. His Death

We have no means of ascertaining the exact age of Elisha when he was overtaken by his fatal sickness, for we know not how old he was when called to the prophetic office (though from the analogy of Scripture, he would probably be at least thirty at that time), nor does there appear any way of discovering how long a

period he accompanied and ministered to Elijah before his rapture (some writers think it was upwards of ten years); but if we total up the years which the various kings reigned over Israel, who were all outlived by our prophet (beginning with Ahab), it will be seen that he was a very old man. One commentator supposes him to have been “at this time fully one hundred and twenty years of age.” Good it is to be assured that, whether our appointed span be long or short, our “times” are in the hands of the One who gave us being (Psa. 31:15). God recovers His people from many sicknesses, but sooner or later comes one from which there is no deliverance—well for us if, when that time arrives, we conduct ourselves as Elisha did and use our remaining strength to the glory of the Lord.

The final incidents in connection with Elisha are in striking keeping with the whole record of his remarkable mission. No commonplace career was his, and most extraordinary are the things which mark its closing scenes. First, we learn that the reigning monarch called upon him during his fatal illness! Kings are not accustomed to visit dying people, least of all the servants of God at such times—it might be good for them if they did. Still more unusual and remarkable was it for the king to weep over the prophet because he was on the eve of leaving the scene. Even more noteworthy was the language used by the king on this occasion. Second, so far was Elisha from considering himself flattered by the presence of such a visitor that he took complete charge of the situation, giving orders to the king, and honoured him by giving a message from Jehovah, which was as striking as any he had delivered on earlier occasions. Third, after his death, God honoured the remains of the prophet by raising to life one who had been cast into his sepulchre.

That which is recorded, in the second half of 2 Kings 13, treats of what was really another miracle in Elisha’s memorable life. This is intimated by the Spirit referring to him there as “the man of God” (2 Kings 13:19), which, as we have so frequently pointed out, was used only when he was acting in his official character and discharging his extraordinary office—a fact which seems to have

escaped the notice of other writers. Like several others which have been before us, this miracle consisted of a Divine revelation being communicated through him, his uttering a supernatural prophecy. Previous to this incident, nothing is recorded about his activities or how he was employed, yet it must not be concluded therefrom that he was under a cloud and rusting out. No, that lengthy silence is broken in such a way as to preclude any thought that he had been set aside by his Master, for the Lord here makes signal use of him as He had done formerly. Elisha, like other (though not all) of God's servants brought forth "fruit" in his old age (Psa. 92:14).

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

"And Joash the king of Israel [also called 'Jehoash'—2 Kings 13:1, 25; 14:1—the grandson of Jehu, and to be distinguished from 'Joash king of Judah' in 2 Kings 13:10-13], came down unto him" (2 Kings 13:14). This indicates that the prophet had not spent his closing years in isolated seclusion, for the king of Israel—not long come to the throne—knew the place of his abode. But this mention of the king's visit also informs us that the man of God was held in high esteem, and though the royal house had sadly

failed to respond to his teachings, yet they recognised his value to the nation. Israel's fortunes had fallen to a very low point, for a little earlier than this, we are told, "In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan" (2 Kings 10:32, 33). What would the end be if Elisha were now removed!

"And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 13:14). While this visit of the king's probably indicated his respect for Elisha, yet his tears are not to be regarded as proof of his affection for him—the second half of the verse really interprets the first. The king was worried over the assaults of Hazael, and greatly feared that upon the death of this man whose counsels and miracles had more than once been of service to the royal house and saved the nation from disaster (2 Kings 3:16-25; 6:9; 7:1), would henceforth be left completely at the mercy of their enemies. Joash regarded the prophet as the chief bulwark of the nation, and the prospect of his speedy removal filled him with consternation and sorrow. Thus, there was a strange mingling of esteem and *selfishness* behind those tears—is not that generally the case even in connection with the departure of a loved one?

The practical lesson for us here is plain. In the words of another, "Let us seek so to live that even ungodly men may miss us when we are gone. It is possible for us in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, so to adorn the doctrine of God, our Saviour in all things, that when we die, many shall say, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his,' and men shall drop a tear, and close the shutter, and be silent and solemn for an hour or two when they hear that the servant of God is dead. They laughed at him while he lived, but they weep for him when he dies. They could despise him while he was here, but now that he is gone, they say, 'We could have better missed a less-known man, for he, and such as he, are the pillars of the commonweal—they bring down showers

of blessing upon us all.’ I would covet this earnestly, not for the honour and esteem of men, but for the honour and glory of God, that even the despisers of Christ may be compelled to see there is a dignity, a respect, about the walk of an upright man.”

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

We turn now to consider Elisha’s response to the king’s visit, his tears, and his acknowledgment. The prophet was very far from acting as a sycophant before Joash on this occasion, but maintained and manifested his official dignity unto the end of his course. He was an ambassador of the King of kings, and conducted himself accordingly. Instead of any indication that he felt himself to be honoured by this visit, or flattered by the monarch’s tears, the man of God at once took charge of the situation and gave orders to his earthly sovereign. Let not young ministers today conclude from this incident that they are thereby justified in acting haughtily and high-handedly in the presence of their seniors and superiors. Not so—such an inference would be entirely un-warranted, for they do not occupy the extraordinary

office which Elisha did, nor are they endowed with his exceptional gifts and powers. Nevertheless, they *are* to maintain their dignity as the ministers of Christ: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

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

When Elisha bade Joash, “Take bow and arrows” (2 Kings 13:15), he was making use of a visual “similitude.” The articles selected at once explain it. In response to the king’s lamentation, the prophet said, in effect, Weeping over my departure will avail the nation nothing—“stand fast in the faith, quit you like a man, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Take not the line of least resistance, but assemble your forces, lead your army in person against the enemy. Though I be taken away from the earth, Jehovah still lives and will not fail those who put their confidence in Him. Nevertheless, you

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

“And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands” (2 Kings 13:16). Here again, we see the commanding authority and influence which the prophet had, under God, for Joash made no demur, but meekly did as he was ordered. By placing his hands upon the king's, Elisha signified his identification with what he should yet do, thereby intimating that he owed it to the prophet's mission and ministry that Israel was to be spared and that God would again intervene on their behalf. By symbolic action, Elisha was saying to him, “The battle is not yours, but God's” (2 Chron. 20:15). How little is that recognised today! Yet, thank God we have at least one General who is not ashamed to publicly own that fact, and also that we have a King who realises the value of prayer and urges His people to engage therein. “He teacheth my hands to war” (Psa. 18:34) was what Elisha now sought to impress upon his royal master.

“And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them” (2 Kings 13:17). In those words, the prophet explained to the king the meaning of his symbolic actions, and what should be the outcome of them. It evidenced that Elisha's mind was still occupied with the welfare of Israel. It demonstrated that he still acted as the servant of Jehovah: It was the final use of his prophetic gift and proof of his prophetic office. “Eastward” was the portion of the land which Hazael had already conquered (2 Kings 10:33), and in bidding the king shoot in that direction, Elisha indicated where the fighting would have to be done. Notice

the striking conjunction of the Divine and human elements here, and the order in which they were made: It should be “The arrow of the LORD’s deliverance” (2 Kings 13:17), yet “*thou* [Joash] shalt smite the Syrians”—God would work, yet by and through him!

“And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed” (2 Kings 13:18). In the light of what follows, it is clear that the king’s faith was here being put to the test: The prophet would have him signalize his reaction to the reassuring message he had just heard. “Smite upon the ground” and intimate thereby how far you believe the words which I have spoken and really expect a fulfilment of the same. Did the Lord’s promise sound too good to be true, or would Joash rest upon it with full confidence? Would he lift up his heart and eyes to God and say with David, “Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me” (Psa. 18:40), or would he follow the temporizing course, which Ahab had pursued, when, instead of following up his victory by slaying Benhadad whom the Lord had delivered into his hand, spared his life, made a covenant with him, and then sent him away (1 Kings 20:29-34).

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

love for souls, *we* would be angry at those who deprive them of their privileges.

“Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice” (2 Kings 13:19). That should present a nice little problem to the hyper-Calvinist. Let us state it in question form. What possible difference to the issue could be made by the number of times the king smote upon the ground? If God had foreordained that the Syrians should be “consumed” (2 Kings 13:17), then could any failure on the part of Joash prevent or even modify it? But do not Elisha’s words plainly signify that the extent to which the Syrians would be vanquished turned upon the response made by him to the Divine promise? If so, does that oblige us to adopt the Arminian idea and say that such events as these fall not within the compass of the Divine decrees, that such are, rather, contingent upon human conduct? We shall not here give a solution to this problem, and will only add that if Calvinists or Arminians are unable to fit this incident into their scheme, then that is proof there is something wrong with their scheme.

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

“And Elisha died, and they buried him” (2 Kings 13:20). It is to be noted that nothing is said here of any “burial service.” Nor is there anywhere in the Scriptures either in the Old Testament or the New Testament Funeral obsequies or ceremonies are of Pagan origin, capitalized by Rome and her daughters, and are neither authorised nor warranted by the Word of God. If the body of Christ was tenderly and reverently interred without the mummery of any “service” over His corpse, shall the disciple be above his Master! What slaves many are to “the way of the heathen” (Jer. 10:2), and in what bondage do they suffer themselves to be held through fear of public opinion—afraid of what their friends and neighbours would think and say if they should be regulated only by Holy Writ in this matter!

“And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet” (2 Kings 13:20, 21). Behold, here once more the sovereignty of God, He honoured Elijah at his departure from this world, but Elisha, in a different way afterwards. It was the Lord’s *seal* upon His servant’s mission. It indicated that the Lord was his God *after death*, as well as before; and thus, furnished evidence both of the immortality of the soul and the final resurrection of the body. It was an intimation that other miracles would yet be wrought for Israel in response to his prayers, and as the result of his labours. Thus, to the end of the piece, *miracles* are connected with the mission of Elisha.

The seventh of seven booklets.

