



**The  
Mission  
and Miracles  
of Elisha**

**Part  
Three**

**A. W. Pink**



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### **8. Seventh Miracle**

### **9. Eighth Miracle**

### **10. Ninth Miracle**

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### **8. Seventh Miracle**

“And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life” (2 Kings 4:17). As Matthew Henry pointed out, “We may well suppose, after the birth of this son, that the prophet was doubly welcome to the good Shunammite: he had thought himself indebted to her, but from henceforth, as long as she lives, she will think herself in his debt, and that she can never do too much for him. We may also suppose that, the child was very dear to the prophet, as the son of his prayers, and very dear to the parents as the son of their old age.” What is more attractive than a properly trained and well behaved child! And what is more objectionable than a spoilt and naughty one? From all that is revealed of this “great woman” we cannot doubt that she brought up her boy wisely and well, that he added to the delightfulness of her home, that he was a pleasure and not a trial to visitors. Alas that there are so few of her type now left. Godly and well-conducted homes are the choicest asset which any nation possesses.

“And when the child was grown, it fell on a day that he went out to his father to the reapers” (verse 18). The opening clause does not signify that he was now a fully-developed youth, but that he had passed out of infancy into childhood. This is quite obvious from a number of things in the sequel. When he was taken ill, a “lad” carried him back home (verse 19); for some time he “sat on her knees” (verse 20), and later she—apparently unaided—carried him upstairs and laid him on the prophet’s bed (verse 21). Yet the child had grown sufficiently so as to be able

to run about and be allowed to visit his father in the harvest field. While there he was suddenly stricken with an ailment, for “he said unto his father, My head, my head!” (verse 19). It is hardly likely that this was caused by a sunstroke, for it occurred in the morning, a while before noon. Seemingly the father did not suspect anything serious, for instead of carrying him home in his own arms, he sent him back by one of his younger workers. How incapable we are of foreseeing what even the next hour may bring forth!

“And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon” (verse 20). What a lovely picture of maternal devotion! How thankful should each one be who cherishes the tender memories of a mother’s love, for there are tens of thousands in this country who were born of parents devoid of natural affection, who cared more for the public house and the movies than for their offspring. But powerful as true mother love is, it is impotent when the grim reaper draws near, for our verse adds “and then died.” Death strikes down the young as well as the old, as the tombstones in our cemeteries bear ample witness. Sometimes he gives more or less protracted notice of his gruesome approach, at others, as here, he smites with scarcely any warning. How this fact ought to influence each of us!—to put it on its lowest ground, how foolish to make an idol of one who may be snatched away at any moment. With what a light hand should we grasp all earthly objects. Here, then, is first, *the occasion* of this miracle: the death of the child.

Second, a word upon *its mystery*. How often the Lord’s dealings seem to us as passing strange. Hopes suddenly blighted, prospects swiftly changed, loved ones snatched away. “All flesh is grass” (Isa. 40:6), and that “today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven” (Matt. 6:30). Thus it was here. The babe had survived the dangers incident to infancy, only to be cut down in childhood. That morning apparently full of life and health, trotting merrily off to the harvest field: at noon a corpse on his mother’s knee. But in her case such a visitation was additionally inexplicable. The boy had been given to her by the Divine

bounty because of the kindness she had shown to one of God's servants, and now, to carnal reason, it looked as though He was dealing most unkindly with her. A miracle had been wrought in bestowing the child and now that miracle is neutralized. Yes, God's ways are frequently "a great deep" unto human intelligence: yet let the Christian never forget, those ways are ever ordered by infinite love and wisdom.

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

Third, *its expectation*. "And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out" (verse 21). This must be pondered in the light of her subsequent actions if we are to perceive the meaning of her conduct here. There was definite purpose on her part, and in view of what immediately follows it seems clear that these were the actions of faith. She cherished the hope that the prophet would restore her son unto her. She made no preparations for the burial of the child, but anticipated his resurrection by laying him upon Elisha's bed. Her faith clung to the original blessing: God, by the prophet's promise and prayers, had given him unto her,

and now she takes the dead child to God (as it were) and goes to seek the prophet. Her faith might be tried even to the straining point, but in that extremity she interpreted the inexplicable dealings of God by those dealings she was sure of, reasoning from the past to the future, from the known to the unknown. The child had been given unto her unasked, and she refused to believe it had now been irrecoverably taken away from her.

Her faith was indeed put to a severe test, for not only was her child dead but at the very time she seemed to need him the most, Elisha was many miles away! Ah, that was no “accident” but wisely and graciously ordered by God. How so? That there might be fuller opportunity for bringing forth the evidences and fruits of faith: a faith which does not triumph over discouragement and difficulties is not worth much. The Lord often causes our ‘circumstances’ to be most ‘unfavourable’ in order that faith may have the freer play and rise above them. Such was the case here. Elisha might be absent, but she could go to him. Most probably she had heard of the raising of the widow’s son, Zarephath (1 Kings 17:23) by Elijah, and she knew that the spirit of Elijah now rested on Elisha (2 Kings 2:15), and therefore with steadfast confidence she determined to seek him. That she *did* act in faith is clear from Hebrews 11:35, for that chapter which chronicles the achievements of faith of the Old Testament saints says “through *faith*...women received their dead raised to life again”—there were but two who did so, and the “great woman” of Shunem was one of them.

“And she called unto her husband and said, send me I pray thee one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again” (verse 22). While faith triumphs over difficulties, it does not act unbecomingly by forcing a way through them and setting aside the requirements of propriety. Urgent as the situation was, yet she did not rush away without informing her husband of her intention. The wife should have no secrets from her partner, but take him fully into her confidence: failure at this point leads to suspicions, and where they exist love is soon chilled. Nor did this stricken mother

content herself with scribbling a hurried note, telling her husband to expect her return within a day or so. No, once again she took her proper place and owned her subjection to him: though she made known to him her desire, she demanded nothing, but respectfully sought his permission, as her “I pray thee” plainly shows. Faith is bold and venturesome, but it does not act unseemly and insubordinately.

“It is happy and comely when harmony prevails in domestic life: when the husband’s authority is tempered with affection, and unsuspecting confidence; when the wife answers that confidence with deference and submission, as well as fidelity, and when each party consults the other’s inclinations, and both unite in attending on the ordinances of God and supporting His cause” (Thomas Scott). But such happiness and harmony is attainable and obtainable only as both husband and wife seek grace from God to walk in obedience to His precepts, and as family worship is duly maintained. If the wife suffers herself to be influenced by the very *un-*‘feminine’ spirit which is now so rife in the world and refuses to own the lordship of her husband (1 Pet. 3:6), or if the husband acts as a tyrant and bully, failing to love, nourish and cherish his wife (Eph. 5:25,29) and “giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7), then the smile of God will be forfeited, their prayers will be “hindered,” and strife and misery will prevail in the home.

“And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? it is neither new moon nor Sabbath. And she said, It shall be well” (verse 23). While admiring *her* virtues, her husband appears in a much less favourable light. His question might suggest that he was still ignorant of the death of his son, yet that scarcely seems likely. If he had made no inquiry about the child he must have been strangely lacking in tender regard for him, and his wife’s desire to undertake an arduous journey at such a time ought to have informed him that some serious emergency had arisen. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that his language was more an expression of irritability, that he resented being left alone in his grief. At any rate, his words served to

throw light upon another praiseworthy trait in his wife: that it was her custom to attend the prophet's services on the feast days and the Sabbath. Though a "great woman" she did not disdain those unpretentious meetings on mount Carmel. No genuine Christian, however wealthy or high his station, will consider it beneath him to meet with his poorer brethren and sisters.

Those words of her husband's may be considered from another angle, namely, as a further testing of her faith. Even where the deepest affection obtains between husband and wife there is not always spiritual equality, no, not even where they are one in the Lord. One may steadily grow in grace, while the other makes little or no progress. One may enter more deeply into an experimental acquaintance with the Truth, which the other is incapable of understanding and discussing. One may be given a much increased measure of faith without the other being similarly blest. None can walk by the faith of another, and it is well for those of strong faith to remember that. Certainly there was no co-operation of faith in this instance: rather did the husband of our "great woman" seem to discourage than encourage her. She might have reasoned with herself, perhaps this is an intimation from God that I should not seek unto Elisha: but faith would argue, this is but a further testing of me, and since my reliance is in the Lord I will neither be daunted nor deterred. It is by our reactions to such testings that the reality and strength of our faith is made evident. Faith must not expect a smooth and easy path.

"And she said, It shall be well:" that was the language of firm and unshaken confidence. "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive and go forward, slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee" (verse 24). Her husband certainly does not shine here. Had he discharged the duties of love *he* had undertaken this tiring journey instead of his wife, or at the very least offered to accompany her. But he would not exert himself enough to saddle the ass for her, but left her to do that. How selfish many husbands are! how slack in bearing or at least sharing their wives' burdens! Marriage is a partnership or it is

nothing except in name, and the man who allows his wife to become a drudge and does little or nothing to make her lot lighter and brighter in the home, is not worthy to be called “husband.” Nor is it any sufficient reply to say, It is only lack of thought on his part: inconsiderateness and selfishness are synonymous terms, for unselfishness consists largely in thoughtfulness of others. The best that can be said for this man is that he did not actually forbid his wife starting out for Carmel.

We know not how far distant Shunem was from Carmel, but it appears that the journey was a considerable and hard one—in a mountainous country. But love is not quenched by hardships and faith is not rendered inoperative by difficulties, and in the case of this mother both of these graces were operative within her. Love can brook no delay and thinks not of personal discomfort as her language to the servant shows. It is also the nature of faith to be speedy and look for quick results—patience is a distinct virtue which is only developed by much hard schooling. An intense earnestness possessed the soul of this woman, and where such earnestness is joined with faith it refuses a denial. While our faith remains a merely mental and mechanical thing it achieves nothing, but when it is intense and fervent it will produce results. True, it requires a deep sense of need, often the pressure of an urgent situation to evoke this earnestness, and that is why faith flourishes most in times of stress and trial, for it then has its most suitable opportunity to declare itself.

“So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite” (verse 25). There are several things of importance to be noticed here. First, like his predecessor, Elisha was the man of the mount: 2:25—symbolical of his spiritual elevation, his affections set upon things above. Second, but mark how he conducts himself not in haughty pride of fancied self-superiority: he waited not for the woman to reach him, but dispatched his servant to meet her, thereby evidencing his solicitude. Third, was it not a gracious token from the Lord to cheer her heart near the



close of a trying journey: how “tender” are God’s mercies. Fourth, “that Shunammite” denotes either that she was the only pious person in that place or that she so over-towered her brethren and sisters in spirituality that such an appellation was quite sufficient for the purpose of identification.

“Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well” (verse 26). Incidentally, this shows that younger men engaged in the Lord’s service and occupying lowlier positions are required to execute commissions from their seniors: compare 2 Timothy 4:11-13. We do not regard the woman’s “it is well” as expressing her resignation to the sovereign will of God, but rather as the language of trustful expectation. She seems to have had no doubt whatever about the outcome of her errand. It appears to us that, throughout the whole of this incident, the “great woman” regarded the death of her child as a trial of faith. Her “it is well” looked beyond the clouds and anticipated the happy issue. Surely we must exclaim, O woman, great is thy faith. Yes, and great too was its reward, for God never puts to confusion those who really count upon Him showing Himself strong on their behalf. Let us not forget that this incident is recorded for *our* learning and encouragement.

“And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me” (verse 27). Our minds at once revert to the two women who visited the Lord’s sepulchre and when He eventually met them saying, All hail “came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him” (Matt. 28:9). In the case before us, the “great woman” appears to have (rightly) viewed Elisha as the ambassador of God, and to have humbly signified that she had a favour to ask of him. In the rebuffing from Gehazi we see how her faith met with yet another trial. And then the Lord tenderly interposed through His servant and rebuked the officious attendant. The Lord was

accustomed to reveal His secrets unto the prophets (Amos 3:7), but until He did so *they* were as ignorant and as dependent upon Him as others, as this incident plainly shows.

Here was still a further test of faith: the prophet himself was in the dark, unprepared for her startling request. But the Lord has just as good a reason for concealing as for revealing. In the case before us it is not difficult to perceive why He had withheld from Elisha all knowledge of the child's death: He would have him learn from the mother herself, and that, that she might avow her faith. "Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" (verse 28). Those were powerful arguments to move Elisha to act on her behalf. "As she did not impatiently desire children, she could not think that her son had been given her, without solicitation, merely to become the occasion of her far deeper distress" (Thomas Scott). The second question evidenced that her dependence was entirely upon the word of God through His servant: "However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will deceive us: hope in *that* will not make us ashamed" (Matthew Henry).

In the last [earlier paragraphs] we dwelt, first, upon the *occasion* of this miracle, namely, the death of the "great woman's" son. Second, upon the *mystery* of it. To all appearances, the child had been quite well and full of life in the morning, yet by noon he was a corpse. In her case such a disaster was doubly inexplicable, for the son had been given to her by the Divine bounty because of the kindness she had shown to one of God's servants; and now, to carnal reason, it looked as though He was dealing most unkindly with her. Furthermore, the wonder-working power of God had been engaged in bestowing a son upon her, and now this miracle was neutralized by suddenly snatching him away. Third, upon its *expectation*. It is inexpressibly blessed to behold how this stricken mother reacted to the seeming catastrophe; throughout the whole narrative it is made evident that she regarded this affliction as a trial of her faith, and grandly did her confidence in God triumph over it.

Continuing our study of the miracle which follows, we note.

Fourth, its *means*. “Then he said to Gehazi, gird up thy loins and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child” (2 Kings 4:29). Some think the prophet believed that the child was only in a swoon, yet we can hardly conceive of the mother leaving the boy under such circumstances—rather had she sent a message by one of her servants: nor is it likely that Elisha’s instructions to the servant would be so peremptorily expressed if such had been the case. Matthew Henry says “I know not what to make of this.” Another of the Puritans suggests that, “It was done out of pure conceit, and not by Divine instinct, and therefore it failed of the effect.” Thomas Scott acknowledged, “It is difficult to determine what the prophet meant by thus sending Gehazi. He had divided Jordan by using Elijah’s mantle, and perhaps he thought that his own staff would be sufficient.” Personally we are inclined to think that the prophet’s design was to teach Gehazi a much-needed lesson. However, this much seems clear from the incident: no servant of God should delegate unto another that which it is his own duty to do.

“And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her” (verse 30). It is clear from these words of hers, that, whatever was or was not the prophet’s design in ordering his servant to make all speed to where the child lay, she regarded his action as another testing of her faith. She evidently had no confidence in Gehazi, or in Elisha’s staff as such. She was not to be put off in this way. Her language was both impressive and emphatic, signifying, I swear that I will not return home unless thou dost personally accompany me: the situation is desperate, my expectation is in thee as the Lord’s ambassador, and I refuse to take any No. Here we behold the boldness and perseverance of her faith. Whether there was any unwillingness on Elisha’s part to set out on this journey, or whether he was only putting her to the test, we cannot be sure, but such earnestness and importunity

won the day and now stirred the prophet to action.

“And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child: but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him saying, The child is not awaked” (verse 31). Young’s concordance gives as the meaning of the name Gehazi “Denier.” If the various references made to him be carefully compared it will be seen that his character and conduct were all of a piece and in keeping with his name. Why Elisha should have had such a man for his personal attendant we know not, yet in view of there being a Judas in the apostolate, we need not be unduly surprised. First, we see him seeking to officiously thrust away the poor mother when she cast herself at his master’s feet (verse. 27). Here we note the absence of prayer unto the Lord, and the nonsuccess of his efforts. Later, we find him giving expression to selfish unbelief, a complete lack of confidence in the power of Elisha (verse 43). Finally, his cupidity masters him and he lies to Naaman, and is stricken with leprosy for his pains (5:20-27). Thus in the verse before us we have a picture of the unavailing efforts of an unregenerate minister, and his failure made manifest to others.

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

things are possible. The very fact that the dead child had been placed upon his bed was a direct challenge to his faith, and nobly did he meet it.

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

Fifth, its *procedure*. “And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm” (2 Kings 4:34). The means used by the prophet and the policy he followed are so closely linked together that they merge into one another without any break, the faith of Elisha finding expression in prayer. Considering the extraordinary situation here, how that act of the prophet’s serves to demonstrate that he was accustomed to count upon God in times of emergency, to look for wondrous blessings from Him in response to his supplications, that he was fully persuaded nothing was too hard for Jehovah and therefore no petition too large to present unto Him. The more faith looks to

the infinite power and all-sufficiency of the One with whom it has to do, the more is He honoured. Next, the prophet stretched himself on the body of the little one, which was expressive of his deep affection for him, and his intense longing for its restoration, as though he would communicate his own life and thereby revive him.

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

“Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro” (verse 35). Let it be noted that even the prayer of an Elisha did not meet with an immediate and full answer: why then should *we* be so soon disheartened when Heaven appears to be tardy in responding to our crying! God is sovereign in this, as in everything else; by which we mean that He does not deal uniformly with us. Sometimes our request is answered immediately, at the first time of asking, but often He calls for perseverance and persistence, requiring us to “wait patiently for Him.” We have seen how many rebuffs the faith of the mother met with, and now the faith of the prophet is tested too. It is true that he had been granted an encouragement by the “waxing

warm” of the child’s body—as the Lord is pleased to often give us “a token for good” (Psa. 86:17) ere the full answer is received; but as yet there was no sign of returning consciousness, and the form of the little one still lay silent and inert before him. And *that* also has been recorded for *our* instruction.

“Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro, and went up and stretched himself upon him” (verse 35). This pacing up and down seems to denote a measure of perturbation of mind, for the prophets were “subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17) and compassed with the same infirmities. But even if Elisha was now at his wit’s end, he did not give way to despair and regard the situation as hopeless. No, he continued clinging to Him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and again stretched himself upon the child. Let us lay this important lesson to heart and put it into practice, for it is at this point so many fail: it is the *perseverance* of faith which wins the day: see Matthew 7:7. Thomas Scott has pointed out, “It is instructive to compare the *manner* in which Elijah and Elisha wrought their miracles, especially in raising the dead, with that of Jesus Christ. Every part of their conduct expressed a consciousness of inability and an entire dependence upon Another, and earnest supplication for His intervention; but Jesus wrought by His own power: He spake, and it was done: ‘Young man, I say unto thee arise; Talitha cumi; Lazarus come forth.’” In all things *He* has the pre-eminence.

Sixth, its *marvel*. This was nothing less than the quickening of the child, the restoring “a dead body to life” (8:5). After the prophet had again stretched himself upon the child we are told that he “sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (verse 35). See how ready God is to respond to the exercise of real faith in Himself! In this case neither the mother nor the prophet had any definite or even indefinite promise they could plead, for the Lord had not said the child should be preserved in health or recovered if he fell ill. But though they had no promise, they laid hold of the known *character* of God: since He had given the child unasked, Elisha would not believe

He would now withdraw His gift and leave his benefactress worse off than she was before. Elisha knew that with the Lord there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17), and he clung to that. True, it makes prayer easier when there is some specific promise we can plead, yet it is a higher order of faith that lays hold of God Himself. There was no promise that God would pardon a penitent murderer, and no sacrifice was appointed for such a sin, yet David appealed not in vain to the “multitude of His tender mercies” (Psa. 51:1).

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

Seventh, its *meaning*. Some help is obtained therein by noting that this passage which sets before us the seventh miracle of our prophet opens with the connective conjunction (verse 18). That “And” not only intimates the continuity of the narrative, notes a striking contrast between the two principal divisions of it, but also indicates there is an intimate relation between them. As we have pointed out on previous occasions, the word “and” is used in Scripture sometimes with the purpose of linking two things together, but at other times with the object of placing two objects



or incidents in juxtaposition in order to display the contrasts between them. In the present instance it appears to be used for *both* reasons. As we hope to show, light is thrown on the typical significance of this miracle by carefully noting how it is immediately linked to the one preceding it. When we look at the respective incidents described, we are at once struck with the antitheses presented. In the former we behold Elisha journeying to Shunem, in the latter it is the woman who betakes herself to him. There it was the woman befriending the prophet, here he is seen befriending her. In that a son is miraculously given to her, in this he is taken away.

The typical meaning of that does not appear on the surface, and therefore it will not be a simple matter for us to make it clear unto the reader. Only the regenerate will be able to follow us intelligently, for they alone have experienced in their spiritual history that which is here set forth in figure. That which is outstanding in this incident is the mysteriousness of it: that a child should be miraculously given to this woman, and then that the hand of death should be laid upon him! That was not only a sore trial to the poor mother, but a most perplexing providence. To carnal reason it seemed as though God was mocking her. But is there not also something equally tragic, equally baffling, in the experience of the Christian? In the last miracle we were shown a picture of the fruit of redemption, and here death appears to be written on that fruit. Ah, my reader, let it be clearly understood that we are as dependent upon God for the *maintenance* of that fruit as we were for the actual bestowal of it.

And *what is* the “fruit of redemption” as it applies to the individual? From the side which looks Godward: reconciliation, justification, sanctification, preservation. But from the selfward side, what a list might be drawn up. Peace, joy, assurance, fellowship with God and His people, delight in His Word, liberty in prayer, weanedness from the world, affections set upon things above. O the inexpressible sweetness of our “espousals” (Jer. 2:2) and of our “first love” (Rev. 2:4). But, in many cases, how soon is that joy dampened and that love is “left!” How wretched

then is the soul: like Rachel mourning for her children, we “refused to be comforted.” How sore the perplexity! How Satan seeks to take advantage and persuade such an one that God has “ceased to be gracious.” How passing strange that such a blight should have fallen upon the “fruit of the spirit!” How deeply mysterious the deadness which now rests upon the garden of God’s planting, causing the soul to say with the poet,

***“Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord;  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word?  
What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still,  
But now I feel an aching void  
The world can never fill.”***

Yes, it does indeed seem inexplicable that the child of God’s own workmanship should pine away, and to a sense, lie cold and lifeless. Ah, but we must not stop there. We must not sit down in despair and conclude that all is lost. The incident before us does not end at that point: the death of the child was not the final thing! There is “good hope” for us here, important instruction to heed. That “great woman” did not give away to dejection and assume that all hope was gone. Very far from it. And if the Christian who is sensible of spiritual decays, of languishing graces, of his dire need of being renewed in the inner man, would experience a gracious reviving, then he should emulate this mother and do as she did. And again we would point out that she did not faint in the day of trouble and indulge in self-pity: she did not bemoan her helplessness and say, What can I do in the presence of death? And if *she* did not, why should *you*!

Mark attentively what this stricken woman did. 1. She regarded this inexplicable and painful dispensation as a testing of her faith, and she acted accordingly. 2. She moved promptly: without delay she carried the child upstairs and laid him on the prophet’s bed—in anticipation of the Lord’s showing Himself

strong on her behalf. 3. She vigorously bestirred herself, going to some trouble in order to obtain relief, starting out on an arduous journey. 4. She refused to be deterred when her own husband half-discouraged her. 5. She sought unto the one who had promised the son in the first instance: the soul must turn to God and cry “*quicken* Thou me according to Thy Word” (Psa. 119:25). 6. She clung to the original promise and refused to believe that God had ceased to be gracious (verse 28). 7. She declined to be put off by the unavailing intervention of an unregenerate minister (verses 29-30). 8. She persisted in counting upon the power of Elisha, who was to her the representative of God. And gloriously was her faith rewarded.

Regarding the typical meaning of this miracle in connection with Elisha himself, it teaches us the following points. 1. The servant of God must not be surprised if those in whose conversion he has been instrumental should later experience a spiritual decay, especially when he is absent from them. 2. If he would be used to their restoration, no half measures will avail, nor may he entrust the work to a delegate. 3. Prayers, believing, expectant, fervent prayer, must be his first recourse. 4. In seeking to revive a languishing soul, he must descend to the level of the one to whom he ministers (verse 34) and not stand as on some pedestal, as though he were a superior being. 5. He must not be discouraged because there is not an immediate and complete response to his efforts, but should persevere therein. 6. No cold and formal measures will suffice: he must throw himself into this work heart and soul. 7. The order of recovery was renewed circulation (verse 34), sneezing, eyes opened: the affections warmed, the head cleared (understanding restored), vision.

## **9. Eighth Miracle**

The passage which is to be before us (2 Kings 4:38-41) has in it practical instruction as well as spiritual lessons for us, for the Scriptures make known the evils and dangers which are in this world as well as the glory and bliss of the world to come. Elisha was visiting the school of the prophets at Gilgal, instructing them

in the things of God. At the close of a meeting he gave orders that a simple meal should be prepared for them, for though he was more concerned about their spiritual welfare he did not overlook their physical. It was a time of “dearth” or famine, so one went out into the field to gather herbs, that they might have a vegetable stew. He found a wild vine with gourds and securing a goodly quantity, he returned and shred them into the pot of pottage, quite unconscious that he was making use of a poisonous plant. Not until after the broth was poured out was the peril discovered, for when they began eating the men cried out “there is death in the pot.” How little we realise the many and varied forms in which death menaces us, and how constantly we are indebted to the preserving providence of God.

The effects of the curse which the Lord God pronounced upon the sin of Adam have been by no means confined unto the human family. “Cursed is *the ground* for thy sake” (Gen. 3:17) was part of the fearful sentence, and as Romans 8:22 informs us “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” No matter where one looks, the observant eye can behold the consequences of the Fall. No section of creation has escaped: even the fields and the woods bring forth not only thistles and thorns, but that which is noxious and venomous. Some of the most innocent-looking herbs and berries produce horrible suffering and death if eaten by man or beast. Yet for the most part, in fact with rare exceptions, God has mercifully provided the sentient creature with adequate protection against such evils. The instinct of the animals and the intelligence of men causes each of them to leave alone that which is harmful: either the eye discovers, the nostril detects, or the palate perceives their evil qualities, and thereby they are guarded against them.

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

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

The mercy of the Creator appears not only in the protecting “senses” with which He has endowed His creatures so that they may recognize and avoid most if not all of the things around them which are inimical to their well being, but also in providing them with suitable remedies and effective antidotes. If there be herbs which are injurious and poisonous there are others which are counteracting and healing. If the waters of Marah are bitter and undrinkable, there was a tree at hand which when cut down and cast into the waters renders them sweet (Exod. 15:25). If we read at the beginning of the sacred Volume of a tree the eating of whose fruit involved our race in disaster and death, ere that Volume is closed we are told of another Tree the leaves of which are “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). This fact, then, holds good in both the material and the spiritual realms: for every evil God has provided a remedy, for every poison an antidote, for every false doctrine a portion of the Truth which exposes and refutes it. With these introductory observations we may now consider the details of Elisha’s eighth miracle.

First, *its location*. “And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land” (2 Kings 4:38). It will be remembered that it was from this place that Elisha had started out with his master on their final journey together ere Elijah was raptured to heaven (2 Kings 2:1), where his sincerity had been put to the proof by the testing “Tarry here, I pray thee.” From Gilgal they had passed to Bethel (2:2), and from thence to Jericho, and

finally to the Jordan. It is striking to note that our hero wrought a miracle at each of these places though in the inverse order of the original tour or journey. At the Jordan he had divided its waters so that he passed over dry-shod before the wondering gaze of the young prophets (2:14, 15). At Jericho he had healed the evil waters (2:19-22). At Bethel he had cursed the profane children in the name of the Lord and brought about their destruction (2:23-25). And now here at Gilgal Elisha exercises the extraordinary powers with which God had endowed him. Wherever he goes the servant of God should, as opportunity affords, exercise his ministerial gifts.

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land.” Gilgal was to the east of Jericho, close to the Jordan, where there would be more moisture and vegetation than further inland. It was a place made memorable from the early history of Israel. It was there that the Nation had set up twelve stones as a monument to God’s gracious intervention, when he had caused them to pass through the river dry-shod (Josh. 4:18-24). It was there too that they had circumcised those who had been born in the wilderness wanderings, thereby rolling away the reproach of Egypt from off them, evidencing their separation from the heathen, as being God’s peculiar people—type of the “circumcision of the *heart*” (Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:29), which is the distinguishing mark of God’s spiritual children. It was there also that they had first partaken of “the old corn of the land” (5:11) so that miraculous supplies of manna ceased. Yet even such a favoured spot as this was affected by the dearth, for great wickedness had also been perpetrated there (1 Sam.15:21-23 and compare with Hosea 9:15).

Second, *its occasion*: “there was a dearth in the land.” The Hebrew word for “dearth” (raab) signifies a famine, and is so rendered in 1 Kings 18:2. This is one of the “four sore judgments” which the Lord sends when He expresses His displeasure against a people: “the sword and the famine and the noisome beast and the pestilence” (Ezek. 14:21). In this dispensation the “famine” with which a righteous God afflicts a

land is one far more solemn and serious than that of dearth of material food, as that threatened in Amos 8:11: “Behold, the days come saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” Such a “famine” is upon Christendom today. It has not yet become quite universal, but almost so. Thousands of places dedicated to Divine worship became social centres, political clubs, ritualistic playhouses, and today they are heaps of rubble. The vast majority of those still standing provide nothing for people desiring soul food, and even in the very few where the Word of God is ostensibly ministered it is no longer so in the power and blessing of the Spirit. It is this which gives such pertinency to our present passage.

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land: and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him.” What a blessed and beautiful conjunction of things was this. How instructive for the under-shepherd of Christ and for His sheep in a day like this. Though God was acting in judgment the prophet did not consider that warranted him ceasing his labours until conditions became more favourable. So far from it, he felt it was a time when he should do all in his power to “strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die” (Rev. 3:2), and encourage those who are liable to give way to dejection because of the general apostasy. “Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2) is the injunction which God has laid upon His ministers. In seasons of “dearth” the servant of Christ needs to be particularly attentive to the spiritual needs of young believers, instructing them in the holiness and righteousness of a sin-hating God when His scourge is upon the nation, and also making known His faithfulness and sufficiency unto “His own” in the darkest hour, reminding them that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psa. 46:1).

See here what a noble example Elisha has left those called by God to engage in proclaiming His truth. The prophet was not idle: he did not wait for needy souls to come to him, but took the initiative and went to them. Times of national distress and

calamity do not exempt any from the discharge of spiritual duties or justify any slackness in employing the appointed means of grace. Nor did these “sons of the prophets” raise the objection that Elisha sought unto them at an inopportune time and make the excuse they must needs busy themselves looking after their temporal interests. No, they gladly availed themselves of their golden opportunity, making the most of it by attentively listening to the instructions of Elisha. Their “sitting before him” betokened respect and attentiveness. It reminds us of Mary who “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word” (Luke 10:39), which Christ designated that “good part,” the “one thing needful” (verse 42). And though many today no longer may *hear* the Word preached, they can still sit and *read* it: be thankful for the printed page if it contains that which strengthens faith and promotes closer walking with God.

Third, *its beneficiaries*. “And he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe [boil or concoct] pottage for the sons of the prophets” (verse 38). The order of action in this verse is significant for it shows how the needs of the soul take precedence over those of the body. Elisha saw to it that they had spiritual food set before them ere arranging for material. On the other hand, the prophet did not conduct himself as a fanatic and disdain their temporal needs. Here, as everywhere in Scripture, the balance is rightly preserved. Attention to and enjoyment of fellowship with God must never be allowed to crowd out the discharge of those duties pertaining to the common round of life. As Christ thought of and ministered to the bodily needs of the hungry multitudes after He had broken unto them the Bread of Life, so His servant here was concerned about the physical well being of these students: a plain and simple meal in either case in the one bread and fish, in the other vegetable stew.

“And one went out into the field to gather herbs and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not” (verse 39). Apparently this person took it upon himself to go out and gather herbs in the field: no doubt his intention was



good, but so far as the narrative is concerned it records no commission from Elisha to act thus—a clear case where the best intentions do not warrant us to act unless we have a definite word from God, and to use only those means He has appointed. It is possible this person may have returned thanks unto God when his eye fell upon those gourds and felt that his steps had been directed by Him to the place where they were growing: if so, a warning how easily we may misunderstand the Divine providences when we are acting in self-will and interpret them in a way which justifies and apparently sanctifies the course we have taken. When Jonah fled from the command the Lord had given him, to “flee unto Tarshish” and went down to Joppa, he “found a ship going” to that very place (1:3)!

Seasons of “dearth” are peculiarly dangerous ones. Why so? Because in times of famine, food is scarce, and because there is less to select from we are very apt to be less particular and act on the principle of “Beggars cannot be choosers.” Certainly there is a warning here to be careful about what we eat at such times, and especially of that which grows wild. The Hebrew word here rendered “wild” means uncultivated, and is generally connected with “wild beasts,” which were not only ceremonially unclean under the Mosaic law but unfit for human consumption. It is to be duly noted that there was a plentiful supply of these “wild gourds” even though there was a “dearth in the land.” So it is spiritually: when there is a “famine” of hearing the words of the Lord, Satan sees to it that there is no shortage of spurious food witness the number of unsound tracts and poisonous booklets which are still being freely circulated in this day when there is such a scarcity of paper, to say nothing of the vile literature in which the things of God are openly derided.

Yet though these gourds were “wild” they must have borne a close resemblance to wholesome ones or he who gathered them had not been deceived by them, nor would it be said of those who stood by while he shred them into the pot of pottage that “they knew them not.” This too has a spiritual counterpart, as the Enemy’s “tares” sown among the wheat intimates. Satan is a

subtle imitator: not only does he transform himself “into an angel of light” but his “deceitful workers” transform themselves “into the apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13,14) for they come preaching Jesus and His Gospel, but as the Holy Spirit warns us it is “another Jesus” and “another Gospel” than the genuine one (2 Cor. 11:4). Those who looked on while this person was shredding the wild gourds into the pot raised no objection, for they were quite unsuspecting, instead of carefully examining what they were to eat. What point this gives to the apostolic exhortation “*Prove ALL things, hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thess. 5:21), and if we refuse to do so, who is to blame when we devour that which is injurious?

Fourth, *its need*. “So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof” (verse 40). It was not until the eleventh hour that they discovered their peril, for the deadly danger of these “wild gourds” was not exposed until they had begun actually to eat of the same; not only had their appearance deceived them, but they had no offensive or suspicious odour while cooking. The case was particularly subtle, for seemingly it was one of their own number who had gathered the poisonous herbs. Ah, note how the apostle commended the Bereans for carefully bringing *his* teaching to the test of Holy Writ (Acts 17:11): much more do *we* need to do so with the preachings and writings of uninspired men. We need to “consider diligently” what is set before us by each ecclesiastical ruler (Prov. 23:1 and compare with Matt. 24:45), for though they be “dainties” and “sweet words” yet are they usually “deceitful meat” (Prov. 23:2, 8). How we need to make Psalm 141:4 our prayer!

It was when the sons of the prophets began to eat the pottage that they discovered its deadly character. Ah, my reader, are you able to discriminate between what is helpful to the soul and what is harmful? Is your spiritual palate able to detect error from Truth, Satan’s poison from “the sincere [pure] milk of the Word?” Do you really endeavour so to do, or are you lax in this

matter? “Hear my words O ye wise men, and give ear unto me ye that have knowledge, for the ear *trieth* words as the mouth tasteth meat” (Job 34:2, 3). But let us not miss the moral link between what is said in verse 40 and that which was before us in verse 38: it was those who had just previously been sitting at the feet of Elisha who now discovered the poisonous nature of these gourds. Is not the lesson plain and recorded for our learning: it is those who are instructed by the true servant of God who have most spiritual discernment, and a better judgment than others not so favoured. Then “take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24) and what ye read.

Fifth, *its nature*. “They cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof.” What made them aware of their peril we know not. Nor is the child of God always conscious of it when some secret repression or unseen hand prevented him from gratifying his curiosity and turned his feet away from some “synagogue of Satan” where there is “death in the pot” being served in that place. Have not all genuine Christians cause to say with the apostle, “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10). From that pot of death, Elisha, under God, delivered them.

Sixth, *its means*. “But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot, and he said, Pour out for the people that they may eat. And there was no harm [margin ‘evil thing’] in the pot” (verse 41). The “meal” we regard as the Word of God: either the written or the personal Word one of the great types of Christ is seen in the “meat” (i.e. ‘meal’) offering of Leviticus 2. It is only by the Word we are safeguarded from evil. See how graciously God provided for “His own:” though there was a “dearth in the land” yet these sons of the prophets were not without “meal!” How thankful we should be for the Word of God in our homes in such a day as this. Though someone else fetched the meal, “he [Elisha] cast it into the pot!”

Seventh, *its meaning*. Much of this has been intimated in what has already been pointed out, and consideration of space has

obliged us to abbreviate these closing paragraphs. Let it not be overlooked that verse 38 begins with “And:” after a reviving be careful where you go for your food! If you are suspicious of the soundness of a religious publication take counsel of a competent “man of God.” Let not a time of spiritual “dearth” render you less careful of what you feed upon. In seasons of famine the servant of God should be diligent in seeking to strengthen the hands of *young* believers. Only by making the Word of God our constant guide shall we be delivered from the evils surrounding us.

## 10. Ninth Miracle

It seems strange so very few have perceived that a miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 4:42-44, for surely a careful reading of those verses makes it evident that they describe the wonder-working power of the Lord, for no otherwise can we explain the feeding of so many with such a little and then a surplus remaining. It is even more strange that scarcely any appear to have recognised that we have here a most striking foreshadowment of the only miracle wrought by the Lord Jesus which is narrated by all the four Evangelists, namely, His feeding of the multitude from a few loaves and fishes. In all of our reading we have not only never come across a sermon thereon, but so far as memory serves us, not so much as a quotation from or allusion to this striking passage. Thomas Scott dismisses the incident with a single paragraph, and though Matthew Henry is a little fuller, he too says nothing about the supernatural character of it. We wonder how many of our readers, before turning to this article, could have answered the question, Where in the Old Testament is described the miracle of the feeding of a multitude through the hands of a man?

First, *its occasion*. Though there was a “dearth [famine] in the land” (2 Kings 4:38) yet we learn from the first verse of our passage that it was not a total or universal one: some barley had been grown in Baal-shalisha. In this we may perceive how that in wrath the Lord remembers mercy. Even where the crops of an

entire country are a complete failure—an exceedingly exceptional occurrence—there is always food available in adjoining lands. Therein we behold an exemplification of God’s goodness and faithfulness. Of old He declared “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night *shall not cease*” (Gen. 8:22). Though more than four thousand years have passed since then, each returning one has furnished clear evidence of the fulfilment of that promise—a demonstration both of the Divine veracity and of God’s continuous regulation of the affairs of earth. As we have said, it is very rare for there to be a total failure of the crops in any single country, for as the Lord declares “I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon and the piece whereon it rained not withered” (Amos 4:7).

Second, *its contributor*. “And there came a man from Baalshalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits” (2 Kings 4:42). Let us begin by observing how naturally and artlessly the conduct of this unnamed man is introduced. Here was one who had a heart for the Lord’s servant in a time of need, who thought of him in this season of scarcity and distress, and who grudged not to go to some trouble in ministering to him. “Shalisha” adjoined “mount Ephraim” (1 Sam. 9:4) and probably a journey of considerable distance had to be taken in order to reach the prophet. Ah, but there was more behind this man’s action than meets the eye: we must look deeper if we are to discover the springs of his deed. It is written “the steps are ordered of the Lord” (Psa. 37:23). And thus it was in the case before us: this man now befriended Elisha because God had worked in him “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). It is only by comparing Scripture with Scripture we can discover the fullness of meaning in any verse.

Ere passing on let us pause and make application unto ourselves of the truth to which attention has just been called. It has an important bearing on each of us, and one which needs the more to be emphasised in this day of practical atheism. The

whole trend of things in our evil generation is to be so occupied with what are termed “the laws of Nature,” that the operations of the Creator are lost sight of; man and his doings are so eulogised and deified that the hand of God in providence is totally obscured. It should be otherwise with the saint. When some friend comes and ministers to your need, while being grateful to him for the same, look above him and his kindness to the One who has sent him. I may pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” and then, because I am so absorbed with secondary causes and the instruments which He may employ fail to see my Father’s hand as He graciously answers my petition. God is the Giver of every temporal as well as spiritual thing, even though He uses human agents in the conveying of them.

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

“And there came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits.” Again we point out that there is more here than meets the careless eye or is obvious to the casual glance. Other passages which make mention of the

“firstfruits” must be compared if we are to learn the deeper meaning of what is here recorded and discover that this man’s action was something more than one of thoughtfulness and kindness to Elisha. “The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God” (Exod. 23:19—repeats in 34:26). The “firstfruits,” then, belonged to the Lord, being an acknowledgment both of His goodness and proprietorship: a fuller and very beautiful passage thereon is found in Deuteronomy 26:1-11. From Numbers 18:8-13 we learn that these became the portion of the priests: “whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they [the people] shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine [Aaron’s and his sons] every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it” (verse 13). The same holds good in the rebuilt temple: “the first of all the firstfruits... shall be the priest’s” (Ezek. 44:30).

This man from Shalisha then, was, in principle, acting in obedience to the Divine Law. We say “in principle,” because it was enjoined that the firstfruits should be taken into “the house of the Lord” and that they became the priest’s portion. But this man belonged to the kingdom of Israel and not of Judah: he lived in Samaria and had no access to Jerusalem, and even had he gone there, entrance to the temple had been forbidden. In Samaria there were none of the priests of the Lord, only those of Baal’s. But though he rendered not obedience to the letter, he certainly did so in the spirit, for he recognised that these firstfruits were not for his own use; and though Elisha was not a priest he was a prophet, a servant of the Lord. It is for this reason, we believe, that it is said he brought the firstfruits not to “Elisha” but to “the man of God.” That designation occurs first in Deuteronomy 33:1 in connection with Moses, and is descriptive not of his character but of his office—one wholly devoted to God, his entire time spent in His service. In the Old Testament it is applied only to the prophets and extra-ordinary teachers: 1 Samuel 2:27, 9:6; 1 Kings 17:18 etc., but in the New Testament it seems to belong to all of God’s servants: 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17.

What has been pointed out above should throw light on a problem which is now exercising many conscientious souls and which should provide comfort in these evil days. The situation of many of God's people is now much like that which obtained when our present incident occurred. It was a time of apostasy, when everything was out of order. Such is the present case of Christendom. It is the clear duty of God's people to render obedience to the letter of His Word wherever that is possible, but when it is not they may do so in spirit. Daniel and his fellows could not observe the Passover feast in Babylon, and no doubt that was a sore grief to them. But that very grief signified their desire to observe it, and in such cases God accepts the will for the deed. For many years past this writer and his wife have been unable to conscientiously celebrate the Lord's supper, yet (by grace) we do so in spirit, by remembering the Lord's death for His people in our hearts and minds. "Not forsaking the assembling of *ourselves* together" (Heb. 10:25) is very far from meaning that the sheep of Christ should attend a place where the "goats" preponderate, or where their presence would sanction what is dishonouring to their Master.

Ere passing on we should point out another instructive and encouraging lesson here for the humble saint. As this man from Shalisha, acting in the spirit of God's Law, journeying with his firstfruits to where Elisha was, he could have had no thought in his mind that by this action he was going to be a contributor unto a remarkable miracle. Yet such was actually the case, for those very loaves of his became the means under the wonder-working power of God of feeding a large company of people. And this is but a single illustration of a principle which, by the benign government of God, is of frequent occurrence, as probably most of us have witnessed for ourselves. Ah, my reader, we never know how far-reaching may be the effects and what fruits may issue for eternity from the most inconspicuous act done for God's glory or the good of one of His people. How often has some obscure Christian, in the kindness of his heart, done something or given something which God has been pleased to



bless and multiply unto others in a manner and to an extent which never entered his or her mind.

“And brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof.” How it appears that it delighted the Holy Spirit to describe this offering in detail. Bearing in mind that a time of serious “dearth” then obtained, may we not see in the varied nature of this gift thoughtfulness and consideration on the part of him that made it. Had the whole of it been made up in the form of “loaves” some of it might have gone mouldy before the whole of it was eaten: at best it would need to be consumed quickly: to obviate that, part of the barley was brought in the husk. On the other hand, had all been brought in the ear time would be required for the grinding and baking thereof, and in the meanwhile the prophet might be famished and fainting. By such a division both disadvantages were prevented. From the whole, we are taught that in making gifts to another or in ministering to his needs we should exercise care in seeing that it is in a form best suited to his requirements. The application of this principle pertains to spiritual things as well as temporal.

Third, *its generosity*. Before noting the use to which Elisha put this offering, let us observe that gifts sometimes come from the most unexpected quarters. Had this man come from Bethel or Shunem there would be no occasion for surprise, but that one from Baal-shalisha should bring God’s servant an offering of his firstfruits was certainly not to be looked for. Ah, does not each of God’s servants know something of this experience! If on the one hand some on whose cooperation he had reason to count failed and disappointed him, others who were strangers have befriended him. More than once or twice have the writer and his wife had this pleasant surprise: we cherish their memory, while seeking to forget the contrasting ones. Joseph might be envied and mistreated by his brethren, but he found favour in the eyes of Potiphar. Moses may be despised by the Hebrews, but he received kindly treatment in the house of Jethro. Rather than Elijah should starve by the brook Cherith, the Lord commanded

the ravens to feed him. Our supplies are sure, though at times they may come from strange quarters.

“And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat” (verse 42). In the preceding miracle this same trait is manifest: nothing is there said of Elisha partaking of the pottage, nor even of the young prophets in his charge, but rather “the people.” Such liberality will not go unrewarded by God, for He has promised “Give, and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). Such was the case here, for the very next thing recorded after his “Pour out for the people that they may eat” (verse 41) is the receiving of these twenty loaves. And what use does he now make of them? His first thought was not for himself, but for others. We must not conclude from the silence of this verse that the prophet failed either to perceive the hand of God in this gift or that he neglected to return thanks unto Him. Had the Scriptures given a full and detailed account of such matters, they had run into many volumes instead of being a single one. According to the law of analogy we are justified in concluding that he did both. Moreover, what follows shows plainly that his mind was stayed upon the Lord.

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

Fourth, *its opposition*. “And his servitor said, What! should I set *this* before an hundred men?” (verse 43). Ah, the servant of God must not expect others to be equally zealous in exercising a gracious spirit or to cooperate with him in the works of faith, no not even those who are his assistants—none can walk by the faith of another. When Luther announced his intention of going to Worms even his dearest brethren sought to dissuade him. But was not such an objection a natural one? Yes, but certainly not spiritual. It shows how shallow and fleeting must have been the impression made on the man by the previous miracles. It was quite in keeping with what we read of this “servitor,” Gehazi, elsewhere. His language expressed incredulity and unbelief. Was he thinking of himself? Did he resent his master’s generosity and think, *We* shall need this food for ourselves? And this, after all the miracles he had seen God work through Elisha! Ah it takes something more than the witnessing of miracles to regenerate a dead soul, as the Jews made evident when the Son of God wrought in their midst.

Fifth, *its means*: faith in God and His Word. “He said again, Give the people that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof” (verse 43). Where there is real faith in God it is not stumbled by the unbelief of others, but when it stands in the wisdom of men it is soon paralyzed by the opposition it encounters. When blind Bartimaeus began to cry out, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me,” and many charged him that he should hold his peace, “he cried the more a great deal” (Mark 10:48). On the other hand, one with a stony-ground hearer’s faith endureth for awhile, “for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by [quickly] he is offended” (Matt. 13:21). When Elisha had first said, “Give unto the people, that they may eat” it was the language of faith. Verse 41 seems to show that the people had been seeking the prophet in the extremity of their need. His own barrel of meal had probably run low, and it is likely he had been praying for its replenishment. And here was God’s answer—yet in such a form or measure as to further test his faith! Elisha saw the hand of

God in this gift and counted upon His making it sufficient to meet the needs of the crowd. Elisha regarded those twenty loaves as an “earnest” of greater bounties.

Do *we* regard such providences as “a token for good” or are we so wrapped up in the token itself that we look no further? It was a bold and courageous faith in Elisha: he was not afraid the Lord would put him to confusion and cause him to become a laughingstock to the people. At first his faith was a general (yet sufficient) one in the character of God. Then it met with a rebuff from Gehazi, but he refused to be shaken. And now it seems to us that the Lord rewarded His servant’s faith by giving him a definite word from Himself. The way to get more faith is to use what has already been given us (Luke 8:18), for God ever honours those who honour Him. Trust Him fully and He will then bestow assurance. The minister of Christ must not be deterred by the carnality and unbelief of those who ought to be the ones to strengthen his hands and cooperate with him. Alas, how many have let distrustful deacons to quench their zeal by the difficulties and objections which they raise. How often the children of Israel opposed Moses and murmured against him, but “by faith he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

Sixth, *its antitype*. There is no doubt whatever in our minds that the above incident supplies the Old Testament foreshadowment of our Lord’s miracle in feeding the multitude, and it is both interesting and instructive to compare and contrast the type with its antitype. Note then the following parallels. First, in each case there was a crowd of hungry people. Second, Elisha took pity on them, and Christ had compassion on the needy multitude (Matt. 14:14). Third, a few “loaves” formed the principal article of diet, and in each case they were “barley” ones (John 6:9). Fourth, in each case, the order went forth “give [not ‘sell’] the people that they may eat” (compare with Mark 6:37). Fifth, in each case an unbelieving attendant raised objection (John 6:7). Sixth, Elisha fed the crowd through his servant (verse 44) and Christ through His apostles (Matt. 14:19). Seventh, in

each case a surplus remained after the people had eaten (verse 44 and compare with Matt. 14:20). And now observe wherein Christ has “the pre-eminence.” First, He fed a much larger company: over 5,000 (Matt. 14:21) instead of 100. Second, He employed fewer loaves: 5 (Matt. 14:17) instead of 20. Third, He supplied a richer feast, fish as well as bread. Fourth, He wrought by His own power.

Seventh, *its meaning*. It will suffice if we just summarise what we have previously dwelt upon. 1. The servant of God who is faithful in giving out to others will not himself be kept on short rations. 2. The more such an one obtains from God, the more should he impart to the people: “Freely ye have received, freely give.” 3. God ever makes His grace abound unto those who are generous. 4. A true servant of God has implicit confidence in the Divine character. 5. Though he encounters opposition he refuses to be stumbled thereby. 6. Though other ministers ridicule him, he acts according to God’s Word. 7. God does not fail him, but honours his trust.

The third of seven booklets.

