



**The
Mission
and Miracles
of Elisha**

**Part
Two**

A. W. Pink



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4. The Third Miracle

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4. The Third Miracle

“And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up thou bald head, go up thou bald head. And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood and tare forty and two children of them” (2 Kings 2:23, 24). In seeking to give an exposition of this miracle let us observe, first, its *connection*. It will be noted that our passage opens with the word “And” and as there is nothing meaningless in Scripture it should be duly pondered. Nor is its force difficult to perceive, for it evidently intimates that we should observe the relation between what we find here and that which immediately precedes. The context records the wonders which God wrought through Elisha at the Jordan and at Jericho. Thus the truth which is here pointed to by the conjunction is plain: when the servant has been used by his Master he must expect to encounter the opposition of the Enemy.

There is an important if unpalatable truth illustrated here, one which the minister of Christ does well to take to heart if he would be in some measure prepared for and fortified against bitter disappointment. After a season of blessing and success he must expect sore trials. After he has witnessed the power of God attending his efforts he may count upon experiencing something of the rage and power of Satan, for nothing infuriates Satan so much as beholding his victim delivered from spiritual death and

set free from that which he occasioned in Eden. Elisha had been signally favoured both at the Jordan and at Jericho, but here at Bethel he hears the hiss of the Serpent and the roaring of the lion against him. Ah, the minister of the Gospel is fully aware of this principle, yea often reminds his hearers of it. He knows it was the case with his Master, for after the Spirit of God had descended upon Him and the Father had testified to His pleasure in Him, He was at once led into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Yet how quickly is this forgotten when *he* is called to pass through this contrastive experience.

It is one thing to know this truth theoretically and it is quite another to have a personal acquaintance with it. The servant of Christ is informed that the smile of Heaven upon his labours will arouse the enmity of his great Adversary, yet how often is he taken quite unawares when the storm of opposition bursts upon him! It ought not to be so, but so it usually is. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you" (1 Peter 4:12). Various indeed are the ups and downs which are encountered by those who labour in the Christian vineyard. What a striking contrast is here presented to our view! At Jericho Elisha is received with respect: the young Prophets render obeisance to him and the men of the city seek his help; here at Bethel he is contemptuously ridiculed by the children. At Jericho, the city of the curse, he is an instrument of blessing; at Bethel, which signifies "the house of God" and where blessings might therefore be expected, he solemnly pronounces a curse upon those who mock him.

Second, its *occasion*. This was the insulting of God's servant. As Elisha was approaching Bethel, "there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him." Upon reading this incident it is probable that some will be inclined to say, It seems that children then were much like what they are now—wild, rude, lawless, totally lacking in respect for their seniors. From this analogy the conclusion will be drawn: therefore we should not be surprised nor unduly shocked at the present day delinquency of our youth. But such a conclusion is entirely

unwarranted. It is true there is “nothing new under the sun” and that fallen human nature has been the same in every age. But it is not true that the tide of evil has always flowed uniformly, and that each generation has witnessed more or less of the appalling conduct which now mark the young in every part of Christendom. No, very far from it.

When there was an ungrieved Spirit in the churches the restraining hand of God was held upon the baser passions of mankind. That restraint operated largely through parental control—moral training in the home, wholesome instruction and discipline in the school, and adequate punishment of young offenders by the State. But when the Spirit of God is “grieved” and “quenched” by the churches, the restraining hand of the Lord is removed, and there is a fearful moral aftermath in all sections of the community. When the Divine Law is thrown out by the pulpit there inevitably follows a breakdown of law and order in the social realm, which is what we are now witnessing all over the so-called “civilized world.” That was the case to a considerable extent twenty-five years ago, and as the further an object rolls down hill the swifter becomes its momentum, so the moral deterioration of our generation has proceeded apace. As the majority of parents were godless and lawless it is not to be wondered at that we now behold such reprehensible conduct in their offspring.

Older readers can recall the time when juveniles who were guilty of theft, wanton destruction of property, and cruelty to animals, were sternly rebuked and made to smart for their wrongdoing. But a few years later such conduct was condoned and “boys will be boys” was used to gloss over a multitude of sins. So far from being shocked, many parents were pleased and regarded their erring offspring as “smart,” “precocious” and “cute.” Education authorities and psychologists insisted that children must not be suppressed and repressed but “directed” and prated about the evils inflicted on the child’s character by “inhibitions,” and corporal punishment was banished from the schools. Today the parent who acts according to Proverbs 13:24;

19:18; 22:15 and 23:1 will not only be called a brute by his neighbours but is likely to be summoned before the courts for cruelty, and instead of supporting him the magistrate will probably censure him. The present conduct of children is not normal but abnormal. What is recorded in our passage occurred in the days of Israel's *degeneracy*! Child delinquency is one of the plain marks of a *time of apostasy*—it was so then, it is so now.

Third, its *location*. As with the former miracles, the place where this one happened also throws much light upon that which occasioned it. Originally Bethel was called “the house of God” (Gen. 28:16-17), but now it had become a habitation of the Devil, one of the principal seats of Israel's idolatry. It was here that Jeroboam had set up one of the calves. Afraid that he might not be able to retain his hold upon those who had revolted from Rehoboam, especially if they should go up to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices in the temple, he “made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan . . . And he made a house of high places and made priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast for the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made” (1 Kings 12:28-32).

Thus it will be seen that so far from Bethel being a place which basked in the sunshine of Jehovah's favour it was one upon which His frown now rested. Its inhabitants were no ordinary people, but high-rebels against the Lord, openly defying Him to His face, guilty of the most fearful abominations. This it was which constituted the dark background of the scene that is here before us: this it is which accounts for the severity of the judgment which fell upon the youngest of its inhabitants: this it is which explains why these children conducted themselves as

they did. What occurred here was far more than the silly prank of innocent children: it was the manifestation of an inveterate hatred of the true God and His faithful servant. Israel's worship of Baal was far more heinous than the idolatry of the Canaanites, for it had the additional and awful guilt of apostasy. And apostates are always the fiercest persecutors of those who cleave to the Truth, for the very fidelity of the latter is a witness against and a condemnation of those who have forsaken it.

Fourth, its *awfulness*. The fearful doom which overtook those children must be considered in the light of the enormity of their offense. Our degenerate generation has witnessed so much condoning of the greatest enormities that they may find it difficult to perceive how this punishment fitted the crime. The character of God has been so misrepresented by the pulpit, His claims so little pressed, the position occupied by His servants so imperfectly apprehended, that there must be a returning to the solemn teaching of Holy Writ if this incident is to be viewed in its proper perspective. Of old God said, "Touch not Mine anointed and do My Prophets no harm" (Psa. 105:15): they are His messengers, His accredited representatives, His appointed ambassadors, and an insult done to them is regarded by Him as an insult against Himself. Said Christ to His ministers, "He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me" (Matt. 10:40). Conversely, he that despiseth and rejecteth the one sent forth by Christ despiseth and rejecteth Him. How little is this realized today! The curse of God now rests on many a place where His ministers were mocked.

"And he went up from thence unto Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head" (2 Kings 2:23). After the vain search which had been made for Elijah (verse 17), it is likely that some inkling of his supernatural rapture was conveyed to the Prophets at Jericho, and from them to their brethren at Bethel (verse 3), and hence we may conclude that his remarkable translation had been noised abroad—received with scepticism and ridicule by the inhabitants

of Bethel. In their unbelief they would mock at it, as the apostate leaders of Christendom do not believe that the Lord Jesus actually rose again from the dead and that He ascended to Heaven in a real physical body, as they make fun of the Christian's hope of his Lord's return and of being caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Thus in saying, "Go up, thou bald head" they were, in all probability, scoffing at the tidings of Elijah's translation—scoffs put into their mouths by their elders.

"They had heard that Elijah was 'gone up to Heaven' and they insultingly bade Elisha follow him, that they might be rid of him also, and they reviled him for the baldness of his head. Thus they united the crimes of abusing him for a supposed bodily infirmity, contemptuous behaviour towards a venerable person, and enmity against him as the Prophet of God. The sin therefore of these children was very heinous: yet the greater guilt was chargeable on their parents, and their fate was a severe rebuke and awful warning to them" (Thomas Scott). How true it is that "the curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2). "And he turned back and looked on them" which indicates he acted calmly, and not on the spur of the moment. "And he cursed them in the name of the Lord"—not out of personal spite, but to vindicate his insulted Master. Had Elisha sinned in cursing these children Divine providence had not executed it. This was fair warning from *God* of the awful judgment about to come upon Israel for their sins.

Fifth, its *ethics*. The passage before us is one which infidels have been quick to seize upon, and lamentable, indeed, have been many of the answers returned to them. But the Scriptures have survived every opposition of its enemies and all the purile apologies of its weak-kneed friends. Nor are the Scriptures in any danger whatever from this sceptical and blatant age. Being the Word of God they contain nothing which His servants have any need to be ashamed of, nothing which requires any explaining away. It is not our province to sit in judgment upon Holy Writ: our part is to tremble before it (Isa. 66:2), knowing that one day we shall be judged by it (John 12:48). As Jehovah

was able to look after the sacred Ark without the help of any of His creatures (1 Sam. 6:10-12) so His Truth is in need of no carnal assistance from us. It is to be received without question and believed in with all our hearts. It is to be preached and proclaimed without hesitation or reservation: holding back no part of it.

Certain so-called “Christian apologists” have replied to the taunts of infidels by a process of what is termed “toning down” the passage, arguing that it was not little children but young men who were cursed by the Prophet and torn to pieces by the bears: but such an effeminate explanation is as senseless as it is needless. We quite agree with Thomas Scott when he says, “Some learned men have endeavoured to prove that these offenders were not young children but grown-up persons, and no doubt the word rendered ‘children’ is often used in that sense. The addition, however of the word ‘little’ seems to clearly evince they were not men, but young boys who had been brought up in idolatry and taught to despise the Prophets of the Lord.” Others hesitate not to roundly condemn Elisha, saying he should have meekly endured their taunts in silence and that he sinned grievously in cursing them. Sufficient to point out that his Master deemed otherwise: so far from rebuking His servant, he sent the bears to fulfil his curse, and there is no appeal against *His* decision!

The passage before us is one that Dispensationalists have sought to make capital out of, supposing that it furnishes a convincing illustration and demonstration of the line they draw or rather the gulf they would make between the Old and New Testaments. Trading on the ignorance and credulity of their hearers, most of whom will readily accept the dogmatic assertions of any who pose as men with “much light,” these teachers have insisted that many of the actions of the Prophets were entirely foreign to and actuated by a radically different spirit from that which was inculcated and exemplified by Christ and His Apostles. They argue that Elijah’s slaying of the prophets of Baal and Elisha’s cursing of the children evidences

the vast difference there is between the dispensations of the Law and of Grace, and the unlearned and unwary are deceived by such clap trap. Sufficient to remind such people that Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the denunciation of Peter and that Elymas was smitten with blindness by Paul (Acts 13:8-11)!

How blind these dispensationalists are. During the very course of why they term this “era of grace” God is even now giving the most awe-inspiring and wide-reaching proof of His wrath against those who flout His Law, visiting the earth with sorer judgments than any He has sent since the days of Noah. The New Testament equally with the Old teaches “it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2 Thess. 1:6). In the incident before us God was righteously visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, as He was by the death of their children also smiting the parents in their tenderest parts. At almost the end of the Old Testament era we read that Israel “mocked the messengers of God and despised His words and *resisted His Prophets*, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people till there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:16). Here at Bethel God was giving a warning, a sample of His coming wrath, unless they reformed their ways and treated His servants better.

Sixth, its *meaning*. At first glance it certainly appears that there can be no parallel between the above action of Elisha and that which should characterize the servants of Christ, and many are likely to conclude that it can only be by a wide stretch of the imagination or a flagrant wresting of this incident that it can be made to yield anything pertinent for this age. But it must be remembered that we are not looking for a *literal* counterpart but rather a *spiritual* application, and viewing it thus our type is solemnly accurate. Ministers of the Gospel are “unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved *and* in them that perish. To the one they are the savour of death unto death and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor. 2:15, 16). Certainly the evangelist has no warrant to anathematize any who oppose him but he is *required* to pronounce accursed of God those who

love not Christ and who obey not His Law (1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 3:10).

Seventh, its *sequel*. This is recorded in the closing verse of 2 Kings 2. “And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.” In the violent death of those children as the outcome of Elisha’s malediction we behold the stating of the Prophet’s Divine authority, the sign of his extraordinary office, and the fulfilment of the prediction that he should “slay” (1 Kings 19:17). After his unpleasant experience at Bethel the Prophet betook himself to Carmel, which had been the scene of Elijah’s grand testimony to a prayer-answering God (1 Kings 18). By making for the mount this servant of God intimated his need for the renewing of his strength by communion with the Most High and by meditation upon His holiness and power. Samaria was the country where the apostate portion of Israel dwelt, and by going thither Elisha manifested his readiness to be used of his Master as He saw fit in that dark and difficult field of labour.

There is only space left for us to barely mention some of the more outstanding lessons to be drawn from this solemn incident. First, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22): if the previous miracle exemplified His “goodness,” certainly this one demonstrated His “severity;” and the one is as truly a Divine perfection as the other! Second, the words as well as actions of children, even “little children,” are noticed by God! They should be informed of this and warned against showing disrespect to God’s servants. Third, what must have been the grief of those parents when they beheld the mangled bodies of their little ones! But how much greater the anguish of parents in the Day of Judgment when they witness the everlasting condemnation of their offspring if it has been occasioned by their own negligence and evil example. Fourth, sooner or later God will certainly avenge the insults shown His ministers: this writer could relate more than one example of a horrible death overtaking one and another of those who opposed and slandered him.

5. The Fourth Miracle

First, its *background*. It has pleased the Holy Spirit in this instance to provide a somewhat lengthy and complicated one, so it will be the part of wisdom for us to patiently ponder the account He has given of what led up to and occasioned this exercise of God's wonder-working power. Just as a diamond appears to best advantage when placed in a suitable setting, so we are the more enabled to appreciate the works of God when we take note of their connections. This applies equally to His works in creation, in providence and in grace. We are always the losers if we ignore the circumstances which occasion the varied actings of our God. The longer and darker the night, the more welcome the morning's light, and the more acute our need and urgent our situation, the more manifest the hand of Him that relieves and His goodness in ministering to us. The same principle holds good in connection with the Lord's undertaking for our fellows, and if we were not so self-centred we should appreciate and render praise for the one as much as for the other.

2 Kings 3 opens by telling us, "Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not there from" (verses 1-3). Five things are taught us in these verses about that "abominable thing" which God "hates" and which is the cause of all the suffering and sorrow that is in the world, namely, sin. First, that God Himself personally *observes* our wrongdoing: it was "in the sight of the Lord" that the guilty deeds of Jehoram were performed. How much evil doing is perpetrated secretly and under cover of darkness, supposing none are witness thereto. But though evil doing may be concealed from *human* gaze, it cannot be hidden from the omnipresent One, for "the eyes of the LORD are in

every place (by night as well as by day) beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). What curb this ought to place upon us.

Second, that God *records* our evil deeds. Here is a clear case in point. The evil which Jehoram wrought in the sight of the Lord is set down against him, likewise that of his parents before him, and further back still, “the sin of Jeroboam.” Unspeakably solemn is this: God not only observes but registers against men every infraction of His Law. They commit iniquity and think little or nothing of it, but the very One who shall yet judge them has noted the same against them. It may all be forgotten by them, but nothing shall fade from what God has written, and when the dead, both small and great, stand before Him the “books” will be opened, and they will be “judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:12). And my reader, there is only one possible way of escape from receiving the awful wages of your sins, and that is to throw down the weapons of your warfare against God, cast yourself at the feet of Christ as a guilty sinner, put your trust in His redeeming and cleansing blood, and God will say, “I have *blotted out*, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions” (Isa. 44:22).

Third, that God recognizes *degrees* in evil doing, for while Jehoram displeased the Lord, yet it is said, “but not like his father and like his mother.” Christ declared unto Pilate, “he that delivered Me unto thee (Judas) hath the greater sin” (John 19:11); and again we are told, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God” (Heb. 10:28, 29). There are many who ignore this principle and suppose that since they are sinners it makes no difference how much wickedness they commit. They madly argue, “I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb,” but are only “treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5), for “every transgression and disobedience” will yet receive “a just recompense of reward” (Heb. 2:2).

Fourth, that God observes whether our reformation be *partial*

or complete. This comes out in the fact that we are told Jehoram “put away the image (or statue) that his father had made,” but he did not destroy it, and a few years later Baal worship was restored. God’s Word touching this matter was plain: “thou shalt utterly overthrow them and quite break down their images” (Exod. 23:24). Sin must be dealt with by no unsparing hand, and when we resolve to break therefrom we must “burn our boats behind us” or they are likely to prove an irresistible temptation to return unto our former ways. Fifth, that God duly notes our *continuance* in sin, for it is here recorded of Jehoram that he not only “cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam” but also that “he departed not therefrom” which greatly aggravated his guilt. To enter upon a course of wrong-doing is horrible wickedness, but to deliberately persevere therein is much worse. How few heed that word “break off thy sin by righteousness” (Dan. 4:27).

“And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel” (2 Kings 3:4, 5). In fulfilment of Balaam’s prophecy (Num. 24:17) David had conquered the Moabites so that they became his servants (2 Sam. 8:2), and they continued in subjection to the kingdom of Israel until the time of its division, when their vassalage and tribute were transferred to the kings of Israel, as those of Edom remained to the kings of Judah. But upon the death of Ahab they revolted. Therein we behold the Divine Providence crossing his sons in their affairs. This rebellion on the part of Moab should be regarded in the light of, “when a man’s ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7)—but when our ways displease Him, evil from every quarter menaces us. Temporal as well as spiritual prosperity depends entirely upon God’s blessing. To make His hand more plainly apparent God frequently punishes the wicked after the similitude of their sins. He did so to Ahab’s sons—having turned from the Lord—Moab was moved to rebel against them.

Having dwelt upon the Divine side of Moab's revolt, let us offer one remark upon the human side. As we ponder this incident we are made to realize that "there is no new thing under the sun." Discontent and strife, jealousy and bloodshedding, have characterized the relations of one nation to another all through history. Instead of mutual respect and peace, "living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3) have marked them all through the years. How aptly were the great empires of antiquity symbolized by "four great *beasts*" (Dan. 7:4-7)—and wild, ferocious and cruel ones, at that! Human depravity is a solemn reality, and neither education nor legalization can eradicate or sublimate it. What, then, are the ruling powers to do? Deal with it with a *firm* hand: "For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil . . . he beareth not the sword in vain: for he (the governmental and civil ruler) is the minister of God (to maintain law and order), a revenger (to enforce law and order) upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:4)—to strike terror into them, and not pamper—to punish the lawbreaker—not attempt to reform him.

"And it came to pass when Ahab was dead that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel" (2 Kings 3:5). The Moabites were the descendants of the son which Lot had by his elder daughter. They occupied a territory to the southeast of Judah and east of the Red Sea. They were a strong and fierce people—"the mighty men of Moab" (Exod. 15:15). Balak—who sent for Balaam to curse Israel—was one of their kings. Even as proselytes they were barred from entering the congregation of the Lord unto the tenth generation. They were idolaters (1 Kings 11:33). For the space of no less than a hundred and fifty years they had apparently paid a heavy annual tribute, but upon the death of Ahab they had decided to throw off the yoke and be fined no further.

"And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel" (2 Kings 3:6). There was no turning to the Lord for counsel and help. He was the One who had given David success and brought the Moabites into subjection, and unto Him

ought Jehoram to have turned now that they rebelled. But he was a stranger to Jehovah; nor did he consult the priests of the calves, so that apparently he had no confidence in them. How sad is the case of the unregenerate in the hour of need; no Divine Comforter in sorrow, no unerring Counsellor in perplexity, no sure Refuge when danger menaces them. How much men lose even in this life by turning their backs upon the One who gave them being. Nothing less than spiritual madness can account for the folly of those who “observe lying vanities” and “forsake their own mercies” (Jonah 2:8). Jonah had to learn that lesson in a hard school. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows never learn it, as they ultimately discover to their eternal undoing. Will that be the case with you, my reader?

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

“And he said I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses” (verse 7). It seems strange that such an one as Jehoshaphat was willing to unite with Jehoram in this expedition, for he had been severely rebuked on an earlier occasion for having “joined affinity with Ahab” (2

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

Second, its *urgency*. “And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days’ journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!” (2 Kings 3:8-10). We must abbreviate our remarks. Note that Jehoram was quite willing for the king of Judah to take the lead, and that he made his plans without seeking counsel of God. The course he took was obviously meant to secure the aid of the Edomites, but by going so far into the wilderness they met with a desert wherein was no water. Thus the three kings and their forces were in imminent danger of perishing. This struck terror into the heart of Jehoram and at once his guilty conscience smote him—unbelievers know enough of the Truth to condemn them! “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD” (Prov. 19:3)—what an illustration of that is furnished by the words of Jehoram on this occasion.

“But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a Prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel’s servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him” (2 Kings 3:11-12). Here we see the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous in a time of dire calamity: the one is tormented with a guilty conscience and thinks only of the Lord’s wrath; the other has hope in His mercy. In those days the Prophet was the Divine mouthpiece, so for one the king of Judah made inquiry; and not in vain. It is blessed to observe that as the Lord takes note of and registers the sins of the reprobate, so He observes the deeds of His elect, placing on record here the humble service which Elisha had rendered to Elijah—not even a cup of water given to one of His little ones shall pass unnoticed and unrewarded! Appropriately was Elisha termed “the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof” (2 Kings 13:14)—their true *defence* in the hour of danger; and to him did the three kings turn in their urgent need.

Third, its *discrimination*. “And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother” (2 Kings 3:13). Mark both the dignity and fidelity of God’s servant. So far from feeling flattered because the king of Israel consulted him, he deemed himself insulted and hesitated not to let him know he discerned his true character. It reminds us of the Lord’s words through Ezekiel, “These men have set up their idols in their hearts and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by *them*?” (14:3). “And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hands of Moab,” (2 Kings 3:13), as much as to say, “Do not disdain me: our case is desperate.” “And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee” (verse 14). Little do the unrighteous realize how much they owe, under God, to the presence of the righteous in their midst—as soon as Lot was removed from Sodom that city was destroyed!

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

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

Sixth, its *meaning*. The very number of this miracle helps us to

apprehend its significance. It was the fourth of the series, and in the language of Scripture numerics it stands for the earth—compare with the four “seasons” and the four points of the compass, etc. What we have in this miracle is one of the Old Testament foreshadowments that the Gospel was not to be confined to Palestine but would yet be sent forth throughout the earth. Prior to His death Christ bade His Apostles, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5, 6 and compare with John 4:9); but after His resurrection He said, “Go ye therefore and teach *all* nations” (Matt. 28:19). But there is more here. “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22), and “their debtors” we Gentiles are (Rom. 15:26, 27). Strikingly is this typified here, for it was solely for the sake of the presence of Jehoshaphat this miracle was wrought and that the water of life was made available for the Samaritans and the Edomites! Thus it is a picture of the minister of the Gospel engaged in *missionary* activities that is here set forth.

Seventh, its *timing*. “And it came to pass in the morning when the meat offering was offered up, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water” (2 Kings 3:20). This hour was chosen by the Lord for the performing of this miracle to intimate to the whole company that their deliverance was vouchsafed on the ground of the sacrifices offered and the worship rendered in the temple in Jerusalem. It was at the same significant hour that Elijah had made his effectual prayer on Mount Carmel, (1 Kings 8:36), when another notable miracle was wrought. So, too, it was at the hour “of the evening oblation” that a signal blessing was granted unto Daniel (9:21). Typically, it teaches us that it is through the merits of the sacrifice of Christ that the life-sustaining Gospel of God now flows forth unto the Gentiles.

6. The Fifth Miracle

In creation we are surrounded with both that which is useful and that which is ornamental. The earth produces a wealth of

lovely flowers as well as grain and vegetables for our diet. The Creator has graciously provided things which charm our eyes and ears as well as supply our bodies with food and raiment. The same feature marks God's Word. The Scriptures contain something more than doctrine and precept: there are wonderful types which display the wisdom of their Author and delight those who are able to track the merging of the shadow into the substance, and there are mysterious prophecies which demonstrate the foreknowledge of their Giver and minister pleasure to those granted the privilege of beholding their fulfilment. These types and prophecies form part of the internal evidence which the Bible furnishes of its Divine inspiration, for they give proof of a wisdom which immeasurably transcends that of the wisest of mortals. Nevertheless one has to turn unto the doctrinal and perceptive portions of Holy Writ in order to learn the way of salvation and the nature of that walk which is pleasing to God.

In our earlier writings we devoted considerable attention to the types and prophecies, but for the last decade we have concentrated chiefly upon the practical side of the Truth. Observation taught us that many of those who were keenly interested in a Bible reading on some part of the tabernacle or an attempt to explain some of the predictions of Daniel, appeared quite bored when we preached upon Christian duty or deportment: yet they certainly needed the latter for they were quite deficient therein. A glorious sunset is an exquisite sight, but it would supply no nourishment to one that was starving. The perfumes of a garden may delight the senses, but they would be a poor substitute for a good breakfast to a growing child. Only after the soul has fed upon the doctrine of Scripture and put into practice its precepts is it ready to enjoy the beauties of the types and explanations of the mysteries of prophecy.

This change of emphasis in our writings has lost us hundreds of readers, yet if we could re-live the past fifteen years we would follow the same course. The solemn days through which we are passing demand, as never before, that first things be put first.

There are plenty of writers who cater to those who read for intellectual entertainment; our longing is to minister unto those who yearn for a closer walk with God. What would be thought of a farmer who in the spring wasted his time in the woods listening to the music of the feathered songsters, while his fields were allowed to remain unploughed and unsown? Would it not be equally wrong if we dwelt almost entirely on the typical significance of the miracles of Elisha, while ignoring the simpler and practical lessons they contain for our hearts and lives? Balance is needed here as everywhere, and if we devote more space than usual on this occasion to the spiritual meaning of the miracle before us (and similarly in the “Dagon” articles) it will not be because we have made or shall make a practice of so doing.

First, its *connection*. “Great service had Elisha done in the foregoing chapter for the three kings: to his prayers and prophecies they owed their lives and triumphs. One would have expected that the next chapter should have told us what honours and what dignities were conferred on Elisha for this: that he should have been immediately preferred at court, and made prime-minister of state; that Jehoshaphat should have taken him home with him and advanced him in the kingdom. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man (Eccl. 9:15). Or, if he had preferment offered him, he declined it: he preferred the honour of doing good in the schools of the prophets, before that of being great in the courts of kings. God magnified him and that sufficed him: magnified him indeed, for we have him here employed in working no less than five miracles” (Matthew Henry). He who has, by grace, the heart of a true servant of Christ, would not, if he could, exchange places with the monarch on his throne or the millionaire with all his luxuries.

Second, its *beneficiary*. “Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my

two sons to be bondmen” (2 Kings 4:1). The one for whom this miracle was wrought was a woman, “the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). She was a widow, a figure of desolation: “how doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! how is she become as a widow!” (Lam. 1:1)—contrast the proud boast of corrupt Babylon: “I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev. 18:7). Not only was she bereft of her husband but she was left destitute: in debt and without the means of discharging it. A more pitiable and woeful object could scarcely be conceived. In her sad plight she betook herself to the servant of Jehovah and made known unto him her dire situation. Her husband may have died while Elisha was absent with the kings in their expedition against the Moabites, and thus he be unacquainted with her troubles.

Third, its *urgency*. The situation confronting this poor widow was indeed a drastic one. Her human provider and protector had been removed by the hand of death. She had been left in debt and had not the wherewithal to discharge it—a burden that would weigh heavily on a conscientious soul; and now she was in immediate danger of having her two sons seized and taken from her by the creditor to serve as bondmen to him. Observe that in the opening words of 2 Kings 4 it is *not* said “now there *came* a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha,” but “there *cried* a certain woman,” which indicates the pressure of her grief and the earnestness of her appeal unto the prophet. Sometimes God permits His people to be brought very low in their circumstances, nor is this always by way of chastisement because of their folly. We do not think that such was the case here. The Lord is pleased to bring some to the end of their own resources that His delivering hand may be the more plainly seen acting on their behalf.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the regenerate is that they are given honest hearts (Luke 8:15), and therefore is it their careful endeavour to “provide things honest in the sight of all men” and to “owe no man anything” (Rom. 12:17; 13:8). They are careful to live within their income and not to order an article

unless they can pay for it. It is because so many hypocrites under the cloak of a Christian profession have been so dishonest in financial matters and so unscrupulous in trade, that reproach has so often been brought upon the churches. Yet, in certain exceptional cases, even the most thrifty and upright may run into debt. It was so here. The deceased husband of this widow was a man who “did fear the Lord” (verse 1), nevertheless he left his widow in such destitution that she was unable to meet the claims of her creditor. There has been considerable speculation by the commentators as to the cause of this unhappy situation, most of which this writer finds himself quite unable to approve. What then is his own explanation?

In seeking the answer to the above question three things need to be borne in mind. First, as we pointed out in our introduction to the life of Elijah series, the prophet was an abnormality, that is, there was no place for him, no need of him in the religious life of Israel during ordinary times—it was only in seasons of serious declension or apostasy that he appears on the scene. Thus, no stated maintenance was provided for *him*, as it was for the priests and levites under the law. Consequently the prophet was dependent upon the gifts of the pious or the productions of his own manual labours, and judging from the brief records of Scripture one gathers the impression that most of them enjoyed little more than the barest necessities of life. Second, for many years past Ahab and Jezebel had been in power, and not only were the pious persecuted but the prophets went in danger of their lives (1 Kings 18:4). Third, it seems likely to us that this particular prophet obtained his subsistence from the oil obtained from an olive grove, and that probably there had been a failure of the crop during the past year or two—note how readily the widow obtained from her “neighbours” not a few “empty vessels.”

“And Elisha said unto her, what shall I do for thee?” Possibly the prophet was himself momentarily non-plussed, conscious of his own helplessness. Possibly his question was designed to emphasise the gravity of the situation: it is beyond *my* power to

extricate you. More likely it was to make her look above him: I too am only human. Or again it may have been to test her: are you willing to follow my instructions? Instead of waiting for her reply, the prophet at once proceeded to ask a second question: “Tell me, what hast thou in the house?” (verse 2). Perhaps this was intended to press upon the widow the seriousness of her problem, for the prophet must have known that she possessed little or nothing, or why should she have sought unto him? Or, in the light of her answer, its force may have been an admonition not to despise small mercies. Her “not anything save a pot of oil” reminds of Andrew’s “but what are they among so many” (John 6:9). Ah, do not we often reason similarly!

Fourth, its *test*. “Then he said, Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels, borrow not a few” (verse 3). It was a test both of her faith and her obedience. To carnal reason it would appear that the prophet was only mocking her, for of what possible service could a lot of empty vessels be to her? But if her trust was in the Lord then she would be willing to submit herself unto and comply with His word through His servant. And are not His thoughts and ways ever the opposite of ours? Was it not so when He overthrew the Midianites? What a word was that unto Gideon: “The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judges 7:2). And in consequence, his army was reduced from over twenty-two thousand to a mere three hundred (verses 3-7); and when that little company went forth it was with trumpets and “empty pitchers” and lamps inside the pitchers in their hands (verse 16)! Ah, my reader, we have to come before the Lord as “empty vessels”—emptied of our self-sufficiency—if we are to experience His wondering working power.

Fifth, its *requirement*. “And when thou art come in thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full” (verse 4). This was to avoid ostentation. Her neighbours

were not in the secret, nor should they be permitted to witness the Lord's gracious dealings with her. It reminds us of Christ's raising of the daughter of Jairus: when they arrived at the house it was filled with a sceptical and scoffing company, and the Saviour "put them all out" (Mark 5:40) ere He went in and performed the miracle. The same principle obtains to-day in connection with the operations of Divine grace: the world is totally ignorant of this mystery—God's filling of empty vessels: "the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him" (John 14:17). Yes, she must shut the door "that in retirement she and her sons might the more leisurely ponder and adore the goodness of the Lord" (Thomas Scott).

Sixth, its *means*. This was the "pot of oil" which appeared to be so utterly inadequate to meet the demands of the widow's creditor. It *was* so in itself, but under the blessing of God it proved amply sufficient. The "five barley loaves and the two small fishes" (John 6:9) seemed quite useless for feeding a vast multitude with, but in the hands of the Lord they furnished "as much as they would," and even "when they were filled" there remained a surplus of twelve baskets full. Ah, it is the little things which God is pleased to use. A pebble from the brook slung by faith is sufficient to overthrow the Philistine giant. A "little cloud" was enough to produce "a great rain" (1 Kings 18:44, 45). A "little maid" was used as a missionary in Syria (2 Kings 5:2). A "little child" was employed by Christ to teach His disciples humility (Matt. 18:2). A "little strength" supplied by the Spirit enables us to "keep Christ's Word and not deny His name" (Rev. 3:8). O to be "little" in our own sight (1 Sam. 15:17). It is blessed to see this widow did not despise the means, but promptly obeyed the prophet's instructions, her faith laying hold of the clearly-implied promise in the "*all* those vessels" (verse 4).

Seventh, its *significance*. In this miracle we have a most blessed, striking and remarkable typical picture of the grand truth of *redemption*, a subject which is we fear rather hazy in the

minds even of many Christians. The Gospel is preached so superficially to-day, its varied glories are so lost in generalizations, that few have more than the vaguest idea of its component parts. Redemption is now commonly confused with atonement: the two are quite distinct, one being an effect of the other. The sacrifice which Christ offered unto Divine holiness and justice was “that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18)—a comprehensive expression covering the whole of our salvation both in the removal of all hindrances and in the bestowal of all requisites. In order to bring us to God it was necessary that all enmity between them should be removed—that is *reconciliation*; that the guilt of their transgression should be cancelled—that is *remission* of sins; that they should be delivered from all bondage—that is *redemption*; that they should be made, both experimentally and legally, *righteous*—that is regeneration and justification.

Redemption, then, is one of the grand effects or results of the Atonement, the satisfaction which Christ rendered unto the Law. God’s elect and debtors to the Law, for they have broken it; and they are prisoners to His justice, for they are “by nature the children of wrath even as others” (Eph. 2:3). And our deliverance (“or salvation”) is not a mere manumission [freeing] without price, that is, a simple discharge by an act of clemency, without an adequate compensation being made. No, while it is true our redemption is of grace and effected by sovereign power, yet it is so because a ransom is offered, a price paid, in every way equivalent to the discharge secured. In the words “I will *ransom* them from the power of the grave, I will *redeem* them from death” (Hosea 13:14) we are taught that the latter is the consequence of the former. Ransom is the paying of the price required, redemption is the setting free of those ransomed, and this deliverance is by the exercise of Divine power. “Not accepting deliverance” (Heb. 11:35): the Greek word “deliverance” here is commonly rendered “redemption”—they refused to accept it from the afflictions on the dishonourable terms (apostasy) demanded by their persecutors.

Redemption necessarily presupposes *previous possession*. It denotes the restoration of something which has been lost, and that, by the paying of a price. Hence we find Christ saying by the Spirit of prophecy “I *restored* that which I took not away” (Psa. 69:4)! This was strikingly illustrated in the history of Israel, who on the farther shores of the Red Sea sang, “Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth Thy people which Thou hast redeemed” (Exod. 15:13). First in the book of Genesis, we see the descendants of Abraham sojourning in the land of Canaan. Later, we see the chosen race in cruel servitude, in bondage to the Egyptians, groaning amid the brick-kilns, under the whip of the taskmasters. Then a ransom was provided in the blood of the pascal lamb following which, the Lord by His mighty hand brought them out of serfdom and brought them into the promised inheritance. That is a complete picture of redemption.

There are many who perceive that Christians were a people in bondage, lost to God, but recovered and restored to Him; yet who fail to perceive they belonged to the Lord *before* Christ freed them. The elect belonged to Christ long before He shed His blood to ransom them, for they were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and made over to Him as the Father’s love-gift (John 17:9). But they too fell and died in Adam, and therefore did He come to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ “purchased the church of God” with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and therefore does the Father say to Him “by the blood of Thy covenant I have sent forth *Thy* prisoners out of the pit where is no water” (Zech. 9:11)—He has a legal right to them. There is no unavailing redemption: all whom Christ purchased or ransomed shall be redeemed, that is, delivered from captivity, set free from sin. Judicially they are so now, experimentally too in part (John 8:36), but perfectly so only when glorified—hence the future aspect in Luke 21:28; Romans 8:23.

Now observe how all the leading features of redemption are typically brought out in 2 Kings 4.

1. The object of it is a widow. She had not always been thus. Formerly she had been married to one who “feared the Lord,” but death had severed that happy bond and left her desolate and destitute—apt figure of God’s elect, originally in union with Him, and then through the fall “alienated” from Him (Eph. 4:18).

2. Her creditor was enforcing his demands, had actually come to seize her sons “to be bondmen.” The Hebrew word rendered “creditor” in 2 Kings 4:1 signifies “one who exacteth” what is justly due to him, and is so translated in Job 11:6. It looks back to “And if thy brother that dwelleth with thee be waxen poor and be *sold* unto thee, thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bond-servant, but as a hired servant, as a sojourner, he shall be with thee and shall *serve* thee unto the year of jubilee” (Lev. 25:39, 40). Our Lord had reference to this practice in His parable of Matthew 18:23-25. Thus the “creditor” of 2 Kings 4:1 who showed no mercy to the poor widow is a figure of the stern and unrelenting Law.

3. As the widow was quite unable to pay her creditor, so we are utterly incompetent to satisfy the demands of the Law or effect our own redemption.

4. She, like us, was shut up to the mere favour of God: “being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24) and that is exactly what we should expect to find in this miracle, for five is the number of grace: see Gen. 43:34; 45:22; Exod. 13:18 margin, 1 Cor. 14:19, etc. Hence too the means used, the “oil” multiplied—figure of the grace of God (Psa. 23:5; Isa. 61:3) superabounding.

5. Yet it was a grace that wrought “through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21), for it obtained the freedom of the widow’s sons by meeting the full due of her creditor.

6. Both aspects of redemption are seen here: by price—“sell the oil and pay thy debt” (verse 2); and by power—the miraculous supply of oil.

7. Nor was it a general and promiscuous redemption, but a definite and particular one: for a “widow”—special object of God’s notice (Deut. 24:19; Psa. 68:5; James 1:27)—and not her

neighbours. Christ purchased “the Church of God” (Acts 20:28) and not a mere abstraction of “freewillism.”

7. The Sixth Miracle

First, we shall take notice of *its connection*. Our present narrative opens with the word “And” which intimates that the incident described here is closely related to what was before us in our last, though we must not conclude that this by any means exhausts its force. Sometimes the Spirit of God has placed two things in juxtaposition for the purpose of comparison, that we may observe the resemblances between them; at other times, it is with the object of pointing a contrast, that we may consider the points of dissimilarity. Here it is the latter: note the following antitheses. In the former case the woman’s place of residence is not given (verse 1), but here it is (verse 8). The one was a widow (verse 1), this woman’s husband was alive (verse 9). The former was financially destitute, this one was a woman of means. The one sought out Elisha, the prophet approached the other. Elisha provided for the former, this one ministered unto him. The widow had “two sons,” whereas the married woman was childless. The one was put to a severe test (verses 3, 4), the other was not.

Second, a word on *its location*. The place where this miracle was wrought cannot be without significance, for there is nothing meaningless in Holy Writ, though in this instance we confess to having little or no light. The one who was the beneficiary of this miracle resided at Shunem, which appears to mean “uneven.” This place is mentioned only twice elsewhere in the Old Testament. First, in Joshua 19:18 from which we learn that it was situated in the territory allotted to the tribe of Issachar. Second, in 1 Samuel 28:4, where we are told it was the place that the Philistines gathered themselves together and pitched in battle array against Israel, on which occasion Saul was so terrified that, after inquiring in vain of the Lord, he sought unto the witch of Endor. Matthew Henry tells us that “Shunem lay in the road between Samaria and Carmel, a road which Elisha was

accustomed to travel, as we gather from 2:25.” It seems to have been a farming district, and in this pastoral setting a lovely domestic scene is laid.

Third, its beneficiary. “And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman” (2 Kings 4:8). The Hebrew word (“gadol”) is used in very varied connections. In Genesis 1:16, 21 and many other passages it refers to material or physical greatness. In Exodus 32:21, “great sin,” it has a moral force. In 2 Kings 5:1, Job 1:3, Proverbs 25:6 it is associated with social eminence. In Psalm 48:1 and numerous other places it is predicated of the Lord Himself. This woman was one of substance or wealth, as is intimated by the servants her husband had and their building and furnishing a room for the prophet. God has “His own” even among the rich and noble. This woman was also “great” spiritually. She was great in hospitality, in discernment—perceiving that Elisha was “a holy man of God,” in meekness—by owning her husband’s headship, in thoughtfulness for others—the care she took in providing for the prophet’s comfort, in contentedness (verse 13), in wisdom—realising Elisha would desire retirement and quietness; and, as we shall see, in faith—confidently counting upon God to show Himself strong on her behalf and work a further miracle.

“And it fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread.” Elisha seems to have resided at or near mount Carmel (2:25; 4:25): but went his circuit through the land to visit the seminaries of the prophets and to instruct the people, which probably was his stated employment when not sent on some special service. “At Shunem there lived a woman of wealth and piety, who invited him to come to her house, and with some difficulty prevailed” (Thomas Scott). Several practical points are suggested by this. The minister of the Gospel should not be forward in pressing himself upon people, but should wait until he is invited to partake of their hospitality, least of all should he deliberately court the intimacy of the “great,” except it be with the object of doing them good. “Mind not high things, but condescend to men

of low estate” (Rom. 12:16) is one of the rules God has given His people to walk by, and His servant should set them an example in the matter.

The Lord’s servants, like those to whom they minister, have their ups and downs, not only in their inward experience but also in external circumstances. Yes, they have their “ups” as well as their “downs.” They are not required to spend all their days in caves or sojourning by brooks. If there are those who oppose, God also raises up others to befriend them. Was it not thus with our blessed Lord when He tabernacled here? Though for the most part He “had not where to lay His head,” yet there were many women who “ministered unto Him of their substance” (Luke 8:2, 3), and the home at Bethany welcomed Him. So with the apostle Paul: though made as the offscouring of all things to the Jewish nation, yet the saints loved and esteemed him highly for his work’s sake. If he was cast into prison, yet he also makes mention of “Gaius mine host” (Rom. 16:23). It has ever been thus. The experience of Elisha was no exception, as the present writer can testify, for in his extensive journeyings the Lord opened the hearts and homes of many of His people unto him.

“Given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:13) is required of the saints, and of God’s servants too (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), and that “without grudging” (1 Peter 4:9), and this held good equally under the Old Testament era. It is to be noted that this woman took the initiative, for she did not wait until asked by Elisha or one of his friends. From the words “as often as he passed by” we gather that she was on the look-out for him. She sought occasion to do good and bought up her opportunities. Nor was her hospitality any formal thing, but earnest and warm-hearted. Hence it may strike us as all the more strange that the prophet demurred and that she had to constrain him to enter her home. This intimates that the servant of God should not readily respond to every invitation received, especially from the wealthy: “seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not” (Jer. 45:5) is to regulate his conduct. Elisha responded to her importunity

and after becoming better acquainted with her, never failed to partake of her kindness whenever he passed that way.

“And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither” (verses 9, 10). Herein we have manifest several other features of her moral greatness. Apparently she was the owner of this property, for her husband is not termed a “great man,” yet we find her conferring with him and seeking his permission. Thereby she took her proper place and left her sisters an admirable example. The husband is “the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church,” and therefore the command is “wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22, 23). Instead of taking matters into her own hands and acting independently, this “great woman” sought her husband’s consent and cooperation. How much domestic strife would be avoided if there was more of this mutual conferring.

This great woman was endowed with spiritual discernment, for she perceived that Elisha was a holy man of God. The two things are not to be separated: it is those who walk in subjection to the revealed will of God who are granted spiritual perception: “he that is spiritual discerneth all things” (1 Cor. 2:15) and the spiritual person is the one who is regulated by the precepts of Holy Writ, who is humble and meek and takes the place which the Lord has appointed. “If therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matt. 6:22): it is acting in self-will which beclouds the vision. “I understand more than the ancients,” said David. And why so? “Because I keep Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:100). It is when we forsake the path of obedience that our judgment is clouded and our perception dimmed.

While admiring the virtues and graces of this woman, we must not overlook the tribute she paid unto Elisha. Observe how she refers to him. Not as a “charming” or “nice man:” how

incongruous such an appellation for a servant of God! No, it was not any such carnal or sentimental term she employed. Nor did she allude to him as a “learned man,” for scholarship and spirituality by no means always go together. Rather as “a *holy* man of God” did she designate the prophet. What a description! what a searching word for every minister of the Gospel to take to heart. It is “holy men of God” who are used by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). And how did she perceive the prophet’s holiness? Perhaps by finding him at prayer, or reading the Scriptures. Certainly from the heavenliness of his conversation and general demeanour. Ah, my reader, the servant of God should need no distinctive manner of dress in order for people to identify him: his walk, his speech, his deportment ought to be sufficient.

Returning to the “great woman” let us next take note of her *constancy*. The inviting of Elisha into her home was actuated by no fleeting mood of kindness, which came suddenly upon her and as suddenly disappeared, but rather was a steady and permanent thing. Some are mere creatures of impulse. But the conduct of those is stable who act on principle. How often a church is elated when a minister is installed, and its members cannot do too much to express their appreciation for him; but how soon such enthusiasm often cools off. The best are spasmodic if not fickle, and need to bear in mind the injunction “let us not be weary in well doing” (Gal. 6:9). It is blessed to see this woman did not tire of ministering to God’s servant but continued to provide for his need and comfort, and at considerable trouble and expense.

Fourth, we turn now to *the occasion* of this miracle. “And it fell on a day that he came thither and turned into the chamber and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him” (verses 12, 13). Elisha did not complacently accept the loving hospitality which had been shown him as a matter of course, as though it were something which was due him by virtue of his office. No, he was truly grateful and anxious to show his appreciation. In this he differed from some ministers

we have met, who appeared to think they were fully entitled to such kindness and deference. While resting from his journey, instead of congratulating himself on his “good fortune,” he thought upon his benefactress and wondered how best he could make some return. But how? She was in no financial need: apparently she lacked none of the good things of this life—what then should be done for her? He was at a loss to know: but instead of dismissing the thought, he decided to interrogate her directly.

Fifth, its peculiarity. “And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care, what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people” (verse 13). This miracle differed from most of those we have previously considered in that it was *unsought*; proposed by the prophet himself. He suggested that royal honours might be bestowed on herself or husband if she so desired. “Elisha had no doubt acquired considerable influence with Jehoram and his captains by the signal deliverance and victory obtained for him (3:4-27), and though he would ask nothing for himself, he was willing to show his gratitude on behalf of his kind hostess by interposing on her behalf, if she had any petition to present” (Thomas Scott). Yet we feel that the prophet knew her too well to imagine her head was set upon such trifles as earthly dignities, and that he gave her this opportunity to declare herself more plainly.

“And she answered, I dwell among mine own people” (verse 13). It looks as though the prophet’s offer to speak unto the king for her, intimated that positions of honour could be procured for her and her husband in the royal household. Her reply seems to show this, for it signified, I am quite satisfied with the portion God has given me: I desire no change or improvement in it. How very rare is such *contentment*! She was indeed a “great woman.” Alas that today there are so few like her. As Matthew Henry points out “It would be well with many, if they did but know when they are well off.” But they do not. A roving spirit takes

possession of them, and they suppose they can improve their lot by moving from one place to another, only to find as the old adage says, “A rolling stone gathers no moss.” “The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest” (Isa. 57:20), but it should be far otherwise with the people of God. It is much to be thankful for when we can contentedly say, “I dwell among mine own people.”

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

Seventh, its meaning. This may be gathered from the miracle preceding. There we had before us a typical picture of redemption, a setting free from the exactions of the Law, a deliverance from bondage. What then is the sequel of this? Surely that which we find in the lives of the redeemed, namely, their bringing forth *fruit* unto God. This order of cause and effect is taught us in “being made free from sin...ye have your fruit unto holiness” (Rom. 6:22 and compare with 1 Cor. 6:20). But it is not the products of the old nature transformed, for the “flesh” remains the same unto the end, bringing forth after its own evil

kind. No, it is altogether supernatural, the “fruit of the spirit,” the manifestation of the graces of the new nature communicated by God at the new birth. Accordingly we have here the fruit of the womb, yet not by the ordinary workings of nature, but, as in the case of John the Baptist (Luke 1:7, 57), that which transcends nature, which issues only from the wonder-working power of God.

It is to be carefully noted in this connection that the beneficiary of our miracle is designated a “great woman.” As we have pointed out in a previous paragraph, this appellation denotes, more immediately, that she was one upon whom Divine providence had smiled, furnishing her liberally with the things of this life. But she was also morally and spiritually “great.” In both respects she was an appropriate figure of that aspect of salvation which is here before us. Redemption finds its object, like the widow of the foregoing miracle, in distress—poor, sued by the Law, unable to meet its demands. But redemption does not leave its beneficiaries thus. No, God deals with them according to “the riches of His grace” and they can now say “He hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father” (Rev. 1:6). The righteousness of Christ is imputed to them, and they are “great” indeed in the eyes of God—“the excellent, in whom is all My delight” (Psa. 16:3) is how He speaks of them. Such are the ones in whom and by whom the fruits of redemption are brought forth.

Everything recorded of this woman indicates that she was one of the Lord’s redeemed. She honoured and ministered unto one of His servants, in a day when they were far from being popular. Moreover, Elisha accepted her hospitality, which he surely had not done unless he discerned in her the marks of grace. The very fact that at first she had to “constrain” him to partake of her kindness—the margin renders it “laid hold of him”—indicates he would not readily receive favours from anybody and everybody. But having satisfied himself of her spirituality, “as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.” Let it be remarked that that expression to “eat bread” means far more to an Oriental

than to us. It signifies an act of communion, denoting there is a bond of fellowship between those who eat a meal together. Thus by such intimacy of communion with the prophet this woman gave further evidence of being one of God's redeemed.

As the procuring of our redemption required miracles (the Divine incarnation, the death of the God-man, His resurrection), so the application of it unto its beneficiaries cannot be without supernatural operations, both before and after. Redemption is received by faith, but before saving faith can be exercised the soul must be quickened, for one who is dead unto God cannot move toward Him. The same is true of our conversion, which is a right about-face, the soul turning from the world unto God, which is morally impossible until a miracle of grace has been wrought upon us: "turn Thou me, and I shall be turned" (Jer. 31:18). Such a miracle as regeneration and conversion, whereby the soul enters into the redemption purchased by Christ, is necessarily followed by one which shows forth the miraculous *fruits* of redemption. Such is the case here, as we see in the child bestowed upon the great woman. Remarkably enough that gift came to her unsought and unexpected. And is it not thus in the experience of the Christian? When he came to Christ as a sin-burdened soul, redemption was all that he thought about: there was no asking for or anticipation of subsequent fruit.

The second of seven booklets.

