2 Kings - Commentaries by Henri L. Rossier

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 8:16-29: Jehoram, King of Judah, and His Son, Ahaziah

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The beginning of this passage presents a small chronological difficulty which the rationalists have not failed to exploit against the authority of the biblical account (cf. 2 Kings 3.). Here we are told that Jehoram of Judah began to reign over Judah during the lifetime of his father, in the fifth year of Jehoram of Israel. Now in 2 Kings 1, Jehoram of Israel succeeds his brother Ahaziah in the second year of Jehoram of Judah. This can be explained very simply by the fact that Jehoshaphat of Judah had conferred the regency upon his son Jehoram, and at the end of seven years, while Jehoshaphat was still alive, he fully conferred the kingdom upon him, perhaps in view of difficulties he might have had with his brothers (2 Chron. 21:1-4). The first year of the regency of Jehoram of Judah corresponds to the time when his father Jehoshaphat went up with Ahab, king of Israel, to retake Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians. These so-called contradictions are never such to the simple Christian who has received these accounts from the hand of God. It is not always possible for him to answer the objections for he is a limited and ignorant creature, but in waiting upon the Lord he will sooner or later receive the answer — when God judges this to be appropriate. To him it remains an established fact that God has spoken, and that He will be found true when He speaks, whereas every man will be found a liar.

The short history of King Jehoram and King Ahaziah of Judah, woven in here in order to link together the order of events, nevertheless presents serious and instructive features. The daughter of Ahab (the husband of Jezebel) was the wife of Jehoram of Judah. Ahaziah, Jehoram's son, was also "the son-in-law of the house of Ahab." These profane alliances led the one and the other into the ways of the kings of Israel. The same holds true at all times. A Christian yoked together with a child of the world necessarily loses his testimony and even the appearance of his Christianity, for the world is never improved by the Christian's alliance with it. Rather, to the contrary, it is bad company that corrupts good manners. True, the Lord, faithful to the promises made to David, does not destroy Jehoram of Judah, but this latter does not find in the world that rest which his corrupted religion cannot give him and which the discipline and chastening of God do not leave him. Edom, which until now had a governor dependent upon the throne of Judah, revolts and chooses a king for itself. The consequence is war. Jehoram has the advantage, but the revolt is not crushed, and this unsubdued enemy continues on "unto this day." At the same time, Libnah revolted. Libnah was a city of Judah, a priestly city belonging to the sons of Aaron (Josh. 21:13; 1 Chron. 6:57). What a shame for Jehoram! In his own kingdom one of the morally most important cities detached itself from him. The reason is given in 2 Chronicles 21:10-11. The sons of Aaron could not associate themselves with one who "had forsaken Jehovah the God of his fathers," and who urged Judah into this path by his high places and fornications. Some testimony was then still left in Judah, and this testimony was to Jehoram's shame. The Lord separated from him a part of the priesthood, that which alone could yet maintain Jehoram's relationship with Himself. When we come to our study in Chronicles, we will consider the judgment of this impious king in greater detail.

Ahaziah the son of Jehoram of Judah, began to reign in the twelfth year of Jehoram of Israel (2 Kings 8:25). His mother was Athaliah, daughter of Omri, a common way of speaking among the Jews; for she was in fact the granddaughter of the head of this dynasty, Omri, the daughter of Ahab, and the wife of Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 8:18). She was thus the sister of Jehoram of Israel. Ahaziah himself was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab. As Jehosphat his grandfather had made an alliance with Ahab in order to retake Ramoth Gilead, which had fallen under the power of the king of Syria, so Ahaziah the son of Jehoram of Judah made an alliance with Jehoram of Israel, son of Ahab, to make war against Hazael, the king of Syria, at Ramoth-Gilead, which was a city of refuge (Deut. 4:43). This was done according to the advice of his counselors of the house of Ahab and of Athaliah his mother (2 Chron. 22:4-5). This alliance with the kings of Israel was an abomination in the eyes of the Lord. Jehoram of Israel suffered the same fate at Ramoth as Ahab, who had earlier been wounded by the Syrians at the same place (1 Kings 22:34). He retired to Jizreel to be healed of his wounds. It was there that his ally Ahaziah, king of Judah, came to him to express his sympathy. By the world's standards this was an act of simple courtesy, but after having opposed Hazael, God's rod against Israel, Ahaziah subjects himself to the blows of Jehu, the second of God's rods against his ally. These judgments upon Israel neither move him nor restrain him in his pathway, and lo, these judgments will reach his very own person!

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 8:7-15: Ben-Hadad and Hazael

It may seem strange to more than one reader that Elijah had not followed the positive injunction of the Lord at Horeb (1 Kings 19:15-17), to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. The fact was that Elijah met Elisha first, whom the Lord brought onto his path. He cast his prophet's mantle upon him for the first time, renouncing, so to say, his commission, in order to transfer it to Elisha, although his own prophetic career was not yet finished. From the moment Elisha was thus designated as his successor, these two other deeds became incumbent upon him. The anointing with which Elisha was sealed as prophet was the anointing of the Holy Spirit, in 2 Kings 2. This anointing with the double portion of Elijah's spirit could not be conferred upon him except through Elijah's being gone up to heaven. Had he been anointed when Elijah met him for the first time, he would have been consecrated a prophet of judgment like his master, but, as we have seen throughout his history except in the exceptional case of the children at Bethel, Elisha is a prophet of grace and of deliverance for the remnant and even for the nations.

It was incumbent upon Elisha according to his commission to anoint Hazael and Jehu, who were to exercise judgment, but in the passage which recounts Elisha's meeting with Hazael, the anointing of this latter is passed over in silence. As a matter of fact, through the prophetic word the rod of God was placed into Hazael's hands, but the anointing could not be mentioned when the man of God, come in grace, was weeping bitterly over the evil that Hazael would do to the children of his people.

The anointing of Jehu (2 Kings 9) corresponds more to that which we might expect of the command given by the Lord to Elijah, but Elisha renounces acting personally and has his mission accomplished by one of the sons of the prophets. Is not this a striking proof of the fact that

the character of Elisha is one of grace and not of judgment. The word of God must be fulfilled, but not to the detriment of the character of grace which the prophet bore.

It would be the same for the Prophet above all prophets, our Lord Jesus Christ. He who came to be baptized of John the Baptist must baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. After having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit by virtue of the perfection of His humanity, He baptizes with the Holy Spirit by virtue of His ascension into heaven. This anointing characterizes the day in which we live, and that of fire, that is to say of judgment, has not yet taken place. The Lord has not yet sent the rod of His anger against Israel and against the world. He will do this later, but presently He neither wishes nor can He lose His character of Savior come in grace.

If this is so, what does this word spoken to Elijah signify: “Him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay”?

We must anticipate the account in 2 Kings 13 to see this realized. The story reported to us is all the more striking in that we see Elisha come to the very end of his career: “And Elisha fell sick of his sickness in which he died.” It is just at this moment that Joash, king of Israel, comes to see him. At its own time and place we shall again consider this account in detail, but it is there that the prophet confers to Joash on behalf of the Lord, judgment upon that which has escaped Jehu’s sword, that is to say, upon Hazael and his successors. Jehu had been incapable of defending the integral territory of Israel against Syria, but Elisha intervenes, and it is Israel that defeats its conquerors. Nevertheless, even on this occasion, the prophet, all the while he is pronouncing judgment, does not lose his character of grace. Prophetically he exercises judgment himself, for he lays his hand on the king’s hands to draw the bow and beat the Syrians, but in view of delivering Israel.

Let us again take up the course of our account. Ben-Hadad1, King of Syria, was sick. “And it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. And the king said to Hazael, Take a present in thy hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of Jehovah by him, saying, Shall I recover from this disease?” (2 Kings 8:7-8). These were exactly the same words that Ahaziah, king of Israel, had pronounced when he sent his messenger to consult Baalzebub (2 Kings 1:2). This denotes two things. The first is that all men, whether idolaters, or whether knowing the true God, alike have a constant preoccupation with death. Having no other hope than that of visible things, they are profoundly tried by the thought that they may be obliged to leave these, to say nothing of the uncertainty as to the future that fills their spirit. The second is that the religious resources so-called that they have at hand are unable to satisfy. A king of Israel with some knowledge of the true God, however mixed up it may have been with superstition and idolatry, found nothing solid in this superficial knowledge, preferring to address himself to a demon in order to receive a reply that would satisfy him. A sun-worshipper, receiving no answer from his god, preferred to address himself to the man of God who was there in the way before him. He wants to consult the Lord through him, not to find an answer for the needs of his conscience, but only to know if his life will be prolonged. The case of the king of Israel is even more serious than that of Ben-Hadad, for it is that of an apostate, but the king of Syria is not motivated by a sense of real need in turning to the man of God. Could not he who had been the instrument for Naaman’s healing heal an ordinary illness, and had he not already displayed divine power in deliverance? So very little does Ben-Hadad know the prophet who had refused Naaman’s gifts, that he sends him a royal present by Hazael with the intention of ingratiating himself with him.

Hazael comes before the man of God and repeats the king’s words. But in the depths of his being something is already stirring, hidden desire, coveting, a plan, perhaps vague, but which waits only to be confirmed. Elisha has read his heart. His secret thoughts do not escape the God’s eye. Elisha’s answer would be ambiguous to anyone else. To Hazael it has a meaning that hastens his decision. His lust brings forth sin. Elisha “settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed.” Under this intense gaze that examined the recesses of his conscience, Hazael, laid bare, felt ill at ease. He will certainly recover! This was precisely what Hazael feared. If the king were healed, what would become of his own plans and secret desires? “But Jehovah has shown me that he shall certainly die.” Yes indeed, he tells himself, my only chance is to get rid of my master; and since God knows it and does not hinder me, that justifies me. One feels it. This man must have reasoned thus, already a murderer in his thoughts. Searched to the depths of his heart, ashamed under God’s gaze, for all that he does not abandon his perverted will, but justifies it by the fact that God knows about it.

After these words Elisha weeps, thinking about the evil that Hazael will do to his people. Shall we say that in revealing these facts to Hazael, he is inciting him to accomplish this? Hazael betrays himself a little in the presence of the prophet who tells him all the truth: “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” One senses more than one is able to prove, in the presence of this hypocritical and closed nature, that the destruction of Israel is an important thing to Hazael. It is easy for him to give himself the role of a dog when it is a matter of doing this, but nonetheless he has the ambition to accomplish it. Lastly, Elisha reveals to him the reason why he has been sent to Damascus. “Jehovah has shown me that thou wilt be king over Syria.” The elements that comprise this darkened soul are now complete. All the obscure desires and ambitions of his spirit are settled. The king may recover, but he will die. I will be king in his stead and will torment Israel. From the thought to its execution there is but a step. Thus God prepares the rod which will chasten His people, until the moment when He will break the rod itself.

Chapters 8:16-17:41 – Kings of Israel and of Judah.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 8:1-6: The Shunammite Again

Chapter 7 has just presented truths to us which may be applied in the gospel; the verses now before our eyes bring us, together with the Shunammite, back to the ground of the faithful in Israel. It is necessary that we use the types of Scripture soberly in order to avoid forcing their interpretation, but on the other hand, it must not be forgotten that we have here prophetic writings, which only in part are historical in bearing, revealing to us through types, principles as to the events in the end times.

Here we find again, as in this entire history, the character of grace of the prophet Elisha. As in 2 Kings 7, he, a true minister of the good news for all, announced the good news to all the people without respect of persons, so here he is occupied in grace with a faithful remnant, the Shunammite, to whom his heart was attached by so many bonds according to God. This upright woman had been the object of the special care of God who preserved her at a time when His judgment fell upon all the land. The prophet knew of the years of famine beforehand and had informed the Shunammite, just as he had known ahead of time the end of the famine at Samaria and had announced it to all the people, small and great. He communicates his secret to this soul, chosen by him, and whom together with her house he wanted to shelter. The

preceding chapter and this one mention two famines. The first, that at Samaria, was local and partial; it was a judgment of God, but the enemy served Him as instrument to produce it. The second which now occupies us, much more severe, was a direct judgment of God extending to all the land of Israel. These same facts are seen in the Revelation, where the judgments at first have a providential character, and then acquire an extreme intensity when they are applied directly by the Lord.

“Rise up,” says the prophet to the Shunammite, “and go, thou and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn.” This woman, whose joy was to dwell in the midst of her people, must abandon her goods and her inheritance and flee before imminent judgment, accepting the first shelter that might present itself. A complete cycle, a week of years, was assigned to her as a time of refuge among strangers. It was not a matter for her of remaining, like Abraham, in Canaan, in the midst of the famine, nor like Isaac of making a short sojourn in Philistia, for neither of these patriarchs was to go down to Egypt. No, she must sojourn where she could, the only condition being that it be not in Canaan. Judgment was to reach to all the land of Canaan, just as to all Egypt in the time of Joseph; only for Canaan now, there was no providential provision to remedy the evil. The Shunammite must remain outside the place of this tribulation which was to come upon all Israel. This is in figure the history of the faithful remnant at the time of the end, whereas the Church, in contrast to the remnant, will be kept from the hour of trial.

We may affirm that at that time the Shunammite was a widow. During her husband’s lifetime the prophet could never have said to her, “Thou and thy household.” She then had lost her protector; she is obliged to leave her goods, once considerable, and these pass into the hands of strangers. Fallen into want, she departs to be nourished by the Lord in whatever refuge she might be able to reach. But she takes with her her son whom the prophet had raised from the dead.

All these details prefigure the history of the remnant of Israel at the time of the end. They shall have experienced the power of resurrection before fleeing far from their land. They will be the true Israel according to the counsels of God, the woman of the Revelation who gives birth to a male child, and who flees to the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God where she is fed (Rev. 12). This people’s portion will be exactly like that of the Shunammite; then they will be brought back, like her, into their own portion at the end of days when God’s judgments upon the land of Israel shall have come to an end.

It is within these parameters that we may lay hold of the typical meaning of our account. That which is not a part of the type is that the day comes when Jehoram takes an interest in the miracles of Elisha. His conscience is in no way engaged. He had proven this above measure throughout all his career, but one may be very far from God while yet showing an interest in Him — both in Him personally, and in His work. This is even a prominent characteristic of the last times. Never have people inquired into miracles and into the Word of God more than in our days. These things are of great interest even to hearts where they are not mingled with faith. We may therefore understand that the king desired to inform himself about the main facts concerning the prophet. Gehazi, the unfaithful servant, to whom Naaman’s leprosy was attached forever, this Gehazi was now at the king’s court. A leper, under God’s judgment, has the ear of the unbelieving monarch! Formerly, sharing the prophet’s poverty, he had been his blessed intermediary to the faithful, and the intermediary of these faithful in Israel to Elisha. He is still able to recount to the world, whose servant he had become, miracles of the past, being well enough instructed in these things to present them truthfully, but he can go no further.

A similar position can easily be found today in Christendom. People who, like Gehazi, prefer the advantages that the world offers them, may be accredited to expound the things of God. They speak the truth, but without the power to apply it to consciences; their own conscience being bad, they cannot reach the consciences of others. There were, no doubt, subjects that a Gehazi would avoid treating of, subjects necessarily prohibited him. How could he speak of Naaman’s healing when he himself was covered with leprosy? and what indiscrete questions might his account have awakened in the king’s mind? Nevertheless, God uses all — the king’s curiosity, the presence of Gehazi at his court—to accomplish His plans of grace toward His beloved ones. The woman appears with her son at the very moment they are speaking of her. Who is it who brings her to this point? God Himself, for she must receive at the mouth of an eyewitness the testimony of her identity. Gehazi’s role finishes there. The king has no more need of him; “And the king asked the woman, and she told him” (2 Kings 8:6). God, who had brought her there, also touches the king’s heart. He restores everything to her who had lost everything.

With her the prophetic history ends. Israel’s judgment being exhausted, she and her house fully enter into their portion at the end of days. The king says, “Restore all that was hers, and all the revenue of the land since the day that she left the country even until now” “Even until now!” The days of tribulation are past for the faithful remnant who again find all the blessings of which they had been deprived during their exodus among the nations, along with all the lost interest, with nothing wanting.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 6:24 - 7:20: The Siege of Samaria

The enemy of God’s people never considers himself beaten. If the Syrian bands, convicted of their wrong-doing by the power of the God of Israel, cease making incursions into the land, Ben-Hadad in contrast gathers all his army to besiege Samaria, and this siege brings a great famine in its wake. Such are the consequences of Israel’s sin. The enemy, without knowing it, was sent by God in judgment against this people. But at the same time he is a type of the prince of death, from whom sinful man cannot escape. The famine is a consequence of the presence of the enemy, who certainly would never dream of feeding those whom he is oppressing. It is like another form of death pressing down upon this guilty people. In all this chapter, then, it is death — that terrible, inevitable fate deserved by sinful men — that reigns. But God has resources even against death. He has the prophet to proclaim this, and if He announces that He will bring the famine to an end, we shall see that this is brought about by doing away with the enemy, the instrument of His judgment. This introduces us into the domain of grace and of the gospel.

After this brief summary, let us examine in detail the contents of this interesting chapter.

Samaria was the capital and center of a religious world which still maintained the appearance of upholding the worship of the Lord, but which had corrupted it. We find this same world in our day in another form, and it is precisely on account of its religious pretensions that it is the object of the judgment of God. Every kind of sacrifice was tolerated at Samaria, and the famine, instead of causing the people and their king to reconsider, only manifested the terrible egoism of men’s hearts, who, in order to avoid dying of hunger, were sacrificing even their own

children instead of sacrificing themselves for them. If such things could be met with here, it was not because the external features of religion had been banished. The king even wore “sackcloth within upon his flesh” as a sign of mourning and of mortification, probably in hope of averting the danger, but without having his conscience touched and his heart changed. We see the same features taking place in Christendom when nations are smitten with public calamities.

The king was mortifying himself at the very moment when, full of hatred, he was seeking the life of the prophet of the Lord. “God do so, and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall remain on him this day!” he said (2 Kings 6:31). He who had had to say to the woman in distress, “If Jehovah do not help thee, whence should I help thee?” and who had rent his clothes before the horrible reality, with violence rejected the only man by whom a means of salvation was offered to him. How completely he had forgotten that the prophet had saved his life, “not once, not twice,” and that the Lord with limitless patience had been stretching forth a helping hand to him! All that was meaningless to him, for the only thing he would not admit—and that was exactly the most important thing—was that his sin had merited him death and judgment.

While these things were happening, the prophet was seated in his house, conversing peacefully with the elders; but, as “seer” he does not need for God to open his eyes to know the man’s intentions, or to realize the protection of God. Faithful to his oath, the king sent a messenger with the order to behead Elisha and, himself thirsty for vengeance, followed on the heels of this executor of His sentence. Before he had arrived, the prophet had seen him: “Do ye see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head?” The man, finding the door barred, could not accomplish his mission, and returned to his master. His plans foiled, the king renounced all trust in God: “Behold, this evil is of Jehovah: why should I wait for Jehovah any longer” (2 Kings 6:33). How many times man, in his state of revolt against God, reasons like Jehoram! Since God does not accord me what I desire, does not grant me the healing of one dear to me, does not bring me out of my material difficulties, I will do away with my obligations toward Him; He no longer exists for me. Ah! it is because like Jehoram, man’s heart does not wish to go to the root of his trouble — sin — and admit of its consequences. He does not want to repent; his pride refuses to cast itself upon the mercy of his judge, recognizing that He would be right to condemn him. The very appeals of God afford him fresh occasions to harden his heart.

How will God respond to so much wickedness and rebellion?—He has His grace announced by the very man whose life the king is seeking! “And Elisha said, Hear the word of Jehovah. Thus said Jehovah: Tomorrow about this time shall the measure of fine flour be at a shekel, and two measures of barley at a shekel, in the gate of Samaria” (2 Kings 7:1). Yes, God proclaimed that the following day He would give abundance and satisfy the poor who are hungering, when their very sin was the cause of the famine.

At the proclamation of this good news, one of the king’s aides mocks at God: “And the captain on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, Behold, if Jehovah should make windows in the heavens, would this thing be?”(2 Kings 7:2). The king did not believe this message, as is seen in what follows (2 Kings 7:12); he kept his hatred and rebellion intact in his heart. Nevertheless, his state was not as terrible as that of this mocker, when the good news of the grace of God was being proclaimed by His prophet. This latter says to the mocker: “Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.” God has immense longsuffering toward all sinners, but those that mock at Him and His Word are irremediably lost. At the end of this chapter we shall see that this man is the only one who, in a scene of deliverance and abundance, is cut off without sharing in any part of it.

This character of mockers is not as rare as one might think in our day. On the contrary, one may say that it characterizes this time in which we live of which Peter said: “Knowing this first, that there shall come at the close of the days mockers with mocking, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for from the time the fathers fell asleep all things remain thus from the beginning of the creation. For this is hidden from them through their own willfulness, that heavens were of old, and an earth, having its subsistence out of water and in water, by the word of God, through which waters the then world, deluged with water, perished. But the present heavens and the earth by his word are laid up in store, kept for fire unto a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet, 3:3-7). Let us not think that mockers are people who laugh at all piety. The unbelief of the past century and a half perhaps bore this character but the times have changed. Today’s mockers display their unbelief very seriously; they reason. For them, the Word of God is null and void, just as it was to Jehoram’s captain, and having no confidence in it, they trust in the stability of visible things, affirming that they will never come to an end. They are willingly ignorant — and that is the character of their mockery — of that which God has revealed to them in His Word. Their judgment is at the door.

And now God shows us that if man does not want Him, not only does He prepare, as in the preceding chapter, a great feast for His enemies, but He also prepares souls in view of the enjoyment of the feast.

“And there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate, and they said one to another, Why do we abide here until we die?” (2 Kings 7:3). These four men were unclean, for leprosy is the picture of sin which defiles a man. As such, they could not dwell with the people; their uncleanness placed them outside the gate of Samaria. They were, at the same time, as being completely leprous, excluded from the presence of God. Moreover, their condition was such that they could not ignore it; their sickness had this special feature of being well-known in Israel so that one could not hide it from God, nor from others, nor from oneself. Lastly, apart from the direct intervention of God outside of all human resources, it would inevitably lead to death.

Such was the personal state of these four men at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. That which made it the more terrible was that death surrounded them on every hand. “If we say, Let us enter into the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if abide here, we shall die. And now come, let us fall away to the camp of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they put us to death, we shall but die” (2 Kings 7:4). If they could have entered into the city, they would have found famine and death. To stay where they were was, without contradiction, death. To go to the enemy, representative of the judgment of God and wielding His sword, would this not still be death? But on that side, at least, there was a glimmer of hope. “If they save us alive, we shall live.” Their lives were dependent on the good will of their enemies. Perhaps they might not pronounce the death sentence?—

Do we not encounter the same circumstances today? The sinner, convicted of sin, cannot find help and deliverance from the world, even in its religious aspect. He meets only famine and death there. He cannot remain in his present state: it is death also. Before him is the threat of the judgment of God, and that is death — terrible and fatal death! But perhaps the Judge may have pity upon him — let him go then and cast himself down at the feet of the Judge! Let him go; he will learn that this God who is Judge is the God of love, the Savior God!

But our account does not go this far. These lepers do not rise up to meet God. They advance, uncertain and fearful, come “to the extremity of the camp of the Syrians; and, behold, there was no man there” What had happened? “The Lord had made the army of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, a noise of a great host,” and believing it to mean an attack by Israel’s allies, they had fled, abandoning their tents, asses, and horses, and the camp just as it was in order to save their lives.

The enemies themselves, the instruments of God’s judgment, had disappeared. Judgment had fallen upon them. There was no more judgment. How had this come to pass? The noise of a great army had been heard, something weak and insignificant in reality, in no wise comparable to the horses and chariots of fire at Dothan, but a most mighty thing because it came forth from the Lord Himself. He was in this noise, and that was enough to bring to naught all the power of Ben-Hadad.

For us, dear Christian readers, this noise has been heard at the cross, where the Son of God had to do with all the power of the prince of death and all his army. He vanquished him with his own weapons, but without any display of strength. In the death of one Man, crucified in weakness, was found God’s power to conquer, to bring to naught, to destroy this terrible enemy. Such was the death of Christ. Satan held men captive through the fear of death, and he was conquered by his own weapons, just as Goliath’s head once was severed by weak David with the giant’s very own sword.

Death was conquered, judgment annulled for these four lepers. Tremblingly they advanced toward these. In their place they found life, an abundance of goods, riches, and that with which to appease their hunger, all the spoil of the enemy, at no cost to themselves. They gather the fruit of victory which for us is that of the Lord. There is peace in the camp; no one opposes them; they are satisfied, discovering the treasure which they appropriate. But can they keep silence and keep them for themselves? No, the joy of salvation must be communicated; these men become messengers of good news to others. “This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace!”

That which characterizes this chapter is not a God who removes the defilement of sin; else these lepers, like Naaman, would not have remained such as they were; but a God who removes judgment in the person of the enemy and at the same time destroys the power of death, in order that poor, defiled creatures might live and enjoy the blessings of which they had been deprived.

Let us notice another characteristic of the gospel in this account. When Elisha made known that “tomorrow” the famine would cease, he said, “Hear” (2 Kings 7:1). This word is addressed to all without distinction, to the people, to the king, to the mocking lord, just as the sower’s seed falls indiscriminately upon every kind of ground. It is the same for the victory won. All are invited. Its results are offered without distinction to all. The people, the whole city, the king and his servants are all invited to this feast. The famous “tomorrow” announced by the prophet has been changed to “today.” All may come, feast, and enrich themselves, but are far from sharing the joy of the lepers. These lepers, in the presence of the marvels of their salvation cannot remain silent; they must speak: “We hold our peace!” We see how the king and his servants receive the announcement of deliverance (2 Kings 7:12-15). For them, this salvation which costs them nothing hides a snare. Let us at least, they say, do something on our part, and they engage to pursue the enemies. With two chariots and five run-down horses! All they can do is to delay the hour of deliverance in seeking to ascertain that which the lepers had laid hold of before their investigation. Their thought, in the presence of the good news, is pure unbelief. The king says: “Let me tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we are hungry, and they have gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city” (2 Kings 7:12) Then, at the proposal of one of his servants, he adds, “Go and see.” Sight, for them, replaces faith, and if they have part, like the others in the results of the deliverance, sight does not save them; it has never saved anyone. The captain is a frightening example of this. The prophet had said to him: “Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof” (2 Kings 7:19). “And so it happened to him; and the people trampled upon him in the gate, and he died.” For him, seeing was the immediate prelude of death.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 6:8-23: Dothan

The healing of the captain of his army does not seem to have produced any effect upon the conscience of the King of Syria. His troops had already made several incursions upon the territory of Israel (2 Kings 5:2; cf. 2 Kings 6:23), and the relations between the two Kings were so strained that in the affair of Naaman the king of Israel thought that the king of Syria was seeking a quarrel with him (2 Kings 5:7).

Now it was no longer a matter of skirmishes; war had truly broken out. The king of Syria sets up his camp here and there, seeking to draw Jehoram into a trap by the latter’s ignorance of his adversary’s movements; but he leaves God out of his calculations. Elisha comes to the aid of the king of Israel, warning him repeatedly of the location of the Syrian camp. Was God’s favor resting upon Jehoram? In no wise, for this king’s heart had not changed since the day Elisha had said to him, “What have I to do with thee? go to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother” (2 Kings 3:13). But God wanted to prove to the king of Syria and to his army that there was a prophet in Israel, that the Lord was there, as He had already shown once before in the healing of Naaman. In acting thus He showed His longsuffering toward Jehoram and his people, and if, in the presence of such favors, this wicked king would not turn to the Lord, he had no more excuse.

Seeing his plans continually foiled, the king of Syria suspected treachery in his court, for the idea of God and of His intervention — this comes out constantly in the course of these accounts — does not even occur to him. The world always thinks this way. It attributes all the events of life to second causes rather than seeing the hand of God in them. One of the king’s servants, more alert than his king to the true state of affairs, opens his eyes. Generally discernment and spiritual understanding diminish with a man’s elevation, and those that should have the most interest in knowing the truth are those who know it the least. “Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (2 Kings 6:12). What a troublesome, disturbing, yes, even frightening thought! What! an invisible Person is “acquainted with all my ways; For there is not yet a word on my tongue, but lo,” He knows it altogether (Psa. 139:3-4). When one’s heart is not honest, does not arrive at this conclusion, and does not cry, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? and whither flee from thy presence?” one tries to forget and rebels against God (Psa. 139:7). This is what happened to the king of Syria: “Go,” he said, “and see where he is, and I will send and fetch him!” He had but one thought: to get rid of the prophet and to obliterate this gaze which was observing his every movement; then he would feel himself delivered from this annoying witness who was hindering him from carrying out his will, from accomplishing his plans. So he uses his entire strength, his whole army, horses and chariots, to seize one single man! The world is always annoyed by the presence of God. In Gethsemane a company of soldiers, a crowd, and officers, all armed with swords and staves, gathered against Christ in order to send Him back to heaven, whence He had come — the Witness who was a burden to them. Did the king of Syria not realize that even

if he could get rid of the visible bearer of testimony in Israel, he would by no means get rid of the eye of the invisible God?

“Go and see where he is.” The eyes of the flesh could easily discover where Elisha was, for he did not steal away. God has nothing to hide; He is light itself. Men, on the contrary, love darkness and fear the light. This is why the army came up “by night” and surrounded the city (2 Kings 6:14).

Elisha’s servant, having arisen early, saw all the host of the enemy, the horses and the chariots, and was afraid. His eyes did not deceive him, but what he was lacking was the eyes of faith. That is why he immediately despaired: “Alas, my master! how shall we do? (2 Kings 6:15). In effect, the self-assured Syrian army was deploying all its strength against a single, defenseless man; and how could he resist? The servant saw the army and came to this conclusion. He is not to be excused, for in his position as the prophet’s servant, he was constantly in contact with the invisible, and ought to have known that no human strength was able to stand before the power of God.

“Fear not,” says Elisha. 1This is always grace’s first word. It is able to reassure a troubled soul. How many times this word “Fear not” is spoken in Scripture! It fills the Old and the New Testament. Everything in this world is of such character to inspire poor, feeble, sinful beings like ourselves with fear. We are confronted with difficult circumstances, the world, its seductions or its hostility, Satan’s hatred, our own selves, and our sinful nature; beside, there is the necessity of presenting ourselves before God and of having to do with Him. Who will answer so many troubling questions? Who can calm the anguish and agitation of our hearts? God alone can, for He has the answer to everything.

“Fear not,” said Jesus to the sinner who casts himself at His feet, rebuked in his conscience in the presence of His mighty grace (Luke 5:10). It is the first word of our history. “Fear not;” He said to his disciples when the storm rose up, threatening to swallow them (Matt. 14:27). “Fear not,” when shipwreck is fully assured (Acts 27:24). “Fear not,” He says to the little defenseless flock in the midst of wolves who have the power of killing the sheep (Luke 12:32; Matt. 10:28; Rev. 2:10). “Fear not,” when Satan displays all his power to hinder the work of God (Acts 18:9). “Fear not,” when death has already done its work (Mark 5:36).

But this word is especially heard at those solemn occasions when weak, infirm, human, fleshly beings are called to meet God. Even if He only reveals Himself by an angel mighty in strength, a heavenly messenger, the soul to whom He addresses Himself is deeply troubled; it needs, like Zacharias or Mary, this so very comforting word, “Fear not” (Luke 1:13,30). How much more when poor men find themselves in the presence of the whole heavenly host, and the glory of the Lord shines about them, do they need this word, “Fear not” (Luke 2:10). And what will happen to the disciples, when on the holy mountain they must enter the glory-cloud, the dwelling place of Jehovah? “Fear not,” Jesus tells them. The poor women who were thinking that they had forever lost the meek and lowly Man whom they had followed upon earth, finding themselves suddenly in the presence of the risen Christ, needed this word, “Fear not.” Lastly, the beloved disciple who had laid his head upon Jesus’ bosom, meeting Him clothed in the resplendent and awesome vestments of God the judge, and falling at His feet as dead, is gently revived by this word, “Fear not” (Rev. 1:17).

The secret of this word is grace; we have to do with grace alone. It reassures us even when we find ourselves in the presence of a God of judgment, for the Judge is our Savior.

In the Old Testament, the soul is much less often reassured when it finds itself in the immediate presence of God, because God is there not yet fully manifested as the God of grace. The friend of God, Moses himself, said: “I exceedingly fear and quake.” All the more do we hear this word when Gideon meets the angel of the Lord face to face and when Daniel, humbled, stands before the representative of the Messiah (Dan. 10:12,19). But in contrast, this word “Fear not,” reoccurs continually as the assurance of the isolated believer in the midst of difficulties and distress and of the world’s hatred. Abraham, Hagar, and Isaac are examples (Gen. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24). A persecuted priest (1 Sam. 22:23) and a Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:7) hear it from the mouth of David, the Lord’s anointed, with whom they sought refuge. A poor Zidonian widow, ready to succumb, receives it from the lips of the prophet (1 Kings 17:3).

This word meets the ears of the people of God every time they have to do with the enemy, whether in Egypt (Ex. 14:13) or in the confines of the wilderness (Num. 14:9; 21:34; Deut. 1:21; 3:2, 22; 7:18; 20:3; 31:6,8), or in Canaan under Joshua (Josh. 8:1; 10:8,25; 11:6), or even in the period of ruin which characterized the kingdom of Israel (2 Chron. 20:17; 32:7; Isa. 7:4), and in the post-exilic period (Neh. 4:14). And when Israel lay in the “lowest pit” cried to God in their distress, the Lord answered, “Fear not” (Lam. 3:57).

Lastly, when the guilty people, bowed beneath the judgment of God, chastened and repentant but near despair, shall hear these words pronounced at the end of their time of trial: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people! we hear this word “Fear not” repeated and multiplied in echo after echo. Fear not, My love will comfort thee, I will help thee, I will strengthen thee, I will be with My servant. Have I not redeemed thee? Am I not with thee? Fear not, I will refresh thee. Fear neither shame, nor insult, nor reproach. Thou are mine, and I have received thee in grace. The entire latter portion of Isaiah has this consoling word from God as a refrain (Isa. 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; 51:7; 54:4).

The assurance of God’s favor dispels fear, perfect love banishes it. How many times in the Psalms do we find this absence of all fear before the enemy, before the shaking of all things, before the threats of the flesh and of man (Psa. 27:3; 46:2; 56:4, 11; 118:6)! In truth, all is joy for the believer, all is confidence, perfect assurance and peace, because through everything he has God for him, He of whom it is said, “If God be for us, who against us?”

“Fear not,” says Elisha to his servant, “for they that are with us are more than they that are with them” (2 Kings 6:16), and he prays, saying: “Jehovah, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.” The eyes of his flesh saw the army of the enemy and did not deceive him, and notwithstanding he was blind. There were things that required the prophet’s intercession and the intervention of the Lord in order that he might see. His eyes were then opened, and “behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17). Angels, these chariots of fire and this cavalry, once gathered to take Elijah up to heaven, are now gathered to protect one single man without defense upon earth, bringing to naught all the plans of his enemies. This divine intervention on behalf of the redeemed has never ceased. Jacob had contemplated it when angels in two bands had met him at Mahanaim, and in the presence of imminent danger he had been able to say of himself, identifying himself with the Lord’s host: “I am become two troops” (Gen. 32:1-2,10). This same angelic army will strike the adversaries of the Lord and of the Assembly when He shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of His might in flames of fire (2 Thess. 1:7), according as it is written, “Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire” (Heb. 1:7). As Esau’s band disappeared before those of Mahanaim, so the army of the Syrians was like a band of ants before the holy myriads which covered the mountain, only it was a matter of protection, not of combat, as when David heard the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees

(2 Sam. 5:24).

The history of Jacob, whom the Lord named Israel, is repeated here. The true Israel was present in the person of its representative, the prophet. At the time of the end the remnant will have its eyes opened and shall hear these words: “Fear not.” When many shall say, “Who shall cause us to see good?” they will be able to cry, “In peace will I both lay me down and sleep; for Thou, Jehovah, alone makest me to dwell in safety” (Psa. 4:6, 8).

Angelic intervention more directly characterizes the dispensation of the law, and consequently also the time of the a feast that God has prepared for them. It is the great supper of grace.

What had these men done in order to have part in such liberality? That which Saul of Tarsus and so many other enemies of Christ had done, in ignorance, no doubt; but they had made war against God, and God answered their hatred thus. From this time on, “the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel”; these isolated assaults end, but Satan cannot remain quiet.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 6:1-7: The Sons of the Prophets and the Jordan

Before beginning the subject of these few verses, we would like to recapitulate the history of the “sons of the prophets” as this book presents it. We have seen that the sons of the prophets represent the prophetic remnant of Israel, brought into relationship with the Messiah by His Spirit at the time of the end.

In 2 Kings 2 They are still scattered here and there, some at Bethel, others at Jericho. They have a partial knowledge of God’s thoughts; they know from prophecy that the Lord will take up Elijah, but they lack true intelligence. They are not yet joined together, with a common character that forms them, so to speak, into a vessel of testimony. Some remain at Bethel, attached to the promises of God, others at Jericho, feeling the weight of the curse of God against His people. They do not stop at Jordan and in figure, do not understand its value. Nor do they know all the efficacy of the death of Christ which they contemplate at a distance (2 Kings 2:7). They show their ignorance of His resurrection, for in seeking Elijah’s body they seek “the living among the dead.”

We see them next (2 Kings 4:1-7) in distress; death occurs among them, and their widows lack the means of subsistence. It is then that, in type, the oil they need—the Spirit—is poured out for them by the ministry of Elisha. We find them thereafter gathered together in one body of testimony around the prophet at Gilgal. Self-judgment, affliction, and repentance characterize them—always in type. It is then that they learn the value of the holy humanity of Christ, come into the world to bring life when “there is death in the pot” because they were unable to distinguish good fruit from bad. It is there that, in their extreme poverty at a time of famine and of tribulation, the Lord feeds these poor witnesses. At last in this same place where at one time Israel had been when she had entered into Canaan, they feed in figure upon Christ in humiliation and in resurrection, and come to know Him. Little by little their spiritual intelligence increases, marked by a growing appreciation of the Lord.

After these things, the Jordan, already presented previously as the death followed by the resurrection of Christ, is shown in 2 Kings 5 to be the only means of purifying the Gentiles, for whom it begins to manifest its influence before the prophetic remnant has part in it. But, while dwelling at Gilgal, this prophetic remnant cannot remain there indefinitely. This time of grace in relation to the Gentiles now comes to its completion. “Behold now, the place where we dwell before thee is too strait for us”(2 Kings 6:1). They want to go a step further, to find a dwellingplace other than the one, however precious it may be, of affliction and of repentance. This place is the Jordan. Now they know the value of the Jordan. There death had been annulled by the power of the spirit of Elijah; the prophet had passed through it to go to heaven. Elisha had returned there in power to bring blessing to them. They already know the death of Christ as the only way possible to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They had come to know it as the purification for the defilement of the Gentiles, at the very time when this defilement had been attached to unfaithful Israel (Gehazi). This marvelous Jordan which had healed Naaman’s uncleanness is the source ever open for Israel’s uncleanness. The remnant want to build themselves a house and dwell there; at last the remnant recognizes that for them this death is the place of blessing and of rest. This is the point the faithful reach. When they reach this place they remain there, they dwell together there. They have found rest, a rest like the swallow, a house like the sparrow.

Elisha approves of their plan and puts them to the test, saying to them: “Go ye.” But how shall they go without him? They must dwell there under the direction of the Spirit of Christ, or else there will be no blessing with them. How shall the Spirit of Christ remain at Gilgal while they go to dwell at Jordan without Him?

Just like the Lord when Jairus appealed to Him, so Elisha consents to come with his servants. He says, “I will go” (2 Kings 6:3). Once come to the banks of the Jordan, they go to work. But suddenly the work is interrupted. One of the sons of the prophets loses his tool in the river, a tool that was not even his own, for he had borrowed it. His poverty, his incapacity are thus manifested: he has no resources. The river of death has swallowed up all his hope. Elisha alone—Christ in Spirit with the remnant—can bring the remedy. Death is conquered; it not only has the gift of cleansing, but it restores to the believer the power he has lost of laboring in the work of Christ and of making Israel to dwell in safety. Everything comes from Him, from the power of His Holy Spirit, from the virtue of His death. He it is who directs the work, who gives the means of accomplishing it, who fills the hearts of His own with the feeling of their own incapacity, who establishes the work of their hands (Psa. 90:17). Without this event the prophetic remnant might have had confidence in its own capacity to do the work of God in Israel. The Spirit of Christ alone has the secret of putting strength in their hands so that they might labor at His work.

Let us note that all this takes place in the midst of the ruin of the people, and that we have not yet the type of the peaceful possession of the millennial blessing. Elisha alone could dwell at Carmel. Here it is a matter of the gradual experience of the prophetic remnant, occupied with building a house of habitation where Elisha might be with them during the reign of the profane king. This is the moment described in Psalm 90 when Christ repents concerning His servants (Psa. 90:13). He comes to their aid in all their infirmities. The same means which had in times past changed the waters of Marah into sweet waters gives power for the remnant’s work and causes death to restore that which seemed to be lost, by the same stroke also destroying every pretension of this poor people’s creditor to reclaim that which had been confided to them under the system of the law.

We cannot insist enough upon the prophetic value of these accounts. It is not, as we shall see, that we cannot find a gospel application in them, as in every other portion of Scripture. But let us state that it is good to keep these events in their natural setting in order to avoid wild interpretations. Now that we have said this, let us examine the moral explanation of this account, that which is applicable to our own circumstances.

The Jordan is an excellent dwelling place for the believer. He must always abide there where he is crucified with Christ. This is where we find the power of the Lord with us. It is there that, gathered about Him, we realize the unity of the Church: “Let us make us a place there, where we may dwell” (2 Kings 6:2). There the Lord gladly comes along with His own to give them His help and His power when they invite Him there. He recognizes and approves of their simplicity of heart, which realizes that blessing is found at the place where the nothingness of man has been proven by His death. Without His personal presence with His people, all our work would be ineffective. Thus, His help is not wanting when we put our hand to the work.

The ax head of the man of the sons of the prophets had not been, as in Israel’s case, an instrument of death for his neighbor (Deut. 19:5); yet even in this case there was a resource for the people who, in their ignorance, had been instrumental in the death of Christ, for they might flee to the city of refuge.

In the scene before us, the work is simply interrupted, work that had been undertaken for the family of God. But what a world it is in which a son of the prophets does not even have a tool of his own. Christ answers, nonetheless, to the very least need of the sons of His people. He is full of compassion for the anguish of a poor human heart concerning a lost tool. This loss, however infinitesimal it may be, moves His heart. The miracle is childish, so to speak but it is a miracle of love. The world, in reading this passage, may well greet it with a mocking sneer. Is it possible, the world will say, that God would reveal such infantile things to us? The believer understands this tender care and rejoices in it, worshipping. He knows that God is for him, and that He who delivered up His own Son for us will also give us all things with Him. He provides for the very least need of his own, pouring the same love into the work that He supplies for the greatest needs. Christ Himself, who humbled Himself unto death, can, far more than did Elisha for the prophets, sympathize with our infirmities and provide for them.

This passage offers us yet another instruction. At Marah, a stick, symbolic of the cross of Christ, had removed the bitterness of the waters, symbolic of death; here the same means abolishes the power of death which was holding the object it had seized. Death from which no one returns, is man’s natural destiny since the time man has sinned. The cross alone, from the moment it is brought in, is able to vanquish and annul this inexorable power; it comes to our help to restore our goods to us. And death vanquished can withhold nothing that belongs to us.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 4:42-44: The Man of Baal-Shalishah

“And there came a man from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of corn in his sack.”

A new means of sustenance, more complete than the preceding, is brought to the sons of the prophets who are gathered around Elisha at Gilgal. First of all there are twenty loaves of barley, a poor food, representing as in the dream of the Midianite (Judg. 7), Christ in His humiliation; then ears of grain, firstfruits gathered in the land of Canaan, a type of Christ in resurrection, the grain that Israel long before had tasted in the same place after having crossed the Jordan. Thus the prophetic remnant will gradually come to know, with self-judgment, all the resources they possess in Christ. These resources will be dispensed to them by the Lord, standing with them in spirit. He will feed His poor with bread, as He did during His sojourn on earth. He will make the feeble understanding that they have become fruitful. “Give the people that they may eat.” These are the same words that Elisha had pronounced before in connection with the pot that had been rendered healthful. The thought no longer occurs to them to add their own labor to this food, for it is complete. They “left thereof, according to the word of Jehovah,” just like the five thousand men in Jesus’ time. What would they lack henceforth?

This entire chapter shows us the way by which the believers of the remnant will be led, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. They will be led on from the knowledge of the travail of Christ’s soul to revive them (through self-judgment and their making experience of their own incapacity for good by which all their activity is marked), to the satisfying of all their needs. They will be led all the way through to the knowledge of Christ the Man, bringing holy life into the midst of death, and by their appreciation of a Christ in humiliation, then in resurrection, He becomes their abundant provision. They “left thereof, according to the word of Jehovah.” Others, too, might feed on it; this meal in offered in grace to all.

We have thus been present, in this chapter, at the miracles of the age to come, and this not without finding in them a source of blessing for ourselves. In 2 Kings 2 we have found, in the person of Elijah, the Spirit of Christ sent in grace to the remnant; in 2 Kings 3 the Spirit of Christ rejecting Israel in order to take account only of Judah, and nevertheless acting in grace toward all; finally in 2 Kings 4, the resources of the Spirit of Christ spread out for those who are faithful among the people, then for the sons of the prophets who pass through all the phases of a tribulation in which their faith is profoundly exercised.

What an age that was! What an age we are in! What an age will that of the end times be! But in all ages the Lord has a remnant He loves, sustains, rejoices over, and nourishes—in His eyes the true salt of the earth.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 4:38-41: Death in the Pot

A new scene is called to our attention. Instead of returning to Carmel, Elisha goes to Gilgal. There the Spirit of Christ represented by the prophet joins the sons of the prophets again. For them it is a matter of collective blessing. The remnant cannot be blessed except in gathering at the place of circumcision, of repentance, and of self-judgment.

“There was a famine in the land.” While the land of Israel lay under the weight of this calamity, type of the future tribulation, the feeble remnant finds what is necessary for its subsistence at this place, in standing before Elisha. Out of this place, far from this person, they would be without resource, even as others. Repentance and having Christ with them in the Spirit will then suffice the faithful, whatever may be their own penury and the ruin that surrounds them. They find sufficient nourishment in the “great pot” of the prophet who will not measure out their means of existence stingily. But one of them, in order to increase the group’s resources, gathers a lapful of fruit which he believes will be useful to all. This fruit, gathered by the man in his ignorance, brings “death in the pot:’ All their food is poisoned, and thus they find themselves reduced to the same extremity as the people. This poor remnant must feel the power of the death that threatens them and which is a result of their working and lack of discernment. What could they add to Elisha’s food? If the fields of Israel were not producing wheat, they were by contrast producing poison in abundance. This is all the fruit that the reign of the apostate king, the Man of Sin of the last days, will be able to procure for them, and all the fruit, on the other hand, that their flesh will be able to gather.

Elisha said: “Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot.” Meal, the perfect humanity of Christ, is that which renders the pottage healthful. All the works of the flesh can but make of it a deadly food. Hardly had they turned to the prophet than the remedy is found. One man alone can save them and bring the remedy for the condition. They sense this, and their first thought when they are under the power of death is of the man of God. They cry unto him “out of the depths.” “If thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?” They wait upon him; “With Jehovah there is loving-kindness.” Gathered in His presence, the perfection of His humanity is their only safeguard and even becomes their food. In His holy person He annuls all the harmful results of man mixing himself into the work of God. Elisha, Christ in the Spirit with them, opens to them a source of deliverance by the knowledge of what He, as Man upon earth, is for those who take hold of Him by faith. “There was no harm in the pot.” “Pour out for the people, that they may eat.”

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 4:8-37: The Shunammite

Besides the sons of the prophets, there was a testimony of individual faith in the midst of this people who were already judged and, in fact rejected. The Shunammite woman is an example of this. This woman was rich,1 in contrast to the widow of the man of the sons of the prophets who was absolutely destitute; but she was a woman of faith, and all her story proves this.

She exercises hospitality towards the stranger who passed by Shunem, and at the conclusion of several visits she takes account of the character of her guest. Perhaps his conversation, and doubtless the entire behavior of the prophet causes her to acknowledge his character. She does not judge by her first impression, but waits for outward evidences to enlighten her. She has the sober good sense of faith. “Behold now,” she says to her husband, “I perceive that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us continually.” She had begun by constraining him to stay, and the prophet had found there an atmosphere answering to his own character. Every time he passed by, he turned in there. Their natures were drawn one to the other. “This is a holy man of God,” she says; to her heart he has not only the official character of one bearing the Word, but she acknowledges him as “holy,” as really separated to God in his practical life. For having a gift from God is not everything; to properly accredit such a gift, there must also be the moral character corresponding to it. The old prophet of Bethel (1 Kings 13) had a gift without this character. How important it is for every one of the Lord’s laborers to take heed to this. One’s gift, however outstanding it may be, remains fruitless if it is not accompanied by moral authority; it is the moral authority that reaches the consciences of the hearers more than the words that accompany it. And moreover, the bearer of the gift himself loses his persuasive energy when his conscience is not right before God. “And I hope also,” says the apostle, “that we have been manifested in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:11). So it was with Elisha. “I perceive that this is a holy man of God,” the Shunammite said of him.

And see how she realizes what is suitable for a man of God. Her riches might have given rise to her preparing a retreat for him furnished with every possible comfort. No, she removes herself from any thoughts of her own position, only to think of what might be suitable for a man to whom riches have no value, or who might even despise them as a snare of the enemy. What is important to her is to receive Elisha not merely in passing, but to prepare him a dwelling in her house. The more we get acquainted with Christ, along with His Word which reveals Him (and which Elisha was the bearer of), the more we will desire that He be a part of our life, and that these words be inscribed on the door of our house: “Here dwells the Word of God.” The Word is no longer a passing enjoyment for us then, or the reading of it a duty attended to on occasion, but it will be a part of our life, of our family, of ourself. In the Christian most favored with this world’s goods, true faith will always manifest itself by this outward simplicity. “Let us make, I pray thee, a small upper chamber with walls, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a seat, and a lamp stand; and it shall be when he cometh to us, he shall turn in thither.” Only a lack of intelligence and an absence of communion with the Lord will act in an opposite way. Those who are part of the family of God and who possess this world’s goods often do not think enough of the danger of offering their brethren engaged in the work of the lord more than what they need, more than what they are accustomed to. If a brother is spiritual, even relative luxury will make him ill at ease and will be an obstacle to his freely opening his heart, ready to bring his hosts something from God. If his Christian life is weak, such prosperity will be a snare for him; and allowing himself to be won over by it, he will return to the place where it is offered, no more simply for the Lord alone, but to satisfy his own desires for a well-being which is but a catering to the wants of the flesh.

The devotion and intelligence of this woman win the prophet’s heart, as they also attract the heart of Christ; so they receive their reward, too. Elisha calls the Shunammite; he has something to give her. “She stood before him,” as he himself stood before the Lord. There is beautiful harmony in the reciprocal positions of this man of God and this woman of faith. He wishes to reward her care for him, but first he tests her to see whether their two hearts are beating together. “Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?” Does she have a desire to increase her resources in the world? She refuses. We shall see later that these things were added to her at a time of need when they were no longer a snare to her. Here, she now answers, “I dwell among mine own people.” Beautiful answer, worthy of a pious woman! She recognized this nation over which judgment is already suspended as her people, and she does not disassociate herself from it. She sees in it that which God alone can distinguish, that which faith alone can realize in it. As long as God still recognizes something in it for Himself, this people is His people, and she has no other desire than to be part of it. In the midst of the ruin she cleaves to the people of God, just as Elijah with his altar of twelve stones when the twelve tribes no longer existed as an entity. She does not need anything else; she is satisfied with the rest, the fellowship, and the peace which this dwelling affords her amidst the existing disorder.

In our day today true faith does not differ from that of the Shunammite; she is not seeking the amelioration of a state of things far from the thoughts of God, but she sees what God has established in His counsels. While being conscious of the ruin of the Church as God's house and people here below, she lives in peace, holding to that which the Lord has established from the beginning, to this church, built upon the resurrected Christ; she views the Church with the Lord's thoughts and affections, even as He will present her one day in glory. Faith does not seek to rebuild ruins and say, "I dwell among mine own people," as though all were in order, because to faith God's thoughts concerning his people are reality.

Nevertheless, the Shunammite's heart nurtures a secret desire, a great desire. So lofty, so unattainable a desire, she had never revealed to anyone; but the prophet's servant was able to discern that she lacked something with which her happiness would forever remain incomplete. "She has no son, and her husband is old." We continually find this barrenness, modified according to the individual circumstances, among the pious women of Israel, and we have spoken of this more than once in the course of these meditations. For their faithful hearts this was the greatest trial possible. Their holy ambition was, not merely to have posterity, but to be introduced by childbearing, whether in a direct or indirect way, to the person or lineage of the Messiah. To these women a son was the supreme good. The Shunammite did not express this need herself, accepting the circumstances in which God's providence had placed her; only the emptiness was there, deeply felt in her heart.

It is the same for us Christians. Every spiritual blessing cannot suffice us if we have not found an object in the personal possession of Christ. To have Him, to know Him, to love Him, to hold Him in our arms like Simeon, to rest upon His bosom like the beloved disciple, to sit at His feet like Mary, to contemplate His glory like the disciples on the holy mountain, to have interest in the smallest detail of His circumstances because He has ravished our hearts, to behold His divine beauty like Moses' parents did in their son —all this and much more constitutes the inestimable happiness of those who belong to Him. The Lord through Elisha grants a son to this woman just as the Holy Spirit through the Word brings us Jesus and makes Him to abide in us-Christ, the hope of glory.

Elisha calls the Shunammite a second time. The prophet's first question had been a test of her faith, and the test had shown that this woman was not pursuing the advantages this world could offer her any more than was her guest. She had learned in the school of the holy men of God what the true interests of a witness in the midst of the ruin of Israel were. He speaks the same words to her that the angel of the Lord had in former days announced as to Sarah: "At this appointed time, thy term is come, thou shalt embrace a son." (cf. Gen. 18:10) Ah! This child is also a promised son, of the same lineage as Isaac, who himself was a type of the true seed, of Christ! How her heart thrilled at this word! "No, my lord, man of God, do not lie to thy handmaid." It is true then! Her joy is complete. She has found in this gift the satisfaction of all her desires.

Alas, a few hours are enough to occasion the loss of this joy; at harvest time all the Shunammite's hopes vanish. The child dies at noon. So it was with the disciples hopes in the time of Jesus. "But we had hoped," said the two Emmaus disciples, "that He was the one who is about to redeem Israel."

The man of God is this woman's only resource. She lays the child there where the bearer of the Word had lain. She had received the child from him; dead, she confided the child to him. It is an act of faith. Had the disciples of whom we have just spoken trusted in the Scriptures, they would not have needed the Lord to open these to themselves in order to know that they announced the very events that had just taken place before their eyes.

The Shunammite calls her husband, asking him for an ass and a servant. What anguish filled her poor heart! But she shows forth the same faith which had characterized her in receiving the prophet and then in laying hold of the hope set before her. Death had come in, had seemed to overthrow everything, but the Shunammite's faith and hope remain the same in the midst of that which seemed to destroy them. "It is well," she says, when death was before her soul. What a word! Her son is dead, but it is well! Why? Because she, this worthy daughter of Abraham, is sustained by that same hope as he whose faith reckoned that God was able to raise up Isaac from among the dead. God who had given her this child and who had taken him back through death, could restore him in resurrection. She expects no less of the man of God, but how she hastens! "Drive and go forward; slack not the riding for me," she bids her servant. Having lost the object of her heart, she can know no rest until she had recovered it. Mary of Magdala affords us a similar example. Ignorant and doubtless but little enlightened, she desires to have Jesus, cost what it may: "Tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away": and at this very moment, she finds Him risen.

Any stopping is critical; a moment lost may compromise everything; this woman can find no rest until she has "caught" the man of God "by the feet." The Lord had not revealed the child's sickness to the prophet, and this for more than one reason. If he would have known the danger, he would have run there, and the child would not have died. Thus his dependence upon God would have been put to the test. The Lord Himself knew of the death of Lazarus, for God knows all things, but for the same reason, as a dependent Man, He did not hasten to Bethany, for He has no word from His Father to do so. And then, if Elisha had known the danger, the Shunammite would not "have seen the glory of God" who raises the dead. A third reason for hiding this event from the prophet was that the Shunammite's faith might thoroughly be put to the test. There would not have been opportunity for her to be manifested completely even if the man sent by God had presented himself at her home at the very moment her son had expired; in this way her faith had its perfect work. She said, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, do not deceive me?" She counts upon Him whose promises are without repentance and dependent solely upon the grace of Him who gives them when they are not sought for, so that absolutely nothing in them might come from her. She believes that even if men are deceivers, God does not deceive. Had Elisha been a man like other men, he might have been mistaken, making a promise without fulfilling it; but he represented God, and a man of God could not act thus. She has but one resource then—the faithfulness of her lord—and she does naught else, knows no other way than to address herself to him. She is truly a woman who does but "one thing." No doubt her soul is grieved within her, but she has confidence in the only resource open to her, and also finds full sympathy in the heart of the one to whom she addresses herself.

Here her faith is tested anew. Elisha says to Gehazi, "Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thy 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 lad." Will the Shunammite accept as remedy for her distress that which is the emblem of the prophet's walk borne by one other than himself? No, her faith accepts no intermediate agent, for it is not Gehazi who will save or who can save. She has learned in the prophet's school that the way to obtain blessing is to abide in constant relationship with the One who is its source. "As Jehovah liveth," she says, "and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee!" These were the very words of Elisha to Elijah. How could the man of God resist this faith which took himself for its model? How could he not go along? No, "he rose up and followed her." Gehazi goes before them, but the staff of the prophet is not enough to bring the child back to life.

To have power in one's hands is not everything: the disciples who were with the Lord had received from Him "power and authority over all demons, and to heal diseases"(Luke 9:1), but when a demon-possessed boy needed to be healed, they could not heal him. The power to do that depended upon their personal communion. Had they had faith like a grain of mustard seed, they would have moved mountains; but these spirits "can go out by nothing but by prayer and fasting." A state of personal dependence and of separation from evil was needful in order to use the power given them. Gehazi lacked this condition of heart, as we shall see later.

Meanwhile, the child was lying upon the prophet's bed, the door closed upon him. Elisha enters and closes the door upon the two of them. He desires to identify himself completely with the child in death. And what grief, what anguish, what labor of soul! He has no rest until he has finished his work, taking the place of the dead child in order to communicate life to him. The child opens his eyes to the light.

Besides the many precious instructions that this scene affords us, I do not doubt that we find in type here the death and resurrection of Israel. At the time of the need, the godly and faithful among the people, who like the Shunammite, regard their people as the child of the sure promises of God, will not lose hope even when Israel is dead, morally speaking; their faith is active with regard to Israel. Their faith will realize that only the Spirit of God can raise up Israel again, and will identify its condition with the cross and the grave where the Messiah, the Savior of the people, had suffered death and been laid in burial for it. Their faith seeks the Lord upon Mount Carmel, where He is found rejoicing in the heavenly sphere of His kingdom before He introduces its earthly part. Through the Spirit they then learn and realize that the labor of Christ's soul had in view the resurrection of His people, and they receive at His hand, as in Ezekiel 37, a new people, the fruit of this labor, born of the Holy Spirit. They will have realized death at the time of the labors of harvest; these labors will not be interrupted, and Israel will revive before the wheat is gathered in the granary. The remnant at last will obtain all that their heart has desired. So it is that through these scenes filled with practical instruction for our souls, the whole cycle of God's thoughts concerning His ancient people will be unrolled.

"And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. And he called her; and she came to him. And he said, Take up thy son. And she came and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground; and she took up her son, and went out" (2 Kings 4:36-37).

"Call her" —How the Shunammite must have been moved at this new call! The first time (2 Kings 4:12) the prophet had called her to prove the precious faith that she possessed; the second time (2 Kings 4:15) to give her the child of promise, an object for her heart. The third time —what would he give her when mourning was filling her soul? Ah! She does not doubt; he would give her her son, clothed in an entirely new character: her resurrected son. Oh, joy that cannot be expressed in words! Her heart is too full to express itself; she bows herself silently; she worships!

Dear Christian readers, have you made these experiences? Have you first of all learned to know Christ as having passed through death for you, as having borne all its anguish? surely the joy that you have known in this deliverance has been great, but have you remained there? Have you found yourself before a risen Christ? If this has not been so, you still have but the half of Christianity, a half-joy, half an object for your faith. If on the other hand you have come to know Him in this character, you may, like the Shunammite, bow down, take your son, and go out. Your portion is complete, there is nothing remaining for you but to enter into the possession of your inheritance with Him, and this what we will later find prefigured in the last scene of this woman's history.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 4:1-7: The Prophet's Widow

As these chapters unfold before our eyes, we are able to notice in them the contrast between the days of Elijah and those of Elisha. Elijah still acknowledges Israel and its king, though it be to pronounce judgment upon them. For Elisha the king no longer exists: "I would not look toward thee nor see thee" (2 Kings 3:14); the people is rejected; and Judah alone still counts for something in the eyes of the prophet. But while in the days of Elijah the faithful remnant was hidden and Jehovah alone could distinguish the seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal, in the days of Elisha this remnant comes into the full light. It is to this remnant that the prophet addresses himself; the sons of the prophets are the special object of his ministry. This ministry no doubt reaches beyond them, as we shall see, but their role is quite the preponderant one, and this gives its own particular stamp to the typical character of this man of God.

What an environment this is in which he carries on his activities! The sons of prophets are without resources in Israel; they are hungry, they are thirsty, their destitution is absolute. The first seven verses of our chapter bring this condition into relief in a singular way. The prophet's wife is without any outward support whatever; the head of the family has been taken away through death; a heartless creditor wants to seize her two sons to make them his slaves. The widow has nothing with which to ransom them from his hand, nothing except a little oil in the house, and the oil, the symbol of spiritual power, is very nearly gone. Can this feeble resource suffice? It will be the same in the last days before the deliverance of the remnant. An apostate people surrounds them; the Antichrist makes them feel his cruel yoke and intends to enslave them, but Jehovah has divine resources for them; they learn to cry out to him: "Thou knowest that thy servant feared Jehovah." Does one not hear here the language of uprightness so often expressed in the Psalms? Christ is absent. Jehovah no longer dwells in the midst of His people, but His Spirit is present in a double measure with the prophet.

Elisha says to the widow, "What shall I do for thee?" This poor woman whose cry has reached the right place becomes the object of tender solicitude. But first of all she needs to confess to the prophet what resources she has at her disposal: "Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil." The word means: just the quantity of oil necessary to anoint oneself. Nothing to pay off her debts, nothing to clear herself, nothing but a very little measure of spiritual power. "Go," says the prophet, "borrow for thyself vessels abroad from all thy neighbors, empty vessels; let it not be few; and go in, and shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and pour out into all those vessels, and set aside what is full." There is fullness of spiritual resources in Elisha; but empty vessels are needed; the poor widow cannot gather too many. She is to borrow them from all her neighbors, bring them into the house from outside, and then, having collected them together, shut the door upon herself. It is an intimate scene in which the apostate nation is in no wise called upon to take part. Three times in this chapter (2 Kings 4:4,21,33) the door is shut, clearly indicating that these scenes have nothing to do with a public testimony such as that of Elisha's great predecessor.

Empty vessels are needed; to be filled with anointing oil it is necessary to be emptied of self. The people of Jericho needed a new cruse and salt; they needed a new nature, sanctified for God, that the curse might be turned away from their city; the daughter of the prophets and her

children, already in possession of a little oil, did not have to procure new vessels in order to obtain a full measure. God avails Himself of the spiritual resources that He finds among His own, however little they may be. It was the same with the disciples when the loaves were multiplied. They told the Lord: “We have not here save five loaves and two fishes.” Jesus told them: “Bring them here to me”; then, having blessed and broken the loaves, He gave them to the disciples who distributed them to the crowds, thus availing Himself of that which they had in order to bless five thousand men by their means.

Here the blessing does not stop until there are no more vessels to fill. A fixed number of vessels receive it, just as later, at the time of the end, 144,000 will be sealed in Israel, but for each one the measure is full. Just as the first disciples at Pentecost “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), so it will be for the remnant at the time of the latter rain according to Joel’s prophecy.

The vessels filled, the oil must be sold —the blessing imparted spreads. Such will be the testimony of the remnant in the last days. Many will share in the spiritual benefits and will themselves become possessors of these blessings. The wise among the people, the bearers of the Word, these sons of the prophets, shall teach righteousness to the many (Dan. 11:33; 12:3). So the prophetic family lives and is sustained with the spiritual anointing which is multiplied for them and which fills their hearts with joy, and the supply is abundant for others.

This miracle reminds us of that of the widow of Zarephath; only in the latter case, it is the blessing brought to the nations by the Messiah; here it is the blessing brought to the remnant of Israel by the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ.

Let us not miss repeating here that all these miracles of Elisha call upon faith. The prophet’s widow must gather together the vessels, being persuaded of things she did not yet see, just as in the previous chapter it was necessary to prepare the ditches before refreshing water could come to fill them.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 2:13-25: Elisha, or Christ in the Spirit

Here we see the figure of the prophet Elisha very clearly portrayed as a type, for as we have already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, his character is essentially typical. If Elijah on the last day of his earthly course represents Christ as the prophetic witness in Israel, what then does this Elisha who is so intimately associated with him represent — this Elisha who backs up his testimony, who crosses the river of death with him, who at his ascension receives a double measure of his spirit? In order to be well understood, let us begin with a little prophetic survey.

During the Messiah’s course here below a few disciples, constituting a feeble, faithful Jewish remnant morally separated from the nation, persevered to the end in following Jesus, Jehovah’s Anointed and the Sent One of God, the great Prophet of Israel. He, rejected by the nation, associates them with Himself in the results of His death and of His resurrection. We are not speaking of the place they hold in the Church. This latter does not come onto the scene in the Old Testament narratives and might at most, as we have said above, be considered here as mysteriously hidden in the person of Elijah—Christ gone up to heaven. We are speaking here of Jewish disciples, at the head of whom were the twelve, who then constituted the true remnant of Israel. As such they received from Christ a double measure of His Spirit in the form of miracles and acts of power, and were able to perform “greater works” than He in the midst of the people. At Pentecost we see the accomplishment, from the Jewish point of view, of the things announced by the prophet Joel: “Upon my bondmen and upon my bondwomen in those days will I pour out of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy... your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” No doubt, even at that moment this power from on high, according to Joel, was not limited to the children of Israel, for God said: “I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17-19). In the future when Joel’s prophecy will be fulfilled, the nations will have part in this gift. Only, this prophecy, indicating the participation of the nations in the gift of the Holy Spirit, afforded room on the day of Pentecost for opening the door to Christ’s Church —to the Church, a marvelous parenthesis in the history of the ways of God, an interval during which a heavenly Assembly is being formed here below, a body composed of Jews and Gentiles and united to its risen Head in glory. It was no less true that a Jewish remnant, powerfully endowed with the Spirit of prophecy, was revealed to the eyes of all at Pentecost. To be a part of this remnant, it was necessary to have followed the Messiah throughout all His course upon earth and to have seen Him go up to heaven (Acts 1:21,22). “If thou see me,” said Elijah, “when I am taken from thee.” This remnant, according to the prophecy of Joel cited in Acts 2, had not yet at that moment reached its final destiny and full development. It was, in the strictest sense of the word, represented by the twelve apostles. The Jews rejected their testimony, thus depriving themselves of the times of refreshing predicted by the prophet, and God used the nation’s unbelief and its rebellion against the Holy Spirit to form the Church, the bride of the Second Man, bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.

But the Church parenthesis will close, and the prophetic times will commence again. The remnant of Israel, of which the Prophets and the Psalms keep telling us, will come upon the scene again with double the prophetic spirit of Elijah, uniting itself, so to speak, to the Jewish disciples who once accompanied the Lord in His course here. Notice carefully that for them, as for Elisha, it will only be that the spirit of Elijah, whether it be in miraculous power or in prophetic understanding, will be upon them, and not in them as with the Christian.

In this short explanation we would in no wise pretend to present the prophet Elisha as a type of the remnant. That would be to understand the importance of his role quite imperfectly. No doubt the Spirit can avail Himself of vessels appropriate to His use, as He made use of Elisha after Elijah’s ascension, but whatever the vessel may be, the important thing is that which it contains. Elisha is the spirit of Elijah come again in twofold power and in grace to bless the faithful of the remnant and to regather them. It is Christ in the Spirit, the prophetic Spirit of Christ availing Himself of instruments, no doubt, but returning in the end times first of all to the sons of the prophets, that is to say, to the remnant, properly speaking, then to such in Israel who have faith when apostasy reaches its height. It is on behalf of this remnant that Elisha performs miracles, but in the midst of the people blinded by the final revolt. Thus the children of the kingdom that Christ will establish on earth shall be separated by Him. As far as the human instruments which the prophetic Spirit will use to this effect are concerned, we are not in a position to point them out specifically. Let it suffice to say that if John the Baptist had been received, he would have been the Elijah that was to come; that in the future Elijah will come again and will restore all things; that there will be two witnesses (symbolic of two bodies of witnesses) at Jerusalem, acting in the prophetic spirit and in the power of Elijah and of Moses.

The testimony entrusted to Elisha has, as we have already suggested, a double character corresponding to the double gift of Elijah’s mantle (1 Kings 19:19; 2 Kings 2:13) —a character of judgment similar to that which his master, a prophet of the law, had exercised here below,

judgment which Christ Himself will not execute until the end of the time of the gospel's grace; and a character of grace toward everyone who would be faithful in Israel, to bring back to these witnesses those whom their testimony will reach, and grace for the conversion of the Gentiles.

Elisha had passed through the Jordan dry-shod the first time in the company of his master, when the latter, smiting the waters with his mantle, had compelled the river of death to yield before his power. Left alone, Elisha now does the same. "He... stood by the bank of the Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah which had fallen from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah? He also smote the waters, and they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over" (2 Kings 2:13-14). It is always to Christ that the Spirit bears witness. Elisha experiences the power of Elijah's name over death, not of his own name. He begins again the history of Israel at the place where Elijah had passed over, not at the beginning (Gilgal) but at the end of his course. Israel of old had crossed the Jordan in the flesh to meet up with sure destruction. Elijah had crossed it to go up to heaven and then to send Elisha back into the land of promise with his prophet's mantle and a double portion of his spirit. Elisha crosses over the river by virtue of Elijah's having crossed — in the name of Elijah, and with Elijah's mantle. "He also," his representative by the Spirit, "smote the waters." Death is powerless before the power of the Spirit of life in Elisha. By the Spirit, as conqueror over death, he recommences the history of the new Israel. It is no longer a people in the flesh who are entering Canaan in order to be rejected at last; it is a new man returning to the people in the power of the Spirit of Christ, the conqueror over death, a new man about to bring to the sons of the prophets, then to the nation, and still later to Gentiles (Naaman) the fruits of this victory and deliverance. The sons of the prophets recognize this power.

So it will be at the time of the end. The prophetic spirit will return to Israel with a completely new power. He will execute, doubtless in the power of Elijah, vengeance against the enemies of the people, just as do the two witnesses in Revelation. But here it is a matter of grace rather than of judgment; the testimony will be one of grace for the blessing of the faithful and the regathering of the entire remnant. The sons of the prophets, gradually enlightened, will recognize this power and will gather themselves around it. The history of the true Israel, having its starting point in Christ, can then begin again to the glory of God.

Elijah's ascension, just as the prophetic remnant of the end times will not at first know of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Thomas in the Gospel of John in figure represents this remnant. He has to be convinced by sight of the resurrection of the Lord. And so the sons of the prophets, at first unbelieving like Thomas, go to look for Elijah. They would like to find upon earth the one who had been taken up to heaven. This was perhaps a good desire; in any case, this searching at once demonstrates both their attachment to Elijah and their ignorance. Christ will return for His people; but it is the devil who says, "Behold, here is the Christ, or there;" when He is still in heaven. Thus Elisha, the prophetic spirit sent by Christ, says, "Ye shall not send:" But he condescends greatly to their ignorance, for the second time Elisha says, "Send" (2 Kings 2:16-17). They must be convinced that their hopes, insofar as they were linked to the old order of things in Israel, were in vain. The fifty men searched for three days and found nothing. The Messiah is no longer to be found here below. He is living after having, in contrast to Elijah, passed through death in reality to become the Firstborn from among the dead, that which Elijah could not be. These men returned to Elisha. It was not granted the prophets of old, nor will it be for the prophetic remnant of the end, but it was the portion of the first disciples to see Christ going up to heaven. There would be a testimony connected with them as having received the double portion of His Spirit. The sons of the prophets, despite the good intentions of their hearts, were not acting according to the Spirit.

During this time of searching when the spirits of the sons of the prophets were being convicted, Elisha was dwelling at Jericho in the place of the curse (2 Kings 2:18), but he is a blessing to the men of the city, for he does not solely have the sons of the prophets in view. While a work is taking place in the heart of these latter, there is room for blessing on a vaster scale. The people appeal to Elisha. Jericho, rebuilt upon the place of judgment and contrary to the thoughts of God, was good in terms of its situation. It was not the selection of Jericho that was bad, for when the people had entered into Canaan this enemy city had become the place of divine power and victory. That which was bad was that which men had made of it, a city contrary to the thoughts of God, a real offense against His will. Besides, the result of Hiel's disobedience was that the spring supplying the town was corrupted and that one had to die there. Moreover, the ground was barren; no fruit could be gotten there.

In order that a fountain of life could spring up there, salt in a new cruse was needed —true separation for God, contained in a new nature. This alone could undo the consequences of the corruption brought about by sin and by the disobedience of the people, for the Word does not speak of these corrupted waters until after Hiel's disobedience (1 Kings 16:34). Only the prophetic remnant (the salt in the new cruse) will be able to carry out this ministry, for, like the twelve who gathered around the Lord, they will bear the true character of children of the kingdom in the end times (Mt. 5-13).

Such then are the two first fruits of the return of a double portion of the prophetic Spirit: those of the people who were prophets become witnesses of the fact that the Messiah is not in the world but that He has been taken up to heaven. The people appeal to Christ's representative here below and recover the blessing through a true spirit of holiness characterizing the new man (see the character of the remnant at the end, in the Psalms), and poured out there where there was previously a fountain of death and of barrenness.

The Word will have its role in this work, for the blessing is spread through the prophetic word: "The saying of Elisha which he spoke" (2 Kings 2:22). Elisha says—what grace for these men burdened under the consequences of the divine curse: "I have healed these waters: there shall not be from thence any more death or barrenness" (2 Kings 2:21). Such is the ultimate result of the witness of the Holy Spirit in Israel in the end times. Spiritual blessing replaces all the misery that has weighed down a part of this poor people, given over to apostasy. This is the main great fact represented in type by Elisha's dwelling at Jericho.

But another fact should not be passed over in silence (2 Kings 2:23-24). Elisha goes up to Bethel. Little boys, representing unintelligent, mocking, unbelieving people, come forth from Bethel just at the moment when the prophet is going to meet God in His house, in the place of His unchangeable promises. What an anomaly! Children, created to give praise, mock the man of God! those of an age characterized according to God's thoughts by trust and respect for such who are above them insult the prophet! Instead of recognizing the God of the promise, they mock His servant and despise him. "Go up, bald head!" they cry out to him, because in his person he is showing signs of decrepitude, of old age (just as the remnant in the Psalms, Psa. 71:9,18), and of reproach. Yet nonetheless the law declares such a man to be clean and not defiled (Lev. 13:40-41). Those of whom God should have expected simplicity of faith reject the representative and witness of the Messiah, identified with the feeble, bowed down remnant, and make fun of his appearance. It would seem too that they are mocking His master, Elijah. "Go up, bald head!" they say. They do not believe in Elijah's having been taken up. Folly like this is not even proper for

children! Where is the promise of His coming? Is not the world the same today? These insults are so much the more odious in that they are directed at the Spirit of Christ, come back in grace and not in judgment as Elijah. Elisha turns back, for he has the promises before him and not judgment, “and cursed them in the name of Jehovah.” They become the prey of a pitiless, cruel power that seizes and tears them.

“And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria” (2 Kings 2:25). The apostate people did not want Bethel, but the prophetic remnant after having recovered the promises made to Christ withdraws to Carmel. He comes to “a fertile field” to enjoy peace and fellowship with his God there. There it was that Elijah had gone up after the judgment of the priests of Baal; there Elisha ascends after cursing the mockers. Carmel was a place of intercession for Elijah; from there a gracious rain of blessing had fallen upon Israel. “The Spirit,” says Isaiah, shall “be poured upon us from on high... and the wilderness become a fruitful field (a Carmel)... and righteousness dwell in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isa. 32:15-19). Thus we have here come in type to the close of a cycle, to millennial blessing.

Elisha’s return to Samaria brings the prophet back, in a measure, to the midst of our historical events.

In bringing this important chapter to a close, let us briefly summarize the career of Elijah, now completed, and that of Elisha in this passage.

Elijah, the great prophet of the law, brings this broken law to God at Horeb. He judges the prophets of Baal; he judges Ahab and Jezebel; he judges Ahaziah and his satellites by fire from heaven; he designates Hazel and Jehu as executors of judgment. In this he is not a type of Christ, except insomuch as Christ will execute judgment, but after this time of grace. He is, on the other hand, the type of Christ’s forerunner John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets of the old convenant (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:14; Luke 1:17; Matt. 10-12).

Elijah, the rejected prophet, turns to the nations (the widow of Sarepta), raises their dead, and sends showers of blessing down upon Israel. In this capacity he represents the ministry of grace brought in by the Lord.

Elijah retraces Israel’s path as being himself the true Israel, obtains the promises, in grace takes the place that the people had brought upon themselves by their unfaithfulness (Jericho), victoriously crosses the river of death, and is taken up to heaven. This is the path of Christ as servant and prophet in Israel.

Elisha, first a type of the remnant, the servant of Christ the prophet as He had walked upon earth, follows Him to the end in all His walk of holiness and sees Him go up to heaven.

Elisha, the prophetic Spirit of Christ with the remnant, receives the double portion of the Spirit of Christ who has gone up to heaven, retraces the path of Christ except for Gilgal, the circumcision of Christ having taken place at the Jordan, in death. His path above all is a path of grace and of restoration for the inhabitants of the accursed city except for the judgment at the end on the mockers who form a part of the apostate people. The sons of the prophets are the prophetic remnant, the sound but ignorant element of the people before Elisha returns to them with the double portion of Elijah’s spirit. Lastly, Elisha dwells in peace in the fertile field of millennial blessings.

Chapter 3 – 2 Kings 3-8:15 – Elisha

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 2:2-6: Elijah, a Type of Christ

“And it came to pass when Jehovah would take up Elijah into the heavens by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.” The prophets had four stages to cover before being taken up to heaven: Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and the Jordan. At the beginning of his career he had been sent to turn back the heart of the people to the Lord. His mission, faithfully accomplished, had in the end completely failed. Israel, after a momentary turnabout at the destruction of the priests of Baal, had not truly repented, and the kings had persisted in their idolatry. Jesus failed in the same way on His mission in the service of the people returned from their captivity. Now the prophet is sent of God, as is Christ in the gospels, to retrace in the power of the Holy Spirit the path that Israel should have followed, but which it had strewn with unfaithfulness and ruin in failing in its responsibility. “Jehovah has sent me” such are the words of Elijah to his faithful companion at each stage (2 Kings 2:2,4,6). Such also are the words of the Lord in the gospels, and especially in the Gospel of John where He constantly presents Himself as the One sent of the Father.

But let us first consider what Israel’s path had been.

Jehovah, after having made His people to cross the Jordan, had rolled away the shame of Egypt from off them by circumcision at Gilgal, for none of the sons of those who had come out of Egypt had been circumcised in the wilderness (Josh. 5:5-9). Then He had made Jericho, the stronghold of the enemy, to fall before Israel, bringing this city under interdict and curse in order at last to introduce His people into the joy of the blessings previously promised to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 35:9). Had Israel kept themselves in these blessings? In no wise! “All their wickedness:” the prophet Hosea later says to them, “is in Gilgal; for there I hated them: because of the wickedness of their doings, I will drive them out of my house, I will love them no more” (Hos. 9:15). And again, “Come to Bethel, and transgress! at Gilgal, multiply transgression!” (Amos 4:4). Jericho, the place of the curse, had been rebuilt by Hiel the Bethelite contrary to the express command of Jehovah (1 Kings 16:34). Bethel itself under Jeroboam had become the prime center of idolatry (1 Kings 12:29), where the sins of Israel had been heaped up.

Elijah is called to retrace this path, strewn with so much defilement; only his faith, while at every step undeniably establishing the ruin of the people, again sees and finds the first blessings instituted by God, blessings which He had not given up bringing to fruition. Elijah recognizes Gilgal and Bethel according to the thoughts of God, in the same spirit which had caused him to build his altar of twelve stones in the presence of the prophets of Baal. He goes there as one who is sent, in the power of the Holy Spirit, without being in any way contaminated by their defilements. He faithfully follows the path that Israel ought to have followed and in which they had miserably failed, for if they had answered to the purpose of God by a true judgment of the flesh at Gilgal, they would have dwelt with Jehovah at Bethel in the enjoyment of all His promises. Elijah, led by the will of God, walks alone in this path, where he is but the type of One greater than he.

In effect, that which the prophet could only accomplish in figure was realized at the coming of the Lord. When He entered upon the scene, opportunity was again offered the Jewish people to recover under Emmanuel the blessings that had been lost. The baptism of repentance administered by John the Baptist, this Elijah which was to come, then became Israel's Gilgal. It was necessary to come there in repentance, confessing one's sins, in order again to find blessings under the reign of Messiah. Jesus, making the Jordan to resemble Gilgal in His baptism, came to associate Himself with some of the excellent of the earth, who by repentance had become children of the Kingdom and heirs of the promise to which they had lost access. In this way the shame of Egypt was rolled away from then anew; the flesh must undergo death, for it had proven that it could not enter into possession of the promises. The history of the people in the flesh was ended, but a new Israel, the true Israel, began in Christ. Personally He had no need of this path. He was the Holy One and had ever been that, but He manifested publicly at the Jordan at the beginning of His ministry —also at His birth and when He was "called out of Egypt" —that separation from evil, holiness, and righteousness were His character; only He associated Himself with the very first movement of the Spirit in those who came to John the Baptist confessing their sins.

But the nation as a whole had rejected Him.

Elijah went up from Gilgal to Bethel. This was also Christ's path. Having as its starting point a full consecration to God, it of necessity culminated in the promises that the God of Jacob had made to Israel (Gen. 28:13-15). He alone, Christ, by virtue of His perfection, was worthy to obtain all the promises of God. Throughout His entire life He had chosen Bethel, the house of God; He had made Jehovah Himself, who hid His face from His rebellious people, His refuge and His dwelling place (Psa. 91). Israel should never have left this place of refuge. Christ alone abode there. As we have seen, Bethel had become for Israel a house of idols. What must Elijah have felt, but above all, what must the Lord have felt, on seeing this holy dwelling place with the blessings which it promised all defiled by the sin of his people!

Therefore to Christ alone, the obedient Man, henceforth belonged the promises. But was He about to enjoy them? No. Let us ask Elijah; he is not called to remain at Bethel; Jehovah is sending him further. He must abandon the place of the promises in order to go down to Jericho. That is where the Lord is sending him. Israel had long ago encountered this obstacle in going up from Gilgal. There they had met with divine power overthrowing the walls erected by the enemy. God had then pronounced a curse upon this city; it was never to be rebuilt (Josh. 6:26). But what had Israel done with Jericho? A man from Bethel had rebuilt the accursed city!

Elijah goes down there at God's order. He must follow the path of unfaithful Israel and verify it. Was not the people like the man in the parable who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of thieves —the nations —who plundered him? Christ went down there also, but not, as Elijah, simply to take account of things there. It was that He might feel in His soul the curse pronounced upon the people, to take and to bear in their place the wrath of God's government against this unfaithful nation.

From Jericho Elijah is sent to the Jordan; he leaves Israel and Canaan in crossing this river, such a precious type of death. Elijah crosses through this death dryshod by virtue of his prophet's mantle and in the power of the Spirit he possessed. So it was with Christ; but He did that which Elijah could not do, tasting the terrible reality of death before conquering it and coming forth on the other side in resurrection. Elijah passed through it only in figure and without being himself affected by it; the Lord alone passed through its reality as the termination of His course; He humbled Himself unto death, but it could not hold Him. It was divided before the power of the eternal life which had gone down into it. Having vanquished death, he was marked out Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:4).

Elijah leaves Canaan, the land of promise and of Israel's inheritance, with nothing more than his prophet's mantle. Though he had visited Bethel, he did not stop there; he took away nothing of that which might have belonged to him as a man of God. So it was with Christ, too, for it was said of Him: "(He) shall have nothing" (Dan. 9:26). But it is there that a new era began for Him. God had sent Him into death. Could He disobey? On the contrary, He resolutely set His face to go there. He left Canaan, His inheritance and His rights, but He knew beforehand that it was in order to go up into heaven, once He had passed through death. Elijah knows this too, but he goes there alive, having passed through only the shadow of the tomb.

Jehovah who was sending His servant on step by step had in mind to introduce him into another world. Thus Elijah received his reward for a life of devotion —doubtless mixed with a measure of human weakness —to the One who had sent him. But Christ receives the reward of unbroken devotion extending even to the sacrifice of Himself. It was also, as we shall see in speaking of Elisha, the starting point of a double spiritual power for the prophet's companion.

Let us be quick to remark that it is not a matter of finding, in all this history, a type of the Savior and of His work of redemption accomplished at the cross. The typical account does not have this work in view; that will become clearer when we add the story of Elisha to that of Elijah. Our subject here is Christ the Man of God (although He was much more than that), the prophet sent by God, come to Israel to bear testimony to its ruin and to the judgment that is the consequence (a testimony which had begun with John the Baptist, this Elijah which was to come), but at the same time to the unchangeable promises of God, which could not be attained except by Christ, a Man without sin, who could share them with His restored people Israel.

The result of all this, as throughout the rest of the Old Testament, is that we must not look for the blessing, properly speaking, of the Church here. The history of Elijah and of Elisha bears uniquely upon Israel. Yet nevertheless, the rapture of Elijah, as that of Enoch, speaks to us in type of the rapture of the saints, of which the Church forms a part. One might say that the rapture is mysteriously concealed in Elijah's ascension,1 whereas it is portrayed in that of Enoch. In the first case, Christ is in view; in the second, those "that are Christ's!'

Let us remark in respect to this, that two men, Enoch and Elijah, have gone up to heaven without passing through death, whereas only one, Christ, has been raised from among the dead in order to ascend up into heaven;2 this is why He is called "the Firstborn from among the dead," for He precedes the saints of whom He is the First-fruit in resurrection. Others who had died were raised before Christ, but for earth, never for heaven. They were subject to dying again, whereas Christ, having been raised from among the dead, will die no more; death has no more dominion over Him.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 2:1-12: The Ascension of Elijah

Elijah’s history as a prophet of judgment ends in 2 Kings 1. 2 Kings 2 presents the end of his career and the mysterious happenings that accompanied this great event.

In the Word we meet many mysteries, secrets hidden from all eternity in the heart of God, things that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and that have not entered into the heart of man. These mysteries remained unknown under the old covenant, but there is not a single one which is not revealed to us by the Spirit of God in the New Testament. Yet nevertheless, despite this revelation the Word is full of mysterious things which spiritual intelligence alone discovers. The Lord could make them clear to us in a few words, but for our greatest profit and for the greatest joy of our souls He allows us to discover them. It is only by study done with prayer in dependence upon the Holy Spirit and by seriously applying ourselves to the things of God that we find the key to these enigmas. Thus we learn to recognize a hidden sense in a fact that appears to be simple, just like a diamond that an ignorant person takes as an ordinary stone, but which dazzles with its brilliance the one who applies himself to cut it. The second part of John 1 and chapter 21 of the same Gospel (John 21) are full of these hidden treasures. The same is true of our chapter (2 Kings 2); scarcely another can surpass it in interest, in intimate experiences, in prophetic revelations, in majestic grandeur. In presenting Elijah and Elisha to us it speaks of Christ and of His Spirit; it is above all else a typical chapter.

More than once, as for example in the story of the widow of Sarepta (cf. Luke 4:26), God honors the prophet Elijah by making use of him to portray certain specific qualities of His Well-beloved, but the last day of his prophetic career is used to illustrate the life, the death, and the ascension of the Messiah, and the blessings which were bound to flow from thence upon His people. This privilege of Elijah’s is in a measure that of every believer, for each of us is called upon to reproduce the qualities of Christ in the world. If it is true that we are “in Him” before God, it is also true that He is “in us” before the world, and that we are called to manifest Him before the eyes of all. If a Christian is faithful, he will be a copy that will at very first glance make its original known. Whoever does not see in this chapter the truth of which we are speaking has in fact seen nothing. Only, we have said, all is presented to us in a mysterious light. That which adds to the mystery is that Elijah is not alone. Elisha, his fellow prophet and his servant, does not leave him for even an instant and sees him going up to heaven; then he returns to “the sons of the prophets,” whose circumstances take up the rest of our history.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 25:27-30: The End

In the thirty-seventh year of the carrying away, Evilmerodach, king of Babylon, took Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) out of prison and maintained him at his court all the rest of his life. The lamp that seemed extinguished began again to shed a feeble glimmer, proof that the Lord is always mindful of the promises made to David, His anointed, and that in spite of everything His grace is watching over this guilty race. In fact a day would come, and it was not far off, when according to Isaiah, the Spirit would announce liberty to the captives and proclaim the year of Jehovah’s favor, the acceptable year of the Lord. Would the people have it then? They rejected Jehovah’s Anointed even as they had rejected Jeremiah and all the prophets before him, but in spite of all, God’s promise will be fulfilled as to them, and their final jubilee will be held when the sword of judgment will have accomplished its strange work upon earth, and the everlasting gates shall be lifted up to let the King of glory enter!

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Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 25:22-26: Gedaliah

Nebuchadnezzar establishes Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the people left in the land to be vinedressers and laborers. This Ahikam had saved Jeremiah in the days of Jehoiakim, when even as Urijah the prophet, he had prophesied against Jerusalem (Jer. 26:24). No doubt this action had had its influence upon the king of Babylon, who respected and protected Jeremiah. Gedaliah dwelt at Mizpah, a strong city that Asa, king of Judah, had built with the stones of Ramah (1 Kings 15:22). It was there that Jeremiah went, and there all those from the surrounding regions who had escaped together with the poor people that were left came to seek the protection of Gedaliah, this noble lieutenant of the king of Babylon. He reassured the people, swearing to them that they had nothing to fear in accepting their servitude to the Chaldeans.

For this poor remnant there was a respite of several months. They gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance (Jer. 40:12). The worship of the Lord even seems to have been held in honor again, now at a time when the temple had been completely destroyed and ruined. At least there was a “house of Jehovah” to which those who mourned over Israel’s condition could go up. The captains of the forces that remained gathered around Gedaliah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah of the royal seed at their head. This latter, however, came with evil purposes, sent by Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, and pushed, no doubt, by his own ambition. Gedaliah warned by Johanan, one of the captains, of the treachery being planned, refused to believe it and to have part in the murder of Ishmael (Jer. 40:13-16). Ishmael smote him in a cowardly manner, thus for the last time rebelling against the king of Babylon’s authority. He massacred the governor’s followers and the Chaldean warriors who were found there. On the second day he killed the men who, perhaps ignorant and not free from heathen practices but with broken hearts, had come to seek the Lord; and led captive all the remainder of the people who were at Mizpah along with the king’s daughters to the Ammonites (Jer. 41:4-10). Johanan and the captains of the forces followed him, found him near the waters of Gibeon, defeated him, and recovered the captives from him, while he succeeded in escaping with eight men and going to Baalis.

These delivered captives, filled with apprehension and wanting to go to Egypt, consult the Lord through Jeremiah to secure an answer according to their desires, but in fact they had decided to disobey if this answer would not be favorable to their purpose. The prophet solemnly warned them. If they would stay, this would be their salvation, for blessing always accompanies the accepting of God’s judgment when the soul humbly submits and in spite of everything counts upon him to bless. To go down to Egypt where they thought they would find

security would be to go on to inevitable judgment (Jer. 42).

In their pride the leaders do not want to accept humiliation, and they treat the word of God as a lie. Is it not always so when God presents His word which condemns the world and the will of man to souls who have chosen the world and their own self will? In face of the most clear sentence they say: “Thou speakest falsely; Jehovah our God hath not sent thee to say” this (Jer. 43:2). Thus they do not listen to the word of the Lord. Obstinate in their purpose to the end, they revolt against God and take with them Jeremiah and faithful Baruch, not wanting to leave behind these witnesses to their disobedience and of their unbelief. They forget only one thing, that they are carrying with them the Word that condemns them. Jeremiah continues to the end in his faithful exercise of the gift of prophecy that God had entrusted to him. At Tahpanhes, just as at Jerusalem, he is a witness of the true God. He announces the future invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, who at that time would remember these revolts (Jer. 43).

These wretched folk begin again to serve other gods in the land of Egypt to which they had fled. Their state is described to us in these words: “They are not humbled unto this day, neither have they feared nor walked in My law, nor in My statutes which I set before you and before your fathers” (Jer. 44:10). So God declares that of all those who had gone down to Egypt, except for “a very small company” that would escape (Jer. 44:28), “none of the remnant” should “escape or remain, so as to return into the land of Judah” (Jer. 44:14).

The people openly declare their will to continue sacrificing “to the queen of the heavens,” and attribute to her the prosperity which they had formerly enjoyed at Jerusalem (Jer. 44:17-18). The predicted calamity overtakes them in Egypt, the Lord delivering Pharaoh-hophra into the hands of the king of Babylon (Jer. 44:30)

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 24:18 - 25:21: Zedekiah

Zedekiah was Jehoiachin’s uncle and had been established in office by the king of Babylon, who had changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah. His mother, Hamutal, was a daughter of Judah; we shall not repeat our remarks previously made about her.

In setting Zedekiah into office, Nebuchadnezzar counted on having a king dependent upon himself who would not ferment new revolts. Zedekiah’s two predecessors had obliged the king of Babylon to make two expeditions against Jerusalem, but now he expected to have peace with this proud, turbulent nation that submitted to his scepter. The prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 17) in a parable describes the politics and purposes of Nebuchadnezzar. The great Babylonian eagle had cropped off Jehoiachin, the top of the young shoots of the cedar of Lebanon, and had carried him away to Babylon. He had then taken the seed of the land — Zedekiah — and planted it by great waters like a willow tree. It had become a vine, spreading, but not high, for the king of Babylon wanted to have an abased royalty in Judah dependent upon him. This vine turned toward another great eagle, the Pharaoh of Egypt, instead of remaining in submission to the first. God declares through the prophet what the result would be.

“Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon” (2 Kings 24:20). This act was an infamous and sacrilegious act in the eyes of the Lord, and this is why: Nebuchadnezzar “had made him take oath by God” (2 Chron. 36:13). And Ezekiel tells us that he “made a covenant with him, and brought him under an oath” (Ezek. 17:13). Thus to all his other transgressions this king was adding the breaking of an oath made in the name of the Lord. Doing this before the idolatrous nations, he demonstrated before them that he had no regard for the God to whom he pretended to belong. Chronicles registers four reasons for the judgment of this king: He did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke to him on behalf of Jehovah; this was rebellion against the word of the Spirit of God. He revolted against Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against returning to Jehovah (2 Chron. 36:12-13). As to the first point, so often repeated about these latter kings of Judah, we are not told about those who immediately preceded Zedekiah that their idolatry was as dreadful as that of Manasseh, or at least the details are not given to us. But as to Zedekiah, we are informed first of all by Chronicles (2 Chron. 36:13-14), where we are told that together with all the chief of the people, he “defiled the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem”; and the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision (Ezek. 8) gives us details of these abominations. “The image of jealousy,” This Astarte set up by Manasseh which “provoked Jehovah to jealousy” was there at the entry of the temple; within the court and in the “chambers of imagery” all sorts of idols had been painted, before which the elders were burning incense; at the entry of the northern gate of the house women were weeping for Tammuz—probably Adonis; at the entry of the temple between the porch and the altar men were worshipping the rising sun. The thoughts of the hearts of the people were no better. Instead of recognizing that God’s judgment had overtaken them because of their unfaithfulness, they said: “We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, in serving wood and stone “ (Ezek. 20:32). The same prophet also presents to us the moral state of the prophets, the priests and the princes. Everywhere there was violence, profanation, dishonest gain, extortion, and rapine (Ezek. 22:23-31); see also Jer. 32:30-35).

Zedekiah’s revolt might have had plausible political motives in the eyes of the world. As happens today too, it won the sympathy of all those who chafed under Babylon’s yoke. But this yoke was according to God, and the Lord proclaimed this in a visible way by the prophet Jeremiah who walked through the city bearing a wooden yoke upon his neck. The king of Judah ought to have known and remembered this, had he had the least concern to serve the Lord. But this man, so brave to revolt, down deep was filled with terror, fearing to compromise himself before the princes of the people. He was doubtless being encouraged in his actions by the surrounding nations, as we see in Jeremiah 27:3, where the kings of Moab, of Edom, of the children of Ammon, of Tire, and of Zidon had sent their messengers to encourage him to shake off the yoke of Babylon together with them. The chief men of Judah were of the same mind and had their ideas of resistance supported by prophets who used their gifts to lead the people into error and lead them into a path of rebellion against the Lord (Jer. 27:12-22).

One can understand the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar who thrice under three successive reigns was obliged to return to Jerusalem to besiege it, and the rage of this despot to whom everything had been subjected by God (The Lord had proclaimed this openly to him. Dan. 2:37-38) on seeing himself despised and scoffed at by the weak people of the kingdom of Israel who had been brought so low. He made no delay in setting out to punish the revolt. Ezekiel describes his uncertainty about the execution of his vengeance; should he begin with Rabbah of the Ammonites, or with Jerusalem. He practiced divination to know where to begin. Without his being aware of it, the Lord’s hand led him against Judah. “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it!” said Jehovah (Ezek. 21:18-31).

Nebuchadnezzar builds ramparts all around Jerusalem and undertakes a siege which lasts about eight months. Famine intensifies in the city, according to the word of Jeremiah: “And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one of the flesh of his friend, in the siege and in the straitness wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them” (Jer. 19:9). During all this time, despite the innumerable dangers threatening him Jeremiah stands firm for the Lord, according to His word: “I will make thee unto this people a strong brazen wall; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, to save thee and to deliver thee, saith Jehovah; yea, I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible” (Jer. 15:20-21). His word, again and again repeated, is: “Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon.” “Thou shalt go to Babylon.” He gives the same warning to the nations confederated with Judah (Jer. 27:3-11) and to Zedekiah and his people (Jer. 27:12-15). The princes persecute the prophet and seek to put him to death, under pretext that he is weakening the hands of the people. Zedekiah fears the princes (Jer. 38:24). At a given moment Pharaoh with his army comes to the aid of Jerusalem (Ezek. 17:17; Jer. 37:5). The Chaldeans, learning this news, withdraw from Jerusalem. Jeremiah shows the people their fallacy. The army of Pharaoh, he says, will return to the land of Egypt, and the Chaldeans will come again. At the time when the Chaldeans withdraw the prophet goes out of Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to have his portion there among the people (Jer. 37:12). He is made prisoner, accused of being a deserter, persecuted, and thrown into a deep dungeon where he sinks into the mire. The princes of the people are the most fierce against him. Ebed-melch the Ethiopian speaks to the king in his favor and pulls him up out of the dungeon (Jer. 38). The day the city is taken this man is saved, according to the word of the prophet (Jer. 39:15). Zedekiah himself persecutes Jeremiah and shuts him up in the court of the prison (Jer. 32:2-3), but in fact it is the king who is the captive of his captains and of his princes and does not dare resist them. In reality he did not hate Jeremiah, but was under the pressure of the fear of men instead of being governed by the fear of the Lord whom he had despised and dishonored (Jer. 38:24-28). The prophet, with a boldness that rests upon the word and the promises of God, hides nothing from the king of that which was about to take place: destruction, plunder, conflagration. As judgment is approaching, he cries out all its details in the ears of all and in the king’s ears. He says: “Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans; for he shall certainly be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes” (Jer. 32:4); and again: “Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon” (Jer. 34:3). And Ezekiel says: “The prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth; they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby; he shall cover his face that he see not the land with his eyes. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; but he shall not see it, and there shall he die”(Ezek: 12:12-13). These two prophecies were fulfilled to the letter. When Zedekiah, on the occasion of the temporary departure of the Chaldean army, proclaimed a jubilee and ordered that all Israelite servants should be set free, all “the princes of Judah and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land passed between the parts of a calf cut in two to confirm the covenant that they made before the Lord (Jer. 34:18-19; cf. Gen. 15:9), but scarcely was the promise made than they transgressed it, going and taking back their servants to bring them into bondage again. And so judgment was pronounced upon them with greatest energy by the prophet (Jer. 34:20-22).

Only a small remnant who had received the Lord’s message and had delivered themselves over to the Chaldeans had their lives saved (2 Kings 25:11). They were the excellent figs of Jeremiah 24.

Jerusalem is taken. Zedekiah flees with his army toward Jordan. His retinue is dispersed, he is taken, led to Nebuchadnezzar, judged as we have seen, and led away to Babylon, where the king of Babylon “put him in prison till the day of his death” (Jer. 52:11). Only, according to the word of the prophet, he does not die a violent death (Jer. 34:4-5), the Lord paying heed to the least bit of evidence of turning in this poor king who had shown a moment of pity for the servant of the Lord and had listened to his word, although he lacked the courage to follow it and the faith to humble himself before God.

The people are carried away to Babylon; the priests and those who had helped with the resistance die a violent death at Riblah. The last vestiges of the power and prosperity of Judah disappear following this attack. Even the two pillars of the temple are broken in pieces and carried away to Babylon as well as all the brass, the gold, and the silver of the house of God. The Lord had been despised. What should Jachin and Boaz yet have to do at Jerusalem? The strength that was in the Lord had departed through Judah’s unfaithfulness, and God had destroyed it instead of establishing it. Thus ends the history of man, placed under responsibility before God. God must give him up—but His promises are without repentance. He will re-establish the reign of His anointed upon these two marvelous pillars, and this reign will be unshakeable.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 24:7-17: Jehoiachin (Or Jeconiah, or Coniah)

Jehoiachin, otherwise known as Coniah, continues in his father’s path. His mother was Nehusta, the daughter Elnathan of Jerusalem. It appears more and more evident that the mothers of these latter kings had themselves, like their sons, forgotten the Lord. In Coniah’s day, Nebuchadnezzar’s servants besieged Jerusalem. This great king himself then came to take part in the siege in person. Jehoiachin went out to him. He was carried captive to Babylon, along with his mother, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah: “As I live, saith Jehovah, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet upon my right hand, yet will I pluck thee thence; and I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them before whom thou art afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldens. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bear thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. And into the land whereunto they lift up their souls to return, thither shall they not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken vase? a vessel wherein is no delight? Wherefore are they thrown out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah! Thus said Jehovah: Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:24-30).

All the treasures of the king and those of the temple were carried away to the capital of the Chaldeans, and all the noble or able-bodied people, men of war, princes, and craftsmen were taken away captive (2 Kings 24:14-16).

This carrying away having been effected, Jeremiah in a vision sees two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord (Jer. 24), the only place where the true state of the people might be appreciated. One of these baskets was full of very good figs in God’s eyes, like figs that are first ripe; the other of very bad figs. That which men saw was exactly the opposite of that which God reveals to Jeremiah. To the world the good figs were the people remaining at Jerusalem under Zedekiah; to God’s heart they were those carried away from Judah. Their goodness

rested upon the fact that they had submitted to Gods' judgment due their iniquity. This same principle holds true for us, only thanks be to God, we have suffered our judgment in the person of Christ, condemned in our stead upon the cross. Once the sentence was executed, God could look down with favor upon those who had been its objects. "And I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up" (Jer. 24:6). He was able to establish them in His presence forever. They must be perfect for that, and it was in this character that the Lord viewed the poor captive remnant. It is the same for us: in virtue of Christ's judgment God sees us perfect in Him, however wretched we may be in ourselves.

The Lord announces the restoration of the people. "I will bring them again to this land," but at the same time He proclaims that in the future He would give them moral perfection before him, the result of a new covenant in which everything would come from Him. He alone is its author; it will be a covenant of grace, not of responsibility. "And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am Jehovah; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:7).

The "bad figs, which cannot be eaten for badness" (Jer. 24:8), and with which God Himself could do nothing, were those who, not having undergone the first judgment under Jehoiachin, must undergo a second and this time final judgment. Whereas God declared that everything was lost, they, trusting in themselves, were boasting that they were the representatives of the people of God. The land of Egypt, type of the world under the dominion of Satan, suited them very well. Instead of accepting the judgment of God they revolted against Him, as we shall see in the history of Zedekiah.

In the midst of the ruin God opened a door of hope to the people. It was from among those who were carried away that God would raise up a remnant, nucleus of Israel of the future, over whom the king of righteousness, the Anointed of the Lord, would reign after all the sons of David had completely failed in their responsibility. The words of Jeremiah concerning the end of Jerusalem's desolation were later to console and strengthen Daniel's heart when the Babylonian captivity was about to reach its end (Dan. 9:1-3). We find these same words of consolation for people of the carrying away under Jehoiachin in Ezekiel: "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, it is thy brethren, thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel, the whole of it, unto whom it inhabitants of Jerusalem say, Get you far from Jehovah: unto us is this land given for a possession. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries whither they are come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I will even gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where ye are scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away from thence all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances, and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:14-20).

Let us again mention with regard to Jehoiachin, an event related by Jeremiah (Jer. 28) which took place under Zedekiah. A prophet, and there were many of these in this period, Hananiah the son of Azzur, prophesied before Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. According to him, at the end of two years the yoke of the king of Babylon which Jeremiah was bearing on his neck before all the people as a sign was to be broken. At the end of two years the captives of Judah (those that had been carried away under Jehoiachin) were to be brought back to Jerusalem and the holy vessels restored to the house of the Lord. Thereupon he broke the yoke borne by the prophet. He did that which the princes had done who were counseling those who had been carried away not to build houses, in opposition to what Jeremiah had told them (Ezek 11:3). Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: The wooden yoke which Hananiah had broken was to become an iron yoke upon all the nations, and the false prophet was condemned to death because he had "spoken revolt against Jehovah" (Jer. 28:16). Two months after this prophecy God's sentence was carried out.

This little scene shows us what the feelings of the people and of their leaders were, in the midst of God's judgments. They did not accept these judgments and did not submit themselves to them. Their national pride would not stand this humbling; neither they nor their king would turn to God to seek His will.

Thus, all along we have had occasion to observe through the prophets that the hearts of the people were desperately evil, and that their state necessarily called for God's judgment.

Just as it was necessary to accept the judgment, so it was necessary to bear it patiently until the end of the seventy years assigned it by the Lord. So Jeremiah wrote to those taken captive under Jeconiah (Jehoiachin): "Build houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Jehovah for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jer. 29:5-7). At the appointed time there was to be a restoration. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Jehovah, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you in your latter end a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 23:36 - 24:7: Jehoiakim

The same observation applies to this king's mother as to the mother of Jehoahaz. Her name is Zebuddah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. She probably came from one of the cities of Judah. Jehoiakim, at first tributary to Pharaoh, then becomes tributary to Nebuchadnezzar whose reign began the fourth year of Jehoiakim. The Lord's warnings are lavished upon him by Jeremiah (Jer. 22:13-19) and other prophets; they are not heeded. He slays Urijah, a prophet who prophesied against Jerusalem and against Judah, but who, lacking faith in presence of the king's murderous plans, fled to Egypt (Jer. 26:20-23). Jeremiah also runs the same dangers, but this man of God trusts in the word of the Lord: "And I, behold, I appoint thee this day as a strong city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land; against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee saith Jehovah, to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:18-19; see also Jer. 6:27; 15:20-21). The Lord watches over him according to this word. When in his unbelief the king, after having cut up the roll of the prophecy of Jeremiah with a penknife and thrown it into the fire, seeks further to seize the prophet and his faithful companion, Baruch, we are told that "Jehovah hid them" (Jer. 36, especially Jer. 36:23, 26).

Jeremiah had begun to prophesy in the thirteenth year of faithful Josiah when the people were still enjoying the prosperity which the faithfulness of the king had procured for them, but the people had not listened. Then the prophet announced the seventy years of captivity under the yoke of Babylon (Jer. 25:11), the destiny of all the nations, at the head of whom he placed Jerusalem, comparing it to the idolatrous peoples, and finally, the destiny of Babylon itself (Jer. 25:17-29). This account indicates what the universal monarchy begun by Babylon would be like, regardless of how short its dominion might be by comparison with the long Assyrian dominion. But Assyria had never formed a compact kingdom, well established and universally recognized like that of Babylon.

Jehoiakim had changed masters. He could hardly wait to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. After his land had in part become a prey for all his neighbors (2 Kings 24:2), this monarch went up against him and bound him with chains of brass to take him away to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6). We learn through Jeremiah what word the Lord had pronounced concerning him: “Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost” (Jer. 36:30).

“Verily, at the commandment of Jehovah it came to pass against Judah, that they should be removed out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done; and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and Jehovah would not pardon” (2 Kings 24:3-4). From the time of Manasseh this irrevocable decree had gone forth from the Lord; it had been suspended during Josiah’s reign, and would have remained so during the reigns of his successors had they been willing to listen (Jer. 25:1-11). There were two causes for this final judgment: idolatry, and innocent blood; and Jehoiakim, like Manasseh, had shed the latter according to his power in Jerusalem, the city that has killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to it.

From thenceforth Pharaoh came not again any more out of his land (2 Kings 24:7), the Babylonian empire having deprived him of all his possessions from the Nile to the Euphrates.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 23:31-35: Jehoahaz

All God’s favor under the reign of Josiah, the blessing and the joy with which the Lord had filled the hearts of the people, bear no results in the successors of this king. Jehoahaz, chosen and proclaimed king by the people in his father’s stead, “did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all this his fathers had done” (2 Kings 23:32). He is linked not to Josiah, but to his unbelieving and idolatrous fathers and he is not numbered in the line of faith. It is not possible to have Josiah or Abraham as father without producing fruits meet for repentance. Here the ax was being laid to the root of the tree and Judah’s royalty was about to pass through its last convulsions before being finally cut off. Mothers issuing from among the people of God are henceforth without influence, whether because there is no more ear to hear them, or whether because they themselves take part in the ruin. Hamutal, the wife of Josiah and mother of Jehoahaz, was the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah and apparently of the priestly race (cf. Josh. 21:13). Her son reigns only three months, and yet finds time to do evil and by his conduct toward God to gainsay that which Josiah had established.

Pharaoh-nechoh avenges himself upon him for the opposition of Josiah who had foolishly supported the Assyrian by seeking to prevent the march of the Egyptian army. Bound with chains, Jehoahaz is led to Egypt and dies there. Pharaoh takes no account of this royalty established by the people. Jeremiah prophesies about him: “Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus said Jehovah concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went forth out of this place: He shall not return thither any more; for he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more” (Jer. 22:10-12). Nechoh takes Eliakim, the son of Josiah, and establishes him king “instead of Josiah his father,” changing his name to Jehoiakim. This latter becomes servant and tributary to the king of Egypt and gives Pharaoh the gold and silver that he gathers up through taxes.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 23:28-30: Pharaoh-Nechoh

Josiah’s end does not correspond to the initial blessings of his reign. We have seen that by special grace God had accorded external rest to him, so that his testimony might develop in peace. It was Josiah himself who now allowed himself to be drawn into war. The time had come when, according to prophecy, the power of the Assyrian which had been weighing so heavily upon all the peoples was to be broken to give place to the universal empire of Babylon. Nechoh goes up with an Egyptian army against the king of Assyria. Josiah takes the Assyrian’s part against Pharaoh, something that God had in no wise commanded him. What did he have to do with supporting the tottering structure of this power, Israel’s cruel enemy? Through prophecy he knew that the final ruin of the Assyrian was near. Was he commissioned by God to correct world happenings or to lend his support in them? Nothing in this world’s condition can be improved in God’s eyes, and we know that this world is already judged. Josiah had been set apart from all the course of this world to serve the Lord, he and his people, and we see him meddling in politics! He does not have to wait long for the result: the world punishes us for our intervening in its affairs. “What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah?” Pharaoh, who is conscious of being an instrument of God, says to him: “God... is with me. God has told me to make haste,” and “the words of Nechoh [came] from the mouth of God” (2 Chron. 35:20-22). From the moment that he entered upon this path, Josiah lost his discernment of the mind of the Lord and was no longer able to recognize the word of his mouth.

It is always so. Spiritual intelligence and a true understanding of the Word are linked to true separation from all that makes up the world, including its politics. And for the rest, the child of God will always be a terribly poor diplomat, because he cannot avoid letting himself be governed by moral principles to which the world pays no heed. But on the other hand, who can know the world’s future like the Christian? A simple child in the faith cleaving to the Word of God through his knowledge of the future will be able to instruct the greatest politician, for such a child knows all its details according to the revelation God has given him of them.

Josiah must suffer for his doings, for this intervention was serious unfaithfulness for a man favored by the blessings and the fellowship of his God. He was killed by Pharaoh at Megiddo, and buried in his sepulcher. Jeremiah lamented for the end of this pious servant of Jehovah

(2 Chron. 35:25).

The Final Downfall—2 Kings 23:31-25:30

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 23:21-23: The Passover

“And the king commanded all the people saying, Hold the passover to Jehovah your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant. For there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah was this passover holden to Jehovah in Jerusalem” (2 Kings 23:21-23).

The celebration of the passover is given us here in few words, whereas Chronicles describes it at length (2 Chron. 35:1-19); but this event has too great an importance in the history of the revival to fail to arrest the reader’s attention for a moment. We have just spoken of the two great principles which characterize revival in the end times: breaking with the idolatry of the world or its religious traditions, and returning to the Holy Scriptures. Following these two facts and as consequence of them we have the celebration of the Passover.

The Passover as an institution had first of all been celebrated in Egypt. The people of Israel had been redeemed from the land of bondage by the blood of the passover lamb. Through it, God’s judgment which overtook Egypt was turned aside from Israel. The people, placed under the sprinkling of the blood, ate the passover. It was a figure of the appropriating of the sacrifice of Christ that faith does for us once for all: this symbol corresponds to what is said of the Christian in John 6:53.

The memorial of this deliverance comes next. It was repeated each year on the fourteenth day of the first month (Ex. 12:14, 26-27, 45). This memorial was celebrated by all the people. In normal circumstances no one in Israel could abstain from it, under penalty of being “cut off from Israel.” As a first condition to partake, it was necessary to be circumcised (Ex. 12:48). This sign was the sign of the separation to God by the judgment of sin and the cutting off of the flesh. And so, at the time of entering into the land of Canaan, after the passage of the Jordan, all those who belonged to the generation whose fathers had fallen in the wilderness and who had not been circumcised were circumcised at Gilgal. “The reproach of Egypt” was thus rolled away from them, and they could celebrate the Passover in the plains of Jericho (Josh. 5:6-12).

By the fact that it was given to a redeemed and circumcised people, the memorial became the symbol of the unity of the people of God. The Passover was thus at the same time the remembrance of redemption and the proclamation of the unity of the people.

The Spirit of God shows us that this celebration was a fundamental institution, first of all in traversing the wilderness (Num. 9:1-14) and then upon entering Canaan (Josh. 5:10). From that time on the Word does not mention it again until the days of Hezekiah, not as though it had not been observed under the judges, under David, Solomon, and the kings, but it was not the special object presented by the Holy Spirit; whereas we see the feasts of the seventh month, especially the feast of tabernacles, occupying a preponderant place under the reign of Solomon.

At the time of Hezekiah’s revival, the Passover was not celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month, but of the second month (2 Chron. 30:15), the date authorized by the Word for those who were unclean or on a journey at the time of the celebration of the feast (Num. 9:11). The priests found themselves in the first situation, having lacked the zeal to sanctify themselves, they were unclean, and Hezekiah acts in consequence of this. Josiah’s Passover was celebrated on the appointed date of the first month (2 Chron. 35:1). The need of sanctifying oneself for the Lord was much more generally felt than it had been under Hezekiah, for the Word of God was better understood, and the desire to obey Him was more real.

At the time of Erza, the Passover was celebrated by “the children of the captivity” on the day consecrated thereto, “for the priests and the Levites had purified themselves as one man” (Erza 6:19-20).

Therefore, in the measure that we advance in the history of the ruin of the people of God, the greater the importance to the faithful the Passover and the state of soul appropriate to it acquire; and, quite remarkably, the sign of the unity of the people becomes all the more important as the people are dispersed all the more by the ruin.

Is it needful to add that these truths answer to the present day? The Lord’s Supper, which on that night in which Jesus was betrayed replaced the Jewish Passover as a memorial, is served and the Lord’s Table is set up for His redeemed people and for them alone. The Lord’s death is proclaimed there until He returns. At the same time this table is a rallying center for the people of God, and it is the proclamation of the unity of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17), even at a time when everything apparently contradicts this truth, or even when, as at the time Hezekiah, those who proclaim it are laughed at and mocked (2 Chron. 30:10).

The history of the Passover does not end here, and in fact shall never be ended. A willing people will yet celebrate it upon earth during Christ’s millennial reign (Ezek. 45:21). It will be celebrated at the same time in the heavenly kingdom where the glorified saints will be gathered around the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5).

Thus since redemption is accomplished, the memorial of that which has acquired it for the people of God lasts, come what may, and will last throughout eternity. The remembrance of the death of Christ is always necessary for it is the sole foundation for every blessing.

Let us return now to Josiah’s Passover. The account in our book, though very brief, is characterized by an important expression: “As it is written in this book of the covenant”(2 Kings 23:21). No doubt, as we see in Chronicles, the people under Hezekiah had also come to celebrate it according to “the word of Jehovah” and “the law of Moses, the man of God” (2 Chron. 30:12,16), but under Josiah the written Word, marvelously preserved and rediscovered in the temple, takes on a yet much greater importance. Nothing that pertains to this memorial should be done without the Word. It was “according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon” that they were to prepare it (2 Chron. 35:4); “according to the word of Jehovah through Moses” (2 Chron. 35:6) that one ought to present the sacrifice to the Lord (2 Chron. 35:12); “according to the ordinance” that one should roast it with fire (2 Chron. 35:13); “according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king’s seer” that each occupied his place to observe the due order according to God in singing and praising (2 Chron. 35:15). And all was done “according to the commandment of king Josiah” (2 Chron. 35:16), that is to say, the instrument of this revival had the intelligence neither to communicate nor order the people to do anything but that which was in accord with

the Scripture.

Let us take these things to heart. Josiah, warned by the Lord, knew perfectly well that in doing this he would not stop the course of judgment; he also knew that he would be gathered to his fathers before the evil would come and that his eyes should not see it (2 Kings 22:20), but he had but one thought. Feeling with deepest humiliation the dishonor inflicted upon the Lord and His worship, he was pressed to honor Him in the midst of the ruin of Israel, in the very place where He had been so dishonored. By all his conduct he was protesting against the infamy which had been committed in Judah under the cloak of religion. He humbled himself under this apostasy, as being responsible for it just as others were, but without being in the least distracted all his activity was directed toward the service of the Lord and toward the cleansing for Him of a peculiar people, however abased or dispersed they might be.

Josiah's era was not marked, as Hezekiah's, by special attacks of the enemy, by trials coming from without or from within. It was a relatively peaceful time when indifference certainly played a greater part than hatred; but whereas the world rested and let things be, Josiah used this lull to show forth greatest activity for his Master.

Our times, we have already said, resemble those times, and the faithful have the same position and the same duties. May we use these end times with their relative calm to render testimony to these three things: separation from the religious and irreligious world which surrounds us, attachment to the Scriptures, and gathering God's children around the Lord's Table until He comes.

Our chapter adds that "all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, Josiah took away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkijah the priest had found in the house of Jehovah" (2 Kings 23:24). Thus, to the end of his career Josiah put into practice the principles he had drawn from the Scriptures. There was no king like him, neither before nor after him, and that was not due to his personal merit nor to his righteousness, but to the fact that the Word of God, mixed with faith in his heart, had become an integral part of himself.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 23:1-20: The Book of the Covenant and the Sanctification of the People

2 Kings 23:1-20

The importance of God's house on earth, that place where the Lord causes His name to dwell, and of the book of the covenant—this now, as we have seen, is what characterizes the spiritual revival under Josiah. Let us not hesitate to repeat: in the times in which we live these two things always characterize a true revival. Interest in the Assembly of the Living God and not in the miserable imitations thereof with which fallen Christendom has replaced it, zeal for the inspired authority of the Holy Scriptures—this is that to which every faithful soul that is seeking the glory of the Lord will be attached today, whatever the cost may be.

The king has all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem gathered about him and goes up to Jehovah's house, having "all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great." He causes to be read before them "all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of Jehovah" (2 Kings 23:2). This book of the covenant included not only the covenant of Sinai, but also that which was made in the plain of Moab, that is to say, all the words of Deuteronomy. It applied exactly to the people's state as it now was; and God had beforehand described it in this book. Deuteronomy spoke above all of obedience and made the blessing or cursing of the people whom God had redeemed from Egypt depend upon obedience to the Word. Here this covenant is renewed: "The king stood on the dais, and made a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart, and with all his soul, to establish the words of this covenant that are written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant." (2 Kings 23:3).

In these end time revivals a powerful effect is produced upon all, although reality is found only in the hearts of the remnant. The book of Jeremiah, who prophesied under Josiah, shows us that in fact the moral state of the people was in no wise changed. They easily consented to the abolition of idolatry through the faithfulness of the king, but their hearts remained as far removed from God as ever. The prophet says: "And Jehovah said unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen what backsliding Israel hath done? She hath gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath committed fornication. And I said, After she hath done all these things, she will return unto me; but she returned not. And her sister Judah, the treacherous, saw it. And I saw that when for all the causes wherein backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce, yet the treacherous Judah, her sister, feared not, but went and committed fornication also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her fornication that she polluted the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And even for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not returned unto me with her whole heart, but with falsehood, said Jehovah" (Jer. 3:6-10. Read also Jer. 5:27-29; 6:9-15, 29; 8:8-13).

In spite of that, a moral constraint upon souls is exercised by means of those who are faithful, even upon those who are in fact afar off from God. In 2 Chronicles 34:33 we see that Josiah "made to serve, all that were found in Israel — to serve Jehovah their God: all his days they did not depart from following Jehovah, the God of their fathers." It is thus that all the people here enter into the covenant. Amon had reestablished all that Manasseh had abolished at the time of his repentance. Josiah in his zeal for God and for God alone, quite different from Jehu's zeal, completely cleanses Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel, as far as his arm could reach. In the fields of Kidron he burns all the objects that had been accumulated in the temple for the worship of Baal, Astarte, and the stars, and carries their dust to Bethel, the initial site of Jeroboam's idolatry. He suppresses (2 Kings 23:5; Zeph. 1:4) the Chemarim — the priests established by the kings of Judah to burn incense before false gods. He completely destroys the lewd statue of the goddess of love which had been set up in house of the Lord, and casts the powder of its ashes on the graves of those who had worshipped her. He does away with the prostitution which had been widespread at Jerusalem under guise of the worship of Astarte. He gathers together the priests who under repentant Manasseh had continued to offer sacrifices to the Lord upon the high places (2 Chron. 33:17). He does not treat them like the Chemarim, but does not allow them to go up to the altar of the Lord at Jerusalem. All fellowship with a religion which, even in being separated from idolatry, had dared to despise the only gathering center for the people, is resolutely broken. In this we find instruction for the day in which we live. This deed of Josiah's shows us that a true revival cannot be associated with worship which is not rendered around the Lord's Table, the only gathering center for His own. Nevertheless, Josiah acknowledges the right of these priests to eat "of the unleavened bread among their brethren" (2 Kings 23:9). The

individual holiness of those whom the Lord had consecrated is fully recognized, but for the moment, if not forever, their functioning in Israel's worship is not tolerated. Josiah furthermore abolishes the horses given to the sun and demolishes and burns the altars which had dared to replace God's only altar. In his zeal for the Lord he even attacks altars built by Solomon (2 Kings 23:13).

He goes still further. His interest extends to all the people of God. He goes to Bethel, condemns all this evil at its source, and thus fulfills the prophecy once pronounced before Jeroboam against the altar where that king had offered up sacrifices (2 Kings 23:15-16; 1 Kings 13:2). However, he spares the sepulcher of the man of God who had pronounced these things. Whatever the unfaithfulness of this man had been, he recognizes what had been done for God by him, also sparing the bones of the prophet of Samaria, the cause of his fall, but who had humbled himself for his error. It is thus that every truly Christian heart acknowledges that which men of God in the past times have done to serve Him, and respects their work, though blemished by failures which caused it to lose its power or spoiled its result (2 Kings 23:17-18).

Lastly, the king goes through all the cities of Israel destroying the temples of the high places without pity for their idolatrous priests whom he exterminates, although since the people had been carried away by the Assyrians, the influence of these to all appearances had been lost. He acts in view of a future restoration; and his heart, fervent in the service of the Lord, is attached to this; for prophets, even during his own reign, were announcing a restoration under the scepter of a king of righteousness and peace.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 21:19-26: Amon

Amon's short reign of two years is characterized by the same impiety as that of his father, even more serious, if this is possible, in that as witness of the judgment inflicted upon Manasseh, and of his repentance and forsaking of his idols, he ought to have received instruction for himself. His mother was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jot-bah. She must have been an Edomite, if Jotbah is the same place as the Jobathah of Israel's journeys (Num. 33:33; Deut. 10:7). It was not without cause, as we have often said, that our book makes discrete allusions to the maternal origins of the kings throughout. Whatever the case may be, to raise up idols that have been destroyed is even worse in the eyes of Jehovah than to set up new ones. It is an insolent despisal of God after He has revealed Himself to us through His ways and His Word that He might make us forsake that which dishonors Him. To return to such is to act as though God did not exist and had not spoken, and this is also what makes Christendom so guilty. God had separated it from idolatry and its immoral principles; it has returned to these principles, as we see when we compare 2 Timothy 3:1-5 with Romans 1:29-32, and later it will return to idols themselves. Amon "forsook Jehovah the God of his fathers"; such is his sentence. For him there was no place left for repentance. He died a violent death just like the last kings of Israel.

Chapters 22:1-23:30 – Josiah

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 21:1-18: Manasseh

Often a period of revival is followed by a faster pace down the pathway of decline; and remarkably, it is not said that God especially emphasizes this state of things by His judgments. The reign of Manasseh, characterized by a real overflow of idolatry, is the longest reign registered in the history of the kings of Judah and of Israel. One cannot judge men's condition by the greater or lesser severity of God's ways toward them. This was precisely the error of Job's friends, who were judging his character according to his tribulations, and in their arguments assumed that men must be relatively righteous by their lack of tribulation. Manasseh began his reign when he was twelve years old and it stretched out for fifty-five years at Jerusalem. His mother's name is given us: Hephzibah — My delight is in her — the very name restored Jerusalem shall be called by the Lord (Isa. 62:4). For the time being Hephzibah had, alas! brought forth a monstrous being, object of the Lord's displeasure. Is it for this reason that neither the father nor the birthplace of Manasseh's mother are mentioned? Manasseh rebuilt the high places destroyed by his father, raised up altars to Baal, made an image of the love-goddess Astarte whose impure worship put even her worshippers to shame, placed her statue in the temple, built altars in the house of the Lord and in its two courts, devoted himself to the worship of the stars, sacrificed his son to Moloch, gave himself up to fortunetellers and enchanters, and by all his conduct caused Jehovah's people to err. There was no king in Judah more abominable than he; nevertheless his reign was prosperous, first of all in its duration, and except on one occasion we do not see that it brought any special calamities upon his people. We repeat what we have already said, God judges the deeds of men according to what they are in relation to Himself, and not according to how they conduct themselves toward the world round about them. Should we conclude that an atheist is any less guilty before God because he has devoted himself to humanitarian causes? In no wise. Men will be judged according to what they have thought of God and His Christ, and if their works do not have the Father and the Son for their object, their works are evil. Such was the case with Cain who attempted to acquire merit for himself by the abundant fruits of his labor, while hating his brother Abel.

Manasseh's deeds called for judgment, but God was not yet done with His testimony in Judah. "And Jehovah spoke by his servants the prophets" (2 Kings 21:10). It is thus that God's Word still remains the only resource in these difficult times, but it is nothing other than the testimony of imminent judgment for the people, judgment from which there is no appeal. "I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipeth a pan, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of Mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt even to this day" (2 Kings 21:13-15). The Lord links their state to their exodus from Egypt. From that time on they had been sinning. Could one, can one say that God has not exercised patience toward those upon whom His name has been invoked?

The Word adds that, "Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem with it from one end to another" (2 Kings 21:16). Thus Manasseh persecuted God's people, those who were innocent of all these infamous deeds. God here leaves us with this terrible sight which called for divine vengeance, but Chronicles, which is always pleased to note the action of grace, gives us information about the end of Manasseh's history. He had, up to a certain time in his history, accepted the suzerainty of the kings of Assyria. Esarhaddon had succeeded Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:37), then Assurbanipal his son. Babylon, which had thrown off the yoke of Asshur under Berodach-baladan, had soon been reconquered and brought back under the dominion of the kings of Assyria. Manasseh, probably enveloped in a conspiracy of all these oriental kingdoms against this harsh servitude to the Assyrians, is led captive to Babylon weighed down with chains of brass. To judge by

history, such was probably the cause of his cruel captivity. But the true cause is revealed to us by the Word. It was Jehovah who brought upon Manasseh and his people “the captains of the host of the king of Assyria” (2 Chron. 33:11).

The purpose of God, who does not desire the death of a sinner was attained. Manasseh humbled himself, judging his entire conduct before God, and God brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then he was as zealous to burn that which he had been worshipping as the pious kings who had preceded his father Hezekiah, and the people followed in the same path. Joel, who prophesied under Manasseh, seems to allude to this event (Joel 2:12-14). Only the high places were not abolished. It was not a revival in the proper sense of the term, but a return to God through the affliction which had caused this wretched man to cry to Him and receive deliverance from all his distress. This subject should be taken up later in our study of Chronicles. The book of Kings stops when it has taken note of the king’s responsibility; that of Chronicles shows us grace acting through judgments to restore him. What a blessed thought, that the hearts of the most hardened may become the objects of grace! How many will be found in the Lord’s presence whose careers, as here, seemed broken by judgment, and who, beyond any doubt, were touched by repentance unto salvation.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 20:12-19: The Embassy From Babylon

A brief passage in Chronicles, the only passage in this book that speaks of all the contents of our chapter, informs us of Hesekiah’s state of soul when the ambassadors were sent by the king of Babylon: “In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death, and he prayed to Jehovah; and He spoke to him and gave Him a sign. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was lifted up; and there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. And Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Jehovah came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chron. 32:24-26). Here we see the king’s feelings when he received the messengers of Babylon. “His heart was lifted up.” At that time under Berodach-baladan Babylon was not yet that which she later became.

Her king had thrown off the over lordship of Assyria and wanted to ward off the return of this power on the offensive by seeking friends among the nations located to the west of his kingdom. He therefore sent a letter and a present to Hezekiah by his ambassadors. Our passage says that Hezekiah “hearkened to them.” Thus they had some request to make of him, some alliance to propose to him against their common enemy, whose yoke Hezekiah had himself thrown off. The Word does not tell us that this alliance was concluded, but that the king received the ambassadors favorably. Here he once more made the humiliating experience that his trust in God was not absolute. According to the account in 2 Chronicles 32:27-31 God had abundantly blessed him for his faithfulness during the first fourteen years of his reign: he had “very much riches and honor,” and it was just at that time that “the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land” arrived. Such was the avowed purpose of Berodach-baladan. As for his secret purpose, he flattered Hezekiah’s pride. On this occasion “God left him to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart” (2 Chron. 32:31). Left to himself, “his heart was lifted up.” He displayed the riches God had given him so that he might vaunt himself before the eyes of these strangers instead of glorifying before these idolaters the God who had saved him by a miracle when he was appointed to death, and who had richly blessed him in replenishing his treasures. These treasures, together with his arsenal, his house, and his domain were passed in review before a jealous world which could not, except merely superficially, be a friend to the saints and the people of God. And lo, in the near future “all... which thy fathers have laid up... [should] be carried to Babylon” (2 Kings 20:17; Isa. 39:6). There was, Chronicles tells us, “wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem,” and Hezekiah had to make painful experience of it. But during the interval his soul had been humbled and restored. He was now prepared, as he says in his writing, to “go softly all [his] years”—the fifteen years of life he yet had before him—“in the bitterness of [his] soul:” Softness and bitterness together! These qualities which seem unable to harmonize, harmonize perfectly for the Christian. To the bitterness of the discipline by which we are broken is joined the unspeakably sweet feelings of the Father’s love, which He has bestowed on us!

Isaiah plays a new role here, that of the Word which penetrates and searches us out. Happy are we if, like Hezekiah, we do not try to hide anything from Him with whom we have to do. The godly king, taken aside, acknowledges and owns everything before the prophet. “What said these men? and from whence came they to thee?” asks Isaiah. “They came from a far country, from Babylon,” answered Hezekiah. Did this “far country” where the prodigal son could live in pleasure far from the face of God (Luke 15:13) have anything to do with the presence of God? These men came “from Babylon; “ cradle both of rebellion against God and of idolatrous worship. Hezekiah had not contracted an alliance with their king, but had bound himself to him by friendship. The prophet asks, “What have they seen in thy house?” The king answers, still with the same sincerity, “All that is in my house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them: “ Then Isaiah announces the judgment of God: “Hear the word of Jehovah: Behold, days come that all that is in thy house, and what thy fathers have laid up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left” (2 Kings 20:14-17). Is this not the final sentence of the Word if our hearts allow themselves to be attracted and puffed up by things of this earth? “And the world is passing, and its lust.” Nothing shall be left!

Hezekiah, having hidden nothing from the Lord, accepts his sentence in all humility. His words recall those of David: “I have sinned against Jehovah,” but they contain yet more: “Good is the word of Jehovah which thou hast spoken” (2 Kings 20:19). With a contrite heart he accepts the consequences of his deed. The testimony which God had entrusted to him does not escape his hands unharmed; on the contrary, it is hopelessly ruined. This revival, begun in the freshness of divine power, ends through the fault of him who had been its instrument. But in a personal way Hezekiah’s heart and conscience had gained through these experiences. If his testimony had been unable to maintain itself and had slipped into ruin, his soul through discipline had recovered its fellowship with the Lord and this humble confidence in Him which it had forsaken for a moment to let itself to be ensnared by the words of the enemy who had flattered his pride.

“And Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; “ Chronicles tells us (2 Chron. 32:26). Blessed result of personal humiliation — it produced the same result in others. When the Assyrian had appeared before the walls of Jerusalem, the king and the people had been of one heart and mind to answer him not and to despise his threats, trusting in the Lord. Discipline having produced its fruits, Hezekiah’s wish “Is it not so? if only there shall be peace and truth in my days!” was fulfilled! “The wrath of Jehovah came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chron. 32:26).

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 20:1-11: Hezekiah's Illness

“In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death” (2 Kings 20:1). As we have already said, this event historically precedes the enemy’s attack against Jerusalem, but it follows it in all three accounts that we have. The book of Chronicles tells us of it in few words, that of Kings at greater length, and Isaiah in great detail, for this prophet adds to it: “the writing of Hezekiah” which is not found in the historical books. There are various reasons for this transposition. The first is that in the sending of the ambassadors Babylon’s role is linked to the illness of Hezekiah. Babylon was destined to cut off the Assyrian under whose jurisdiction it then was, and was henceforth to play the preponderant role in the history of Judah. This role, that of the power transferred to the Gentiles and the establishment of the first universal monarchy, does not begin to appear in God’s ways toward His people until the historical—not the prophetic—role of the Assyrian has ended. The second reason is that it was necessary to set Hezekiah’s faithful career before our eyes before his grievous illness which threatened to put an end to it. From the prophetic point of view, especially in Isaiah, this makes Hezekiah’s tears and supplications all the more poignant. His death might have appeared to have been a judgment of God when his whole life has been spent before Him in integrity. This is also why the writing of Hezekiah is not found in the prophecy properly so called, for it describes the feelings of the remnant appointed to death. In effect, the remnant will be called upon to pass through similar circumstances. Upright in heart, having served God all their lives, like Hezekiah cleansed from evil and from all evil associations, they must realize in their souls what it is to be cut off from the land of the living under the weight of the governmental indignation of God against Israel of which they form part. But they will be delivered and come to life again, as a result of the part they have in the death and resurrection of the Messiah. The third reason is that in the book before us it was important not to interrupt the account that began with the legitimate revolt of Hezekiah, continued with the invasion of Judah when the king’s confidence was put to the test, and ended with his marvelous deliverance in answer to implicit trust in God when all human help was impossible.

After having reached Hezekiah in his circumstances, God’s discipline reached him in his person: “Set they house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). He must die. What misery! He who could say, “Ah! Jehovah, remember, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done what is good in Thy sight” (2 Kings 20:3), this man must die! For a godly Jew, to walk before God in the land of the living was an evident sign of His favor. Was this favor then withdrawn from the king? God would take no account of fourteen years of devotion to Himself, to His cause, and to His house! He was therefore being rejected as a useless instrument, just at the moment when his piety and his confidence in God had shone out in a special way! This kingdom which God had entrusted to him would have fallen into other hands, less pure than his own!

All this speaks to us of that which overtook the Messiah, of whom Hezekiah is but a feeble type. He also must be cut off in the midst of His days, be cast down after having been lifted up. He also, the faithful Witness who had done solely the will of God, had to suffer death; He also had to depart with nothing and lose His kingdom and all His earthly glory. But Christ—and this could not be the case with Hezekiah—suffered these things because He was bearing the iniquity of a great people, and must suffer God’s righteous condemnation in our place. A man like Hezekiah could in no way redeem his brother nor give God a ransom for him (Psa. 49:7); but He could pass through the experience of the wrath of God in His government. And this is what will happen to the remnant. Like Hezekiah, lifting up their voice to God from the depths, they will learn that the Lord will not take heed to their iniquity because He has visited it upon the Messiah.

It is therefore only in the measure in which Hezekiah participates in the experiences of Christ that he can be considered a type of the Messiah in our passage. Personally, just like the Lord, the zeal of the house of God had eaten him up too, but this not without a failure. He could say, “I trust in Thee”; when it came to dying, he seemed to be cut off from the land of the living without cause; only, Hezekiah was a sinner, and as such it was necessary for another to take his place under the judgment of God.

“Hezekiah wept much” (2 Kings 20:3). The Lord never wept because of the lot that was reserved for Him, for He had come into this world to die. He wept over rebellious Jerusalem; He wept before the tomb of Lazarus as He saw the power of death weigh upon poor fallen men, but He never wept for Himself. Only in one sense, like Hezekiah, He “offered up both supplications and entreaties to Him who was able to save Him out of death with strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7), but it was not, like Hezekiah, in order not to die; it was to be saved out of death, to be delivered through resurrection from the horns of the buffaloes, so that the fruit of His work for us might not be lost. As for Hezekiah, tears became him, as they will become the upright remnant. He must learn to accept the sentence of death as being due to him; to say at first without understanding God’s purpose: “What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it (Isa. 38:15); to understand at last, at the end of all his anguish, that the Lord “was purposed to save” him (Isa. 38:20).

God’s answer does not wait long: “And it came to pass before Isaiah had gone out into the middle city that the word of Jehovah came to him saying, Return, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus said Jehovah, the God of David thy father: I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of Jehovah” (2 Kings 20:4-5). Scarcely has Hezekiah’s soul been searched out than the word of the Lord comes to Isaiah. One senses that God had beforehand prepared for the king all that He here accords him in his affliction. Hezekiah is brought back to life by a sort of resurrection. “Isaiah said, Take a cake of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered “(2 Kings 20:7) To all appearances the means had no value, but applied at the prophet’s word it is found to be the power of God unto salvation.

“And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What shall be the sign that Jehovah will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of Jehovah, the third day? And Isaiah said, This shall be the sign to thee from Jehovah, that Jehovah will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah said, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: no, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried to Jehovah, and he brought the shadow back on the degrees by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward” (2 Kings 20:8-11).

Ahaz had set up this dial. Since his reign the shadow had gone forward. Time was passing rapidly and must end in night, in the complete vanishing of the monarchy under God’s judgment. The Lord could hasten this end, for the measure was full, but it pleased Him to answer the desire of the godly king and the prophet’s request by delaying the hour instead of hastening it, thus granting an extension of time to the power of the king. But this miracle has a deeper meaning. It signifies that God could and would overturn all the order of nature and its laws which made the sinner subject to death so that He might accomplish the salvation of His beloved ones. Death no longer retains its fatal course; that life which was declining and which would then, as it were, be cut off from the loom like the weaver’s fabric (Isa. 38:12), would commence anew for the faithful remnant in the resurrection of the Messiah, their representative. For us it begins anew in eternal life by the

resurrection of the Savior. Such is the sign that Hezekiah asks for. His request denoted a complete confidence in God who alone can do the impossible with the impossible. In reversing in Christ that which through sin had become nature's order for us so that He might save us, the Lord assures us that His counsels concerning us will be accomplished.

"On the third day thou shalt go up to the house of Jehovah." It is thus that Christ's death and resurrection give us, at the end of three days, free entry into the sanctuary.

Hezekiah had already received, without asking it, the sign of the enemy's final overthrow (2 Kings 19:29-31) in the fact that God had kept alive, without any human intervention, this remnant from which He would form the new Israel; he learns here by what means this remnant should be saved.

Let us observe before ending this part of Hezekiah's history the prophet Isaiah's remarkable role in all these events. Like the Word of God which he represents, he is the bearer of the sentence of death against the best of men who form part of a sinful, fallen race. Death is decreed, and there is no appeal. This message produces a deep affliction in the soul that receives it. Immediately Isaiah announces the happy news of the king's healing. He then indicates the means by which this healing may be effected, and applies it to the fatal boil. Lastly, he makes known the sign by which, reversing the order of nature, the Lord engages Himself to effect that which He has promised. These things take place in virtue of the mediation of the prophet who cries unto the Lord, for one does not possess the blessing except by the personal intervention of the Lord Jesus. We have here a complete example of that which the gospel brings to the soul of every sinner,.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 18:19-37: Rab-Shakeh's Discourse

The first part of Rab-shakeh's discourse deals with Hezekiah's trust in the Lord, trust which we have seen characterizing his piety. "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?... Now on whom doest thou rely, that thou hast revolted against me?" (2 Kings 18:19-20). Here the formidable pride of the Assyrian is laid bare. Could Hezekiah, deprived of his territory, shut up in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage, resist the army of the Assyrian? The last thought that occurs to the enemy is that one may confide in an invisible God, and that Hezekiah might have other governing principles, other succor than that of the world. If he were trusting in someone, it must be in Egypt. These thoughts increased the king's wrath against Hezekiah. Egypt was exactly the enemy against whom his expedition was directed, and if Hezekiah had revolted it was, so he thought, that he was expecting its help. This was the case with all the surrounding nations who had thrown off the heavy yoke of the Assyrian. Was Hezekiah's case different from all these? Perhaps he was pretending to trust in the Lord. "And if ye say to me, we rely upon Jehovah our God..." (2 Kings 18:22). Empty words! Hezekiah had taken away the high places and the altars of this God, for Sennacherib is ignorant of the true God and confuses Him with the idols which faithful Hezekiah had abolished. You may as well say you are trusting in Egypt! The world can never understand that Christians are not seeking to be allied with the world, and in fact there is nothing astonishing in this skepticism when we look at the condition of Christendom all around us. Is religion menaced with danger? Is it undergoing attacks or persecution? The Christian world immediately has recourse to the governments of this world to avoid this or to be delivered from it. Christendom's behavior and works are founded upon the influence of the world or its financial aid. Their good works have no other support. The unbeliever is justified when he says to us, "But if ye say to me, We rely upon Jehovah our God..: in actual fact, you are not trusting Him any more than we are!" It was not so with Hezekiah. He could let the Assyrian speak, for he knew from what gods he had cleansed his people. He knew upon which God he could count.

But a very serious thing to consider is that the unfaithfulness of Judah had given the enemy an occasion to blaspheme the true God and to deny his existence. Since you had high places and altars, these were the Lord for you, he says. He does not know the Lord except by the idols which Judah had made its gods. He had the right to say to them, You have the same kinds of gods I do, and you serve them in the same way. And now you are saying: As for us, we trust in the Lord! What Lord, pray tell me? The Lord of the high places, or the Lord of the altar you have just set up? Are they different from one another?

And now, it is Jehovah that "said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it" (2 Kings 18:25). Did not the Assyrian have the right to speak about the Lord too, to say, "I have the same God as you, I know Him as well as you"? Are not these same expressions heard daily in the world today? War breaks out between two nations. Which one has God on its side? Both of them call upon His name, sure of the victory. Where is He, the true God? Alas! even among Christian nations—neither on the one side nor on the other. The true God is unknown to both. This was not the case with Hezekiah. His trust in God was being questioned by the enemy who was defying and mocking him. What should he do? Let the enemy talk, but himself hold his peace, looking humbly to God. The enemy was saying, The Lord is with me against you. Let him say so, Hezekiah, and just trust in your God whom the enemy does not know!

The Rab-shakeh speaks in Hebrew to the people upon the wall. Hezekiah's servants beg him to speak in the Syrian language. This he refuses in words of defiance and disdain. The danger of seeing the people become discouraged may have filled Hezekiah with anguish. But the same danger leaves the believer's soul tranquil and peaceful. He has only to keep silence. His trust in God answers to everything.

And now the Rab-shakeh attacks the person of the king. Hezekiah is a deceiver, a seducer (2 Kings 18:29, 32). He is lying to you in persuading you to trust in the Lord (2 Kings 18:30). Do not listen to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:31-32). Listen to the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:28). He will let you live in tranquility; then he will carry you away to "a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive-trees and of honey" (2 Kings 18:32), a land just as full of good things as the land of Canaan. There is where you will find true abundance (cf. Deut. 8:7-10). No doubt you will be in bondage too, but the Assyrian will see that you are happy! Satan has always spoken thus to the hearts of men. Woe to him who listens to him, for the prince of this world never makes a man happy. Is it necessary to reason with him, to enter into controversy, or even conversation with him, even to answer him? Our first parents only proved it too well, to their own ruin and that of their posterity; the man of faith is not tempted to answer him. "But the people were silent and answered him not a word; for the king's command was, saying, Answer him not" (2 Kings 18:36). It is only a matter of keeping silent and leaving the enemy to his threats or to his honeyed words. The people trust the words of the king, their leader, and imitate his faith. God uses this open attack of the Assyrian against God and against His anointed to strengthen and to revive the people.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 18:1-18: Hezekiah and the First Revival

Hezekiah's mother was probably of the priestly or levitical family and no doubt, as we have often noted, the Lord used her in the upbringing of her son, whereas Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, could only have had a bad influence upon him. But whatever may have been the case with these favorable or unfavorable influences, it is grace alone that explains the characters of Hezekiah and of Josiah; the last kings of Judah, ungodly despite their Jewish mothers and their godly father, are the proof of this.

"He did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that David his father had done" (2 Kings 18:3). God traces his faithfulness back to the example given by David, a fact all the more remarkable in that it is not stated of his predecessors. Jotham "did what was right in the sight of Jehovah: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done" (2 Kings 15:34); Uzziah, "according to all that his father Amaziah had done" (2 Kings 15:3); Amaziah "according to all that Joash his father had done (2 Kings 14:3). The Word of God makes the same remarks about Josiah as about Hezekiah (2 Kings 22:2), thus confirming the fact that these two kings returned to that which was at the beginning. One cannot today call a revival a true revival which does not have this character.1 It was the same in the days of Ezra and of Nehemiah. In the very scene of ruin, the people returned to the divine foundations and to the Word of God, at the same time separating themselves from all activity in common and any alliance with the world. In our days, claims are made of being able to create revivals, while still being joined together with professing Christendom which dishonors God, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Word. It was not so with Hezekiah. In no wise did he compromise with the corruption which had been introduced into Judah. Only, what distinguishes him from us, simple Christians, with regard to principle is that Hezekiah had a special authority and responsibility as king, given him by God, and that his duty was to use his own authority to cleanse the people, an activity which, as in the preceding reigns, could well have left his subjects more or less indifferent to his personal piety. The revival was accomplished in the king's heart, the king was its agent, and there might have been a question whether the heart and conscience of the people would follow the impetus thus given. Now we see in 2 Chronicles 30:10-14; 31:1 That Hezekiah's zeal bore fruit and was followed by the humiliation of the people and by unity of heart and mind to cleanse themselves from evil. Not only those of Judah, but also the remnant of Ephraim after the carrying away felt the blessed effect of the king's piety, so that the destruction of the implements of idolatry spread not only to Judah and Benjamin, but also to Ephraim and Manasseh.

"He removed the high places, and broke the columns, and cut down the Asherahs, and broke in pieces the serpent of brass that Moses had made; for to those days the children of Israel burned incense to it: and he called it Nehustan" — a piece of brass (2 Kings 18:4). Here this cleansing is attributed to the king alone. It was complete on his part, going even as far as the brazen serpent which Moses had made. Is it not striking to note that the Word does not mention the brazen serpent from the time when Moses lifted it up in the wilderness, and yet Israel had carefully kept it for more than seven hundred years, no doubt in memory of the marvelous deliverance brought about thereby on behalf of the people. Israel had been healed by its means, and was it not natural that they should desire to keep it as a visible testimony to his healing. It was a respectable thing, an ancient type of deliverance from sin and its consequences by the sacrifice of Christ, but this object in the hands of the enemy of our souls had become a means of idolatry for the people, who burned incense unto it. Faithful Hezekiah's intervention was needed to single out and destroy this hidden idolatry, clothed in the guise of a divine institution. The serpent was a symbol, not a thing having in itself any miraculous property. The unique occasion when it had been employed not having been renewed, and being impossible to be renewed, it had no more value in itself than any other nehustan or piece of brass. Nehustans, more hidden, but also more gross than ordinary idolatry, are ever numerous in Christendom. Like Nehushtan, the cross of Christ has given rise to superstitious practices. To possess a piece of the "true cross:" to kiss it, or to revere a piece of bronze or of ivory representing the Lord dying upon the cross — these are general practices in a large part of Christendom. Man is attached to the symbol and sees in it some value or special property. He makes of the symbol his God. Is it better than the idolatry that defies the attributes of God? Certainly not; it is an idolatry just as gross, but still more dangerous, because it takes that which is most sacred, most elevated, the cross, center of all the counsels of God, the symbol of eternal love, to make of it an idol which the eyes of the flesh see, which the lips of the flesh kiss, an idol which has neither eyes to see nor ears to hear. Faith rids itself of these things and takes them for what they are, neither more nor less than a piece of wood or brass.

"He trusted in Jehovah the God of Israel" (2 Kings 18:5). He finds here the particular and very striking character of Hezekiah, and of the revival which accompanied his reign. It is trust in God. This trust caused him to reject all human aid. He does not, like other kings, seek the help of Egypt in order to escape Assyria (Isa. 30:1-5; 31:1-3) or lean, like his father upon the Assyrian against other enemies from without. Nevertheless, even from that side his faith presents its weaknesses, as we shall see.

In respect to trust, Hezekiah had no equal among the kings of Judah. This trust is inseparable from obedience: "He clave to Jehovah, and did not turn aside from following him, but kept his commandments, which Jehovah commanded Moses" (2 Kings 18:6). Let us beware of so-called trust in God which links itself to disobedience of His Word. If I trust in Him, I will cleave to Him; if I cleave to Him, I will keep His Word, and I keep it just as He has confided it to me at the beginning, just as Hezekiah kept "his commandments, which Jehovah commanded Moses." One may find, no doubt, trust in Him mixed with much ignorance, but ignorance is not disobedience. Only, from the time one's soul is brought into relationship with the clear revelation of the mind of God, and yet prefers its religious forms to it — its high places and its Nehushtan — it will never have true trust in God. Yes, trust, cleaving to the Lord and obedience are things that are inseparable. The result of Hezekiah's faith is soon apparent; "Jehovah was with him; he prospered whithersoever he went forth" (2 Kings 18:7). What a happy circle of blessings! God's favor and spiritual prosperity accompany faithfulness. May these blessings be ours, dear reader! Amen.

We are then told that Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not" (2 Kings 18:7). He acted in opposite fashion to how his father Ahaz had done, who, solemnly warned by Isaiah not to fear the attack of Rezin, king of Syria, and of Pekah, son of Remaliah, and exhorted to ask of the Lord a sign that His promise would be fulfilled, had preferred to have recourse to the Assyrian. God then had declared to him that this king of Assyria in whom he trusted should fill the breadth of the land of Immanuel with "the stretching out of his wings" (Isa. 7:1-17; 8:8). Hezekiah, it seems to us, acted according to God in not recognizing this authority. It was not the same later on for Judah, when it had to do with Babylon, as we can see in Jeremiah and at the end of our book. To revolt against Nebuchadnezzar when God has transferred the sovereignty to him and was using this yoke as a judgment upon Judah, was to revolt against God. In Hezekiah's case, it was a declining to accord to the Assyrian an authority which God had in no wise given him at that time with regard to Judah. Hezekiah was God's servant and could not be the servant of the king of Assyria. And thus victory over the Philistines (2 Kings 18:8) is granted him following his trust in God which had caused him to shake off this yoke.

But even there, so far as the dominant character of his faith is concerned, we see from the beginning of his reign that the trust of this godly king wavers. God often allows things to happen in order to teach us to know our own hearts, so that we might have no confidence in our own hearts. The history of men of faith from Abraham to David affords us numerous examples. It is in regard to the very trust that above all else characterizes his walk that Hezekiah takes his first false step. Israel's terrible disaster through Shalmaneser's invasion doubtless caused his confidence to be shaken, but when Hezekiah saw all the cities of Judah fallen into the hands of the king of Assyria, his heart failed him. He sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying: "I have sinned; retire from me: I will bear what thou layest upon me" (2 Kings 18:14). Fear gripped him. Like Peter, he beheld the wind and lost sight of the Lord. He compared himself to the king of Assyria, instead of comparing him to the Lord. This king imposed tribute upon him; Hezekiah stripped himself of everything in order to pay it, even to removing the gold from the doors and from the pillars of the temple of the Lord. What use was it to him? The king took no account of it. What did it matter to him to break his word to this despised servant of Jehovah?2

Chronicles is silent about this failure (2 Chron. 32:1-8) and proceeds, as does Isaiah 36, to the account of that which follows in our chapter from 2 Kings 18:17 on. This is because, as we have often seen in the course of these meditations, it is a matter here of the king in responsibility, whereas Chronicles shows us the action of the grace of God in the hearts of those whom He employs in His service. The discipline was full of blessing to Hezekiah's heart, as we shall see in what follows.

Before going further, let us observe that the account in Chronicles (2 Chron. 29-31) places much emphasis upon one part of Hezekiah's activity at the beginning of his reign, activity which the account in Kings passes over in silence. In effect, Chronicles presents to us, all along, Hezekiah's zeal to restore the worship and the house of the Lord, whereas our account here depicts his energy in separating himself from evil and in purifying the people from it. These two characteristics are inseparable for a true revival, and it may be said that the first, the return to God, must needs excel the second, or to put it even more clearly, that separation from evil follows the restoration of our relationship with God. That is so true that Chronicles shows us Hezekiah as having it "in [his] heart to make a covenant with Jehovah" "in the first year of his reign, in the first month," and that the hollowing of the temple began "on the first of the first month" (2 Chron. 29:3, 10, 17). Thus from the first day of his reign this twenty-five-year old king resolutely undertakes the cause of God. He comes to the throne young, inexperienced, having under his father's reign only witnessed sights that would serve to turn souls away the Lord. How then are we to explain his attitude? He enters upon his career with faith alone, with the fruit of grace!

"And in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them" (2 Kings 18:13). Here we would make a historical observation which is important. Hezekiah reigns twenty-nine years. In the fourteenth year of his reign, Sennecherib comes up against him. 2 Kings 20 tells us that after his supplication, when he was sick unto death, the Lord added "to [his] days fifteen years" Hezekiah's illness therefore took place at the beginning of the Assyrian invasion and before this latter's defeat, and is not presented to us in its chronological place.3 Also these events are mentioned in an imprecise way: "In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death" (2 Kings 20:1). By this fact, we can measure the depths of the trial which this man of God had to pass through. On the one hand, the invasion of all his country except for Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13); on the other hand, a fatal illness, and that at the time when he had restored to his people the worship of the true God, exterminated idolatry, and freed Judah from Assyrian bondage! One understands that his faith, subjected to this terrible trial, wavered, that his trust in God was momentarily dimmed in his heart.

The king of Assyria, who had beseiged and conquered Lachish, sends his servants, the Tartan or general at the head of his armies, the Rabsaris (chief chamberlain) whose functions are not too well-known, and the Rab-shakeh, the political head of the king's household and his mouthpiece on important occasions. They stand before Jerusalem, and Hezekiah's servants, Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah come out to them. Except for this moment, our account agrees almost word for word with that in Isaiah 36 and 37.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 17:7-41: The Divine Recapitulation of the History of Israel

Now God Himself recapitulates this long history of Israel which begins in Exodus and ends in our chapter. Not that it is ended for good; it is ended only as that which concerns this people and its kings, viewed as responsible. The bowels of the prophet Hosea, moved with divine compassion, announce its future restoration: "My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fiercess of mine anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man—the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not come in anger. They shall walk after Jehovah; He shall roar like a lion; when He shall roar, then the children shall hasten from the west: they shall hasten as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria; and I will cause them to dwell in their houses, saith Jehovah" (Hos. 11:8-11). This same God who had given them a king in His anger and taken him away in His wrath (Hos. 13:11) says, "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol. I will redeem them from death" (Hos. 13:14), and again "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His shoots shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They shall return and sit under his shadow; they shall revive as corn, and blossom as the vine: the renown thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon" (Hos. 14:4-7).

From 2 Kings 17:7-18 God shows what He had done for Israel since, delivering from Egypt, He had introduced them into Canaan (2 Kings 17:7). He then speaks of that which they had done, first of all acting "secretly" against the Lord, walking according to the idolatry of the nations which God had dispossessed before them, and in the statutes that the kings of Israel, beginning with Jeroboam I, had established in founding and maintaining their national religion of the calves of Dan and Bethel. Moreover, they had erected everywhere in their fortified cities, and even to the watchmen's tower, high places and male and female idols in greater excess than had Judah, which was content to keep the high places, at one time consecrated to the worship of the Lord, turning them into places of idolatrous practices (2 Kings 17:8-13). The Lord had testified against Israel and against Judah by all the prophets. Had they listened to these? No, they had forsaken the commandments of the covenant to deliver themselves up to terrible apostasy, described in all its aspects in 2 Kings 17:14-17. Finally, in His wrath God removed them from before His face and "there remained but the tribe of Judah only," no doubt for a short time, but God still recognized it according to the word of Hosea: "Ephraim encompasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah yet walketh with God, and with the holy things of truth" (Hos. 11:12).

In 2 Kings 17:19-20 God mentions Judah as in passing. This latter had followed the statutes established by the ten tribes, and the Lord was rejecting all the seed of Israel. But from 2 Kings 17:20-24 He returns to Ephraim and to its separation from the house of David. It was doubtless a judgment of the Lord against Solomon, and as such ordered of God, but on the other hand it was the fruit of the evil heart of Israel for whom the temple of God at Jerusalem had little importance when they thought of becoming a nation independent of Judah. Perhaps, notwithstanding, Israel would not have dreamed of forging a new religion for itself from many bits and pieces if the political views of Jeroboam, a complete stranger to the fear of God, had not forced the people to enter upon this path. “Jeroboam violently turned Israel from following Jehovah, and made them sin a great sin” (2 Kings 17:21). But on the other hand, “the children of Israel walked” (they were therefore themselves guilty) “in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them” (2 Kings 17:22). And Israel was carried away to Assyria. We see here in 2 Kings 17:24 and also in 2 Kings 17:6 the enormous extent to which the kingdom had grown. The Assyrian monarch made the people of Babel and of other places come to replace those deported from the cities of Samaria.

These idolatrous nations, brought into the land of Israel, did not fear the Lord. He sent lions among them, which slew them. In spite of its desolation, God was caring for the land of His inheritance. He was asserting His rights over it, not allowing these to be taken away. He would not have the land again fall under the curse from which He had delivered it when He had exterminated the Canaanites. Whatever the ruin might be, the name of the Lord must not be entirely removed from the land of Israel, and that in view of the future, for the remnant, the true Israel, is to inherit the land. Decimated by lions, these poor ignorant pagans who likened the God of Israel to their own false gods understood this judgment. They were more intelligent than the Lord’s people (2 Kings 17:26). The king of Assyria had one of the priests who had been carried away captive sent to them in order to “teach them the manner of the god of the land”; but this priest himself had supported the dreadful mixture of idolatry with the worship of the true God and so was unable to teach them anything but his own corruption, so that on the one hand they learned “how they should fear Jehovah,” whereas, on the other hand, “every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places that the Samaritans had made” (2 Kings 17:29). A corrupted religion—this fact which is so evident must nonetheless be especially insisted upon—cannot lead men on in the truth and will always mold them according to its own pattern. And so it is said, “They feared Jehovah, and made to themselves from all classes of them priests of the high places, who offered sacrifices for them in the houses of the high places” (2 Kings 17:32). Had not Jeroboam done the same thing with regard to the priesthood? That which they learned from the priest of Samaria led them on in that same path, only they go a little further and the priests whom they establish, following the pattern set by Jeroboam, became simply priests of their idols (2 Kings 17:32, cf. 2 Kings 17:29). The Word of God repeats that “they feared Jehovah, and served their own gods after the manner of the nations, whence they had been carried away” (2 Kings 17:33), but it adds in 2 Kings 17:34: “To this day they do after their former customs: they fear not Jehovah, neither do they after their statutes or after their ordinances, nor after the law and commandments that Jehovah commanded the sons of Jacob, whom he named Israel.” Let us not forget that the fear of the Lord, this first step in the path of wisdom, cannot be allied with the idolatry of the world, no more with heathen idols than with those of the present-day world which, in rejecting Christ, has recognized the overlordship of Satan. Those who in appearance fear Him, in fact do not truly fear Him if they do not obey Him, for to fear Him is to obey Him. God does not tolerate mixtures.

Observe in all this passage how the fear of the Lord, this beginning of wisdom, had been brought before the conscience of the people (2 Kings 17:35-40), as well as the nations. The Lord had said to Israel: “Ye shall not fear other gods”(2 Kings 17:35, 37, 38), “Jehovah alone... Him shall ye fear, and Him shall ye worship” (2 Kings 17:36), “but ye shall fear Jehovah your God, and He shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies” (2 Kings 17:39). In this short passage the expression “fear Jehovah” occurs eleven times! All else depended upon this elementary ordinance and still depends on it!

As for these nations, in making them feel His displeasure by the attack of the lions, the Lord had impressed upon them that they turn to Him. Then, following the same principle toward them that He had used with His own people, He left them to their own responsibility. They pay no more attention to this than had Israel. But which of these two groups was the more guilty? When the captives of Judah were restored to their land that they might receive Christ, they deeply despised the Samaritans and had no relationship with them (John. 4:9) But they went further than that, and said to their Messiah, “Thou art a Samaritan!” (John. 8:48). It is thus that the religious man judges other men, he who himself is under the same judgment, and so too he judges God! The rejected Jesus accepted this name that He might in a parable show that despite this position of dishonor which was accorded Him He alone was the dispenser of grace, in contrast with religious men whose self-righteousness prevented them from being a neighbor to wretched Israel, fallen into the hands of the nations who had spoiled it!

Chapters 18-25 –The Last Kings of Judah

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 17:1-6: Hoshea, King of Israel

We now come to the last events of the history of Ephraim, otherwise called the ten tribes. Hoshea, the murderer of Pekah, reigned nine years in Samaria while doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. His conduct in relation to Him was less profane than that of his predecessors, only, he did not take into account the judgments of God by which the subjection of Israel to Assyria had been foretold through all the prophets. From year to year king Hoshea had been sending presents to the king of Assyria (2 Kings 17:3), following the example of one of his predecessors, Menahem, who by means of presents had declared himself a vassal of Pul’s in order that this latter might establish the kingdom in his hands (2 Kings 15:19-20). Later Tiglath-pileser had come up against Pekah and, as we have seen, had transported the tribes beyond the Jordan to Assyria. Pekah evidently had not followed, as had Menahem, this rule of submission to Assyria, which would explain the political motives for the carrying away of these tribes. These political motives are not given us in the Word, but the divine motive is indicated to us by a word in Chronicles: “And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser... and he carried them away” (1 Chron. 5:26). Here in 2 Kings, the usual ways the kings of Assyria act toward Israel are brought to light. “Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria, and Hoshea became his servant, and tendered him presents” (2 Kings 17:3). The threat of an invasion by an enemy stronger than he obliges Hoshea to submit himself, howbeit unwillingly no doubt, to his vassalage. But these presents hardly help him. “For they are gone up to Assyria,” says Hosea the prophet, “as a wild ass alone by himself; Ephraim hath hired lovers. Although they hire among the nations, now will I gather them, and they shall begin to be straitened under the burden of the king of princes” (Hos. 8:9-10).

“But the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and sent up no present to the king of Assyria as he had done from year to year” (2 Kings 17:4). Actually, this two-faced, suspicious conduct of the king is mentioned by the prophet:

“Ephraim feedeth on wind, and pursueth after the east wind: all day long he multiplieth lies and desolation; and they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried into Egypt” (Hos. 12:1), and again “Ephraim is become like a silly dove without understanding: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria” (Hos. 7:11). So, discovering Hoshea’s conspiracy, Shalmaneser “shut him up and bound him in prison” (2 Kings 17:4). “As for Samaria her king is cut off:” according to the prophecy of Hosea (Hos. 10:7), without the circumstances of his death being reported to us. The king of Israel having been made a prisoner, “the king of Assyria overran the whole land, and went up against Samaria, and besieged it three years” (2 Kings 17:5; cf. 2 Kings 18:9); but it was not Shalmaneser in person who took the city, for it is told us, “And at the end of three years they took it” (2 Kings 18:10). Actually, during this interval Sargon (Isa. 20:1) had succeeded Shalmaneser, or at least was at the head of the army during a short interregnum. The fate of this rebellious city was terrible, according to the word of Micah who prophesied “ concerning Samaria and Jerusalem”: “Therefore will I make Samaria as a heap of the field, as plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will lay bare the foundations thereof. And all her graven images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her harlot-gifts shall be burned with fire, and all her idols will I make a desolation; for of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them, and to a harlot’s hire they shall return” (Mic. 1:6-7). Hosea also describes this event: “Samaria shall bear her guilt; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up” (Hos. 13:16).

“The king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6). It has been supposed that part of the ten tribes fled to Egypt at that time. We do not think that the expression in Hosea 8:13: “They shall return to Egypt,” is to be interpreted in this manner. This same prophet had said: “They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria”; then, “Ephraim hath hired lovers” (Hos. 8:19); then again: “Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria shall they eat that which is unclean” (Hos. 9:3). All this fully harmonizes with Hoshea’s conspiracy, as also this other word: “He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king” (Hos. 11:5). “Return into the land of Egypt” does not necessarily mean to flee there, but to seek assistance there, as it is said in Isaiah 31:1: “Woe to them to go down to Egypt for help:”

As to the passage in Hosea 8:13, it must be observed that the prophet continually associates Judah’s iniquity with that of Ephraim. “The peoples shall be assembled against them, when they are bound for their two iniquities. And Ephraim is a trained heifer, that loveth to tread out the corn; I have passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to draw; Judah shall plow, Jacob shall break his clods “(Hos. 10:10-11). So he also reunites them together in the same future blessing once they will have reached the complete measure of their servitude (Hos. 10:12). This observation helps us to understand that “They shall return to Egypt” in Hosea 8:13 applies to Judah, morally associated with Israel. What proves this is the following verse: “Israel... buildeth temples, and Judah has multiplied fenced cities,” but even more so “For behold, they are gone away because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Moph (or Noph = Memphis) shall bury them” (Hos. 9:6). Now we know from the account of Jeremiah 43-44:1 That the fugitives of Judah fled before the king of Babylon and found refuge in Egypt, and at Noph, among other places. They forced the prophet to accompany them there, and we know that there he prophesied against them when they thought they were safe from their oppressor (cf. 2 Kings 25:26).1

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 15:32-38: Jotham, King of Judah

This son of Uzziah began his reign the second year of Pekah (cf. 2 Chron. 27:1-9), and reigned sixteen years at Jerusalem. His mother, Jerusha, daughter of Zadok, was probably of the priestly family. With her we continue to observe the blessed role of the mothers of the kings of Judah. Nothing of the kind for the kings of Israel. But “the people still acted corruptly” (2 Chron. 27:2), because of the lack of decision in these godly kings who did not dare attack idolatry at its root. The account in Chronicles teaches us that Jotham “became strong, for he prepared his ways before Jehovah his God:” Godliness is a source of strength for us also, and of spiritual power. From the moment that our ways are not ordered before God, strength forsakes us. Serious reflection for all, and a thousand times yet more serious for those who have a particular responsibility with respect to the people of God. Only the sense of this strength presents a danger. We have seen in the case of Uzziah that this feeling pushed him to lift himself up before the high priest (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Jotham does not become puffed up by his strength. Also it is said of him, in comparing him with his father: “Only he entered not into the temple of Jehovah” (2 Chron. 27:2). On the contrary, being humble, he was occupied with the house of God. He “built the upper gate of the house of Jehovah” (2 Kings 15:35), a deed characteristic of his reign in the book of kings. What a privilege when a believer leaves behind him as a remembrance, that which he has done for the house of God! God records this deed and leaves it with us as a memorial for Jotham. There are other deeds in his life, and Chronicles informs us of them, but is it not touching to see that God puts this one into the spotlight as characteristic, in His eyes, of the reign of this faithful king? Without giving way to imagination, there is nothing that forbids us to think that the daughter of Zadok might have inculcated into her son from his youth on a respect for the temple of the Lord, and that under this influence the center of the king’s activity was the house of God.

Pekah, the son of Remaliah, allied with Rezin, king of Syria, begins to go up against Judah in the days of Jotham (2 Kings 15:37). The sin of Judah necessitated the discipline of God, but the consequences of this discipline could be removed by the godliness of their leader, as happened later under pious Hezekiah with regard to the Assyrian. It seems also that this may have been the case during the reign of Jotham.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 15:23-31: Pekahiah and Pekah, Kings of Israel

Mehahem not having died a violent death, his son Pekahiah reigned in his stead. The retributive government of God is not exercised toward Menahem, and his case, like a number of others in this history, teaches us that God’s earthly government is not the measure of His righteousness nor His full retribution of the ways of men. This was the error of Job’s friends, against whom Elihu rose up in anger.

During the two years of his reign, Pekahiah like all his predecessors persevered in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Let us note here that which is repeated so often in the preceding chapters, that by the sins of their kings, Israel was made to sin. The sin of an individual is rendered considerably more serious when it becomes a stumbling-stone for others, and its consequences are reckoned to those who carry away the ignorant and poorly established in the pathway of their own disobedience.

Pekah, the son of Remaliah, assisted in his conspiracy by men of Gilead, kills Pekahiah as well as two of his companions. He reigns twenty years in Samaria and follows, with regard to the Lord, the way of the kings of Israel. The results of his reign are summarized in 2 Kings 15:29. The Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser comes up against him and carries away captive the Reubenites, the Gadites, and that half tribe of Manasseh, all the people settled beyond the Jordan, “and brought them to Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan — unto this day” (1 Chron. 5:26). The dismemberment of the kingdom of Ephraim begins with the tribes which, for their own convenience, had chosen their portion on the other side of the Jordan.

It is always so. Christians who do not enter resolutely and without a backward glance upon the ground where, like the Jordan, the death of Christ an insurmountable barrier between them and the world, such Christians are the first to be exposed to the attacks of the enemy and become the poor captives of the world, with which, despite their real faith, they have not consented to break completely. Thus the dismembering of the kingdom of Israel begins to take place. This would be completed under the reign of Hoshea. We shall return to Pekah in the next chapter, but before this we find mention made of the reign of Jotham.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 15:13-22: Shallum and Menahem, Kings of Israel

Shallum conspired against Zechariah, killed him, and reigned in his stead. His crime scarcely benefited him, for at the end of a month he fell beneath the blows of Menahem. We are touching the reason for all these acts of violence: each is wanting to usurp power for his own gain. With conscience no longer lifting up its voice, sinners are delivered up to all the instincts of their evil nature.

The city of Tiphsah not having wanted to open its gates to Menahem, he treats it with utmost cruelty. He succeeds in maintaining himself upon the throne for ten years. He does that which is evil, walking in the sins of Jeroboam all his days. Under his reign the Assyrians at last appear upon the scene: “Pul the king of Assyria came against the land” (2 Kings 15:19). This is the first king of Assyria whose name is mentioned in biblical history. This personage has occasioned much debate among critics, who seem to agree now to consider him identical with Tiglath-Pileser, one of the greatest and best-known among the Assyrian monarchs (2 Kings 15:29; 16:7; etc.). In keeping simply to the letter of Scripture, we shall rather be led to see in Pul, king of Assyria, a distinct person, according to what is told us in 1 Chronicle 5:26: “And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgath-Pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh.” The carrying away of the tribes beyond the Jordan is attributed in 2 Kings 15:29 to Tiglath-Pileser, whereas Pul is presented to us in 2 Kings 15:19 as coming against Israel, but influenced by an immense tribute of silver (more than six million U.S. dollars in terms of the value of silver at the time of the translation of this book) to become the protector of the king of Israel “that his hand might be with him to establish the kingdom”- so greatly shaken—“in his hand.” This Pul, we have not yet pointed out enough, “turned back, and stayed not there in the land” (2 Kings 15:20), which was not the case with his successor. It is true that human documents are silent with regard to him, and perhaps will always remain so, but we have the Word of God as guide, and our safeguard is to receive it simply, as God has given it to us. Hosea mentions the fact that is before us now: Ephraim went “to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb; but he was unable to heal you, nor hath he removed your sore” (Hos. 5:13). This king Jareb may well be none other than Pul.1 His name means, “He who contests: “ doubtless an allusion to the combative power of the Assyrian, whom Israel thought to appease and to propitiate by presents. “The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calf of Beth-aven; for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the idolatrous priests thereof shall tremble for it, for its glory, because it is departed from it. Yea, it shall be carried unto Assyria as a present for king Jareb” (Hos. 10:5-6). Even one of Jeroboam’s calves had been carried to Assyria as a present for its king! And the same prophet adds in another place: “They are gone up to Assyria as a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim has hired lovers” (Hos. 8:9). But what a shame for Israel! Their god given to the enemy of their race as a common present! That too was of the Lord.

In the final analysis, what was the use of all the politics and quests after alliances and protection, turning now toward Assyria, then toward Egypt? Did they delay for one instant the judgment that had been decreed? And it is the same in our own day, is it not? The guarantees that nations are seeking to procure one from the other will all disappear like chaff carried away by the wind when “the Lamb that was slain” shall step forward to take the book of God’s counsels and ways toward the world and carry it into execution.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 15:8-12: Zechariah, King of Israel

We shall not enter into the chronological difficulties raised concerning the date of the accession to the throne of Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, our purpose not being to answer here the attacks of unbelief. When difficulties are raised by human reasoning, wisdom consists in waiting upon God to resolve them, if we lack the necessary light. Our dependence upon Him is thus put to the test, and we can be certain that in due time we shall receive the answer. How often have Christians who were in humble submission to the Word made this experience!

Zechariah, the last king descended from Jehu, reigns only six months at Samaria. “And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin:” If, as we have seen, the godly kings of Judah were lacking in energy to abolish the high places — and how Solomon’s negligence in respect to this had born disastrous results among his successors, accustomed to patterning themselves according to the customs tolerated by the glorious head of their dynasty — those of Israel, by contrast, had walked resolutely in the custom instituted by Jeroboam I. Examples are not wanting in present-day Christendom to characterize these two tendencies. From the moment when, not going back to the pure fountain of the Word of God, Protestant Christendom, at the very time when accepting the scriptural truths proclaimed by the reformers, also accepted certain anti-scriptural dogmas which these had not given up, all was already destined for quick ruin. From the moment when, walking in the semi-idolatrous religion of the bishops of Rome or of the East, Catholicsm forsook the Word of God to substitute its own fables for it, judgment must overtake it. It has been pronounced and will in the near future fall on the great harlot.

Here the final period of usurpations and of assassinations which precede the carrying away of the ten tribes begins, the period of which Hosea, the prophet of Israel, had said: “They are all hot as an oven, and devour their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me” (Hos. 7:7). The heart of the prophet in his lengthy lamentation betrays his anguish concerning Israel. The time had

come when God would “visit the blood of Jizreel upon the house of Jehu, and cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease” (Hos. 1:4). The Lord had kept silent about the blood shed by Jehu at Jizreel; He had not spoken of it to anyone, no, not even to guilty Jehu. Contrariwise, it might have seemed to him that when God said to him, “Thou has executed well that which is right in My sight” (2 Kings 10:30), and I shall reward thee, that God was approving all that Jehu had done. Far from it! If the Lord had raised him up for judgment and approved him in that, the time was come when the fleshly guile and the furious violence of this king must find their chastisement. The word of the Lord: “Thy sons shall sit upon the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation” (2 Kings 15:12), had been accomplished as recompense, and now His word was being accomplished in retribution and in righteous judgment. What a God is ours! Who is able, as He is, to weigh in the same balance both the acts He approves of and those He condemns, to reward and to punish them in rendering retribution according to His ways of righteous government?

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 15:1-7: Azariah or Uzziah, King of Judah

2 Chronicles 26 gives us the detailed history of Azariah or Uzziah, who succeeded Amaziah, his father. His mother was of Jerusalem. His reign was long, beginning when he was still very young. “And he did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. Only,” the account adds, “the high places were not removed: the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”—ever the habitual refrain for Judah, just as with the calves of Jeroboam for Israel. The prophet Micah alludes to these two characters to explain the judgment of God upon his people. “For the transgression of Jacob is all this,” he says, “and for the sins of the house of Israel. Whence is the transgression of Jacob? is it not from Samaria? And whence are the high places of Judah? are they not from Jerusalem?”(Mic. 1:5).

Our account of the reign of Uszziah contains the same hiatus that we have already noted with regard to Amaziah. Like the idolatry of the latter, the sin of Uzziah, reported in 2 Chronicles 26, is passed over in silence. We have above said that the reason is evident. It is a matter of bringing out, without weakening it by the account of their faults and of their inconsistencies, the piety of the kings of Judah, contrasting this with the idolatry of the kings of Israel which cried to the Lord for vengeance. Here we find only, “And Jehovah smote the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house,” (2 Kings 14:5) without the cause of his judgment being mentioned.

In fact, Uzziah, blessed at the beginning for his faithfulness, but puffed up by the enormous success of his career, had thought he could usurp the high priest’s place in offering incense upon the golden altar himself. This act may recall the rebellion of the Levite, Korah, long before, who wanted to take Aaron’s place. But with Uzziah this evil had another character. The idea of his dignity, of his considerable importance as king, led him, the civil power, to usurp the religious authority. This sin forms one of the numerous elements of present-day Christendom. The Lord judges Uzziah by striking him with leprosy. He is expelled from the temple by the priests and remained excluded from the congregation of Israel until his death. This authority, of which he was so proud and the honor of which he had not attributed to the Lord, is removed from him and entrusted to his son Jotham years before his death. It was impossible to tolerate fleshly pretensions — terrible defilement when one brought these into the house of God — and Uzziah dies, separated from the blessings of this house for having disregarded the dignity of the high priesthood (type of that of Christ), which the Lord had established there.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 14:23-29: Jeroboam II, King of Israel

Jeroboam, king of Israel, the third successor of Jehu, succeeds Joash, his father. “He did evil in the sight of Jehovah: he departed not from any of the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin” (2 Kings 14:24). Nonetheless his reign lasted forty-one years! One might believe, and we have several examples in this history, that God always promptly cut off the kings whose conduct dishonored Him. Such is the case with Zechariah, the son of this same Jeroboam (2 Kings 15:8), but it is not so here. God has different ways which He knows how to reconcile with His longsuffering and His mercy. His pity for Israel’s state of being oppressed directs His ways concerning Jeroboam’s reign. “Jehovah saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and that there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And Jehovah had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under the heavens; and he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (2 Kings 14:26-27). God raises up a savior for this people in the person of this king who had incurred His displeasure, just as He had previously done with Joash his father (2 Kings 13.5). “He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the sea of the plain” (2 Kings 14:25).

The territory of Hamath, the principal city of upper Syria, had at one time belonged to Solomon (2 Chron. 8:3). Jeroboam’s victory restored to Israel “the entrance of Hamath,” a very important strategic position. The city of Hamath itself does not seem to have been part of the conquest, but the borders of Israel were restored from the entrance of Hamath to the Salt Sea, which is the Dead Sea (ch. Josh. 3:16). Taking possession of this enlarged Israel’s territory at the expense of that of Judah, for a part of Damascus and of Hamath had formerly belonged to the latter (2 Kings 14:28).

Jonah the prophet, the son of Amittai, had announced this event beforehand (2 Kings 14:25). Jonah is the first prophet about whom we have a prophetic writing. Our passage here presents him as a prophet of Israel. His prophecy has not been preserved for us. It spoke of a particular event which had no abiding import. It is mentioned in Scripture, but it is not, according to what we have in 2 Peter 1:20, a “prophecy of scripture.” The latter is never interpreted by the events near at hand to which it alludes. Jonah is presented to us in this passage as a prophet of grace and of temporary deliverance of Israel.

A few words will suffice to characterize the book which speaks of him. Jonah, representing the people who glory in their legal righteousness, rebels against the Lord, who wishes to send him to the Gentiles. He is for the moment thrown into the sea by the nations whose ship can then sail in peace upon a calmed sea. At the end of three days, the prophet, representing the Messiah who takes the place of unfaithful Israel, is raised, and the new Israel announces the judgment and grace that follow its repentance. He is then enlightened as to the merciful purposes of the Lord.

Apart from its prophetic meaning which ought not to detain us here, Jonah's preaching against Nineveh has a historical importance for the course of events which are unfolded in this part of the book of kings. It shows us the considerable role of the Assyrian kingdom at this epoch, a kingdom which would enter into conflict with that of Israel, to accomplish the judgments of God.

The prophet Amos, who prophesied in the same epoch, announced to the house of Israel that Jeroboam's conquests would not be long-lasting. The Assyrian would capture these from them. "For behold, O house of Israel, said Jehovah the God of hosts, I will raise up against you a nation; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the torrent of the Arabah" (Amos 6:14). Less than one hundred years later, this prophecy was realized under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:34; 19:13). Jeroboam had "put far away the evil day" (Amos 6:3), in reconquering Israel's borders to "Hamath the great" (Amos 6:1-2), and unto the sea of the plain. Behold, says Amos, the evil day is near at hand. On the eve of ruin, the prince was relaxing, thinking only of his ease (Amos 6:4), and behold, Hamath itself and Gath (recaptured by Uzziah—2 Chron. 26:6), and Calneh and Babylonia were about to fall into the hands of the Assyrians! The house of Jeroboam was threatened with ruin under the judgment of the Lord, who would "not again pass" His people any more, and who would cause judgment to fall upon them from top to bottom, even to their foundations (Amos 7:7-9).

It is remarkable that Hosea, prophesying under the reign of Uzziah, of Jotham, of Ahaz, and of Hezekiah, kings of Judah, mentions only Jeroboam, king of Israel, and passes over his successors, under whom he likewise prophesied, in silence (Hos. 1:1). For him their history seems to stop with Jeroboam, although Zechariah, this latter's son, represented the fourth generation granted the house of Jehu by the Lord (2 Kings 10:30). But Zechariah, the last link of this chain, is in fact already rejected. He reigns only six months, and God turns away from him and his successors, according to His word: "I will not again pass by them any more" (Amos 7:8; 8:2); and according to that which Hosea says: "They have set up kings, but not by me" (Hos. 8:4).

Amos gives us some details about the end of the reign of Jeroboam 11 (Amos 7:10-17). Amaziah, priest of the calf at Bethel, warns the king that Amos is prophesying against Israel, adding (which was a lie) that he had foretold the violent death of the king. By this slander, Amaziah was seeking to rid himself of the prophet and to have him sent away to Judah, for he was giving him competition at Bethel, "the king's sanctuary, and... the house of the kingdom." (Bethel, "the house of God" had been completely forgotten.) God's true witness embarrasses Amaziah, who clings to his usurped priesthood and to his official position. Amos answers him: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And Jehovah took me as I followed the flock, and Jehovah said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos 7:14-15). Amos was not dependent upon a prophets' school, but directly upon God, nor was he of the priestly family. Christ expresses Himself likewise later on in the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 13:5). The Holy Spirit had chosen Amos from among the shepherds of Tekoa (Amos 1:1), from being among the sheep, just as He had formerly chosen David, His anointed. The Lord had said to him, "Go," and he had gone. We have in Amos an example of the ministry that is attached directly to that of Christ, and that is a foretaste of what the entire Christian ministry later on would be, or rather ought to be. Now the prophet takes the false minister and his false pretensions to task directly: "Therefore thus said Jehovah: Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city, and thy sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided with the line; and thou shalt die in a land that is unclean; and Israel shall certainly go into captivity, out of his land" (Amos 7:17).

A terrible judgment must fall upon these official men in the service of the world and of its false gods whom they christen with the name of the Lord; as for Israel, they must certainly be carried away captive. Henceforth there would be no more repentance in God's heart with respect to them. The time was come; it was too late, as it is said in Revelation 22:11: "Let him that does unrighteously do unrighteously still; and let the filthy make himself filthy still!" Judah was to be spared a while yet, and God wanted to produce revivals there until the hour foretold by Jeremiah would sound for Judah.

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 14:1-22: Joash, King of Israel?Amaziah, King of Judah

Amaziah, the son of Joash king of Judah, began to reign in the second year of Joash king of Israel. He reigned fifteen years simultaneously with this king and twenty-nine years in all at Jerusalem. At this point let us notice here in the history in kings, the role of mothers in the conduct of their children. When these mothers come from Judah and Jerusalem, it is rare to see their sons follow the worship of false gods. Only the four last kings of Judah, in the time of its thorough decadence, escape this influence of their mothers, who were of the same tribe and were themselves enveloped, so to speak, in this apostasy. It is said of these kings, that they "did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father(s) had done." But we shall come back to this remark again.

The mother of Joash of Judah was Zibiah of Beersheba; the mother of Amaziah the son of Joash was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. We shall meet other such examples. Contrariwise, the influence of idolatrous mothers or wives was pernicious for the kings.

The wife of Jehoram of Judah was Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:18); Ahaziah was the son of Athaliah (2 Kings 8:26). This observation should make Christian mothers realize their responsibility and ought to exercise them to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord; on the other hand it shows that the union of a Christian family head with a woman of the world is morally disastrous for the children issuing from such a union.

Amaziah "did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, yet not like David his father: he did according to all that Joash his father had done" (2 Kings 14:3). To govern his conduct, Amaziah should have gone back to the origin of the kingship and to the conduct of David, king according to God's heart. No doubt David had seriously failed in his life and had had to undergo severe discipline on this account; but David's heart had always been upright when it had been a matter of the Lord's service and of the throne of God in the midst of His people. Amaziah followed the footsteps of his father Joash whose life was divided, as we have seen, into two very distinct periods, one of true godliness, the other of a decline all the more marked in that its beginnings had been so brilliant.

Nevertheless, this beginning by itself does not denote a heart devoted unreservedly to the service of the Lord. A straw in a piece of cast iron is enough to cause it to break when the right occasion presents itself. This straw was the maintenance of the high places. We have already spoken of this subject, and we return to it to observe that, apart from the two exceptions already mentioned, this word "Only, the high places were not removed" is like a refrain accompanying the history of the faithful kings of Judah; whereas another refrain, "He departed not from

the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," designates the kings of Israel. These kings ordered their conduct in matters religious according to that of the head of their royal house, who was an idolater. The kings of Judah, instead of governing themselves according to David their father, were generally content to seek their point of departure in the reign of Solomon, who had not abolished the high places. But it is always very dangerous to accommodate oneself to a system which, even when boasting of great antiquity, does not seek the mind of God as its source. This is also the history of the responsible Church. Instead of linking up her testimony with "that which was from the beginning," she found her starting-point in the customs, traditions, and principles that characterized her when she was already in decline. Joash tolerated the people's incense-burning upon the high places; he himself, no doubt, did not participate in these idolatrous customs, but he was no less guilty. To tolerate evil in the people whom God had entrusted to him was the equivalent of committing it himself.

A second point is to Amaziah's praise: "And it came to pass when the kingdom was established in his hand, that he slew his servants who had smitten the king his father" (2 Kings 14:5). He did not let evil go unpunished in the sphere of his responsibility. At least in this respect he understood, like Solomon at his accession to the throne, that to tolerate crime and evil was to make himself liable for it. This question of liability is little understood today. Most Christians feel that they are not guilty in tolerating evil in the sphere to which they belong, that their responsibility is taken care of if they abstain from evil personally. This is a serious error, which sooner or later bears its sad fruits! "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Jehovah, forever" (Psa. 93:5)—not only the Christian individually. The ruin and final apostasy of Christendom plays a large part in the misunderstanding of this truth. In this at least, Amaziah was faithful, somewhat counterbalancing his lack of vigilance with respect to the high places.

"But," it is added, "the children of those that smote him he did not put to death; according to that which is written in the book of the law of Moses wherein Jehovah commanded saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (2 Kings 14:6). There again, Amaziah shows an intelligent respect for the Word of God. This commandment of the Lord had been given in Deuteronomy 24:16 and Amaziah governed himself by it with the obedient heart required of all those who hear and read His Word.

Between verses 6 and 7 (2 Kings 14:6-7) we have an intentional hiatus filled in by 2 Chronicles 25:5-16. We shall follow our custom of not, except in passing, encroaching upon that which this latter book presents, for by this omission the Word brings out the sin of the kings of Israel, by opposing it to that which was righteous and godly in the conduct of the kings of Judah. Nevertheless, the account in Chronicles gives us to understand the event related in 2 Kings 14:7-14. Amaziah, for a time disposed to use troops of Israel whom he had hired to fight Edom, and warned by the prophet that "Jehovah is not with Israel," gives up his project which had already been executed in part and sends this contingent back to their homes. With only his own army and in dependence upon the Lord, he undertakes the campaign against Edom, and wins a brilliant victory. The troops of Israel that had been dismissed fall upon the cities of Judah, smiting three thousand men and taking much spoil. But, as the prophet had said to Amaziah, the Lord was able to give him much more than the wages given to the men of Ephraim. If he must in some measure incur the consequences of his unbelief in hiring them without having consulted the Lord, he can on the other hand count upon the blessing that follows obedience.

This calamity, casting a pall upon his victory over Edom, does not drive the king to the Lord. Even his victory becomes an occasion of stumbling for him. He brings the gods of the Edomites to Judah and bows down before them without listening to the protests of a new prophet.

His pride as a victorious king being wounded, and incensed by the humiliation which the troops of Ephraim had inflicted upon him, Amaziah provokes Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. He collides with a pride even greater than his own. Joash answers him by a very transparent parable: Jehoram of Judah, the thorn-bush of Lebanon, husband of Athaliah the daughter of Ahab, had sent to Jehoram of Israel, the cedar of Lebanon, asking him for a wife from the house of Ahab for his son Ahaziah. Jehu, the wild beast in Lebanon, had trodden underfoot Ahaziah, the king of Judah... And now his successor, instead of humbling himself, was glorying in his victory over Edom! Here we see Joash's irritation break forth, seeing his military forces despised while Judah alone had been sufficient to conquer Edom.

Amaziah does not listen to this warning, and "it was of God," Chronicles tell us (2 Chron. 25:20), "that he might deliver them into the enemy's hand, because they had sought after the gods of Edom." Judah is beaten, Amaziah taken prisoner, Jerusalem broken down, all the treasures of the king and of the temple taken away as spoil along with hostages (2 Kings 14:12-14). Amaziah meets his God, whom he had professed to serve and honor, as a consuming fire from that moment when he forsakes Him to serve other gods.

This same unfaithfulness is the cause of Amaziah's tragic death. Our chapter simply recounts that they conspired against him at Jerusalem and that he fled to Lachish, that they sent after him to slay him, and that they brought him on horses to bury him with his fathers in the city of David. But Chronicles gives us the solemn reason for this drama: "From the time that Amaziah turned aside from following Jehovah, they made a conspiracy against him."

In the meantime (2 Kings 14:15-16), Joash of Israel, the son of Jehoahaz, died so that Amaziah lived an additional fifteen years after his conqueror. His son Azariah succeeded him. He recovered Elath for Judah and restored it. This city which previously, together with all the territory of Edom to which it belonged, had been under the rule of David and had formed part of the Solomon's dominion, had been an important outlet for his maritime power, for it was located not far from Ezion-Geber on the shore of the Red Sea (1 Kings 9:26; 2 Chron. 8:17). After Azariah, it did not remain in the hands of Judah for long. Sixty-eight years later, Rezin the king of Syria, recovered it (2 Kings 14:16:6).

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 13:10-25: Joash, King of Israel, and Elisha

Joash, the son of Jehoahaz and grandson of Jehu, reigned sixteen years, the first three years simultaneously with Joash, king of Judah, whose reign lasted forty years. Not only did he not turn aside from any of the sins of Jeroboam, but "he walked therein" (2 Kings 13:11), the Word here indicating to us that he took them as his rule of conduct. These kings of Israel who one after another followed the same path had very powerful and readily discerned motives for acting thus. Indeed, their authority and the possession of their kingdom were, humanly speaking, bound to a religion which separated them from Judah's worship with its temple and Jerusalem as its center. To return to the worship of Jehovah would have been to abandon their dominion, to submit themselves to the family of David, and to renounce their own royal prerogatives. Their thoughts naturally had no connection with those of God. The Lord's judgment had separated the ten tribes from the house

of David. Had they remained faithful to the Lord, He would doubtless have taught them the way to combine His worship with their being deprived of the temple. But rather than that, though separating them in practical respects from Judah, He could have kept them in relationship religiously with the temple at Jerusalem. This is all the more striking in Joash of Israel's case, in that later God delivered into his hand the king of Judah and Jerusalem. If he had had any concern for Jehovah whatever, occasion was thus offered him to renew the religious bond with the temple of God that had been broken by Jeroboam. Much later still, Josiah, this faithful king of Judah, furnishes us with another example. Without pretending to recover his royal prerogatives over Ephraim, by his zeal he becomes the restorer of the worship of Jehovah among those of the ten tribes who had escaped the captivity (2 Kings 23:15-20).

As for the power of Joash of Israel, it was great. His reign was important, and he accomplished many things. But he lived without God, and what is left of him? As with so many other rulers over men, nothing remains as to him but this word: "This man was born there" (Psa. 87:4).

There was however a bright spot in the life of Joash of Israel (2 Kings 13:14-21), as in that of Jehoahaz. The latter, at a time of oppression and misery, besought the Lord, who answered him. Joash went to visit Elisha when Elisha was dying, and wept over his face. At this time circumstances were still as difficult for him as they had been for his father. Hazael, and after him his son Ben-Hadad, were making their yoke weigh heavily upon Israel. The "savior of Israel" had not yet been manifested in the person of Joash. Only God's grace could consecrate him for this work; but meanwhile the prophet, dispenser of this grace, was about to die. With him the last means of deliverance for the people would disappear. What would become of Israel without him? The king laments, weeps over the face of Elisha, crying out: "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Remembering the prophet's word at Elijah's rapture, he thus expresses his sorrow at losing him. Was not he, Elisha, the prophet of grace, who was about to die, as worthy of going up to heaven as Elijah? At the same time the king was bearing witness by these words that Elisha had the same value to him that Elijah had had to Elisha. If the only agent of blessing between God and Israel must die, all blessing was then lost to this oppressed people. Joash's heart is torn. Perhaps this was merely a superficial feeling, in any case it was not very long-lasting, but it was one that drew the sympathy of the heart of God to this votary of idols. He had promised a savior to Israel; Joash would be this savior. Had he not gone down to Elisha, deliverance would have been hindered, and victory impossible.

Let us notice an interesting fact: We have here two histories of Joash, each one ending in a summary which repeats the same words (2 Kings 13:12-13; 2 Kings 14:15-16). The first history contains the king's general character; the second, his victories over Syria and over Judah. Between these two portions we find the end of Elisha's career, and what was able to make of this evil king an instrument of deliverance for his people. This was grace. God shows grace whenever and as long as He is able to do so. Grace delights in a soul in which even a flash of repentance appears, or in the mere sigh of an oppressed heart. With his last breath the prophet's moments, now numbered, are yet used to rekindle, be it but for an instant, the little spark of life still remaining in the heart of the king, this blackened firebrand.

Moreover, let us notice that the word spoken to Elijah: "Him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay," is only fulfilled, and that prophetically, in these last moments of the prophet's life. So little is he a prophet of judgment that he does not exercise judgment except in figure, and even this judgment is nothing other than the salvation of Israel and its deliverance from the yoke of Syria. Thus, as we have seen all though his history, Elisha never loses his character of grace, but in order to communicate grace to his people, he must die, and this is what we shall find in the passage now occupying us.

If Joash is to become a savior for Israel, it will in no wise be because he merits this title by or in himself. His heart is unchanged, his ungodliness remains, but God will use him as instrument of a salvation whose starting-point is the death of the man of God. "And Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows. And he took a bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thy hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it; and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands, and said, Open the window eastward" (2 Kings 13:15-17). The king was only to follow Elisha's word and must not take any initiative, but more than that, it is Elisha's hands that direct the hand of the king, that identify themselves with the judgment of Ben-Hadad, but at the same time with the salvation that this judgment would bring about for Israel. Elisha's hands are those of the savior of the people; without them there would not be any deliverance. Here the prophet is the representative of the Lord; it must be demonstrated that everything comes from Him.

"Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, An arrow of Jehovah's deliverance, even an arrow of deliverance from the Syrians; and thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou hast consumed them" (2 Kings 13:17). The king shoots his arrow eastward; nothing is done without the word of God. Joash is unable to understand anything of this; the prophet must explain the matter to him. It is needful for Joash to know that he is an instrument devoid of action, having no worth in himself, when God condescends to employ him.

"An arrow of Jehovah's deliverance!" Such is the general plan. Next we find the detail of the defeat of the Syrians. "And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed" (2 Kings 13:18). The destruction of Syria would depend upon the degree of faith, of zeal, of trust in God which Joash is about to display. It will be shown whether this instrument can become a means of complete deliverance for Israel by itself. Alas! When it is a matter of smiting upon the ground without having Elisha's hands over his hands, when, in a word, he is left to his own resources, the king strikes the ground with his arrows three times and stops. Before so much grace and condescension on God's part, the man shows himself to be not only insufficient, but faithless. Before, when he was shooting his arrows eastward, he was ignorant of the significance of this act and was not responsible to know it. God explained it to him. Now that he could understand it in striking his arrows upon the ground, he stops. The wrath of the man of God, God's wrath, blazes against him: I would have completely delivered this people; that depended upon you, and you were not willing to do so! You shall smite the enemy but thrice.

Just as does Elijah's end, so Elisha's speaks to us of Christ. It is with a dying Christ that we find grace and deliverance. A sigh sent up to Him is enough that one can be freed from the enemy who is oppressing us. This salvation is offered to the most wretched, to the most unworthy, who may thus become instrument of deliverance for others. What an honor and what a privilege! But the heart's natural unbelief paralyzes the action of the Spirit and reduces all God's good will towards man to nothing. As long as we allow ourselves to be directed by the word in every movement we must make (this account is the evident confirmation of this), success is assured to us; once the least thing is left to our responsibility, we grind to a halt and thus thwart the Lord's plans of grace.

The scene that follows (2 Kings 13:20-21) is as striking as that which we have just considered. The history of Elisha does not end with the prophet's wrath, but ends with death for himself and resurrection for others. During his lifetime, Elisha, like Elijah his master, had brought a

dead person back to life. This event, which in itself alone demonstrated God's presence in a man in the midst of Israel — this event which later characterized the Son of God at the tomb of Lazarus — had even reached the ears of the king. But a scene marvelous in another way from that of the Shunammite's son unfolds before us now. It is in his death that Elisha becomes the means of life for one who is dead. It was reserved for Another, and for Him alone, to come forth from the tomb in the power of the life that was in Himself, and to be declared Son of God in power, Son of the living God, through His own resurrection. Here it is by the death of the prophet, in touching Elisha's bones, that one who had died finds life. This thing became much more real, even in a material way, at the death of our beloved Savior. It was at His death, when He had dismissed His spirit, that the bodies of saints who had fallen asleep were raised to enter into the holy city. From the moral and spiritual aspect it is by entering through faith into contact with a dead Christ that we have eternal life and resurrection in the last day (John. 6:54). In His death the power of death has been conquered for us, and the dominion of him who held this power is broken. He who was unable not to want to die, has died that He might give life.

However, let us not forget the prophetic character of this scene. The end of Israel's last great prophet, the herald of grace, is not linked up with chariots and horsemen which carry him to heaven; it is linked up with a tomb. "Elisha died, and they buried him." After his death the enemy's oppression is displayed in a Moabite incursion upon Israel's territory. The poor people do not even have leisure to bury their dead, but they find the sepulcher of Elisha just in the nick of time to cast in a dead body. From the moment that this dead body, typical of Israel, is laid among the dead and comes into actual contact with the dead prophet, from the moment that he "touched the bones of Elisha, and he revived, and stood upon his feet" (2 Kings 13:21). So it will be with Israel in the last days; Israel will find national life again and come forth from among the dead from the moment they enter into relationship with Him whom they have pierced, and believe in Him. This will be the last miracle of grace worked for this people, when it will have been demonstrated that the nation's state is without resource and hopeless. The history of Elisha ends here.

In verses 2 Kings 13:22-25, the prophet's word to Joash is fulfilled. Hazael had taken the cities of Israel away from Jehoahaz; Joash retakes them from Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, and "three times did Joash beat him."

Meditations on 2 Kings, 2 Kings 13:1-9: Jehoahaz, Son of Jehu, King of Israel

The Lord fulfilled His promise made to Jehu: "Thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 10:30). Jehoahaz succeeded his father. Second Chronicles, which gives the history of the family of David, makes no mention of Jehoahaz because there were no relationships between this king and Judah. When such relationships did not exist, this book passes over those kings in silence. Jehoahaz did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam any more than did his father, and even the Asherah, idol of the Phoenician goddess of love, whose impure worship had been inaugurated by Ahab at Samaria (1 Kings 16:33) remained in Israel's capital. Also God's rod, in the persons of Hazael and Ben-Hadad his son, continued to beat down the ten tribes.

Nevertheless, what mercy in the heart of God! It is sufficient that Jehoahaz, without his heart being changed in any way, besought the Lord, for Him to answer, moved by the misery and oppression of Israel. "And Jehoahaz besought Jehovah, and Jehovah hearkened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them" (2 Kings 13:4). He takes account of the slightest movement of an unhappy soul toward Himself. God is very easily found. Who henceforth might be able to say that he had sought Him in vain, when the most ungodly man, should he but for an instant turn toward Him, would receive an answer? "And Jehovah gave Israel a savior, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents as before" (2 Kings 13:5). This savior appeared, as we shall see, in the person of Joash, the son and successor of Jehoahaz. At last the people might enjoy a little quiet. Had they attributed this favor to God, this blessing would have continued, but "they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam," but "walked therein" (2 Kings 13:6). The remark is constantly made that the world gladly enjoys God's favors without being the least bit careful to serve him.

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