2 Kings - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Short Meditations on Elisha, Prophecy Upon Hazael, The

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We have here another instance of the intimacy of the prophet with the counsels of the Lord. What daily communications there must have been between them! Indeed, in the history of God's people, glorious revelations have been vouchsafed to those faithful ones who stood obedient—the witnessing and suffering remnants in evil times. Thus to Ezekiel and Daniel among the captives, what extended visions of divine purposes were opened to them! So when Zechariah, Haggai, and their companions began, in honesty of heart and in spite of enemies, to work at the house of the Lord as His faithful remnant returned out of captivity, what thoughts and scenes of coming glory are made to pass before them! As still more marvelously afterward, in like manner, before John in Patmos, where he was a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus. And Elijah and Elisha were of the same. They were, each of them in his season, the godly remnant of their day, and had very preciously the eye, the ear, and the lips of the Lord opened to them.

But from this passage in his history we find that Elisha had honor beyond the limits of Israel. We see him in Damascus, and his arrival is soon reported to the king, and honored by him. The case of Naaman may have given him this introduction to the honor and confidence of the Syrian court, and is some evidence of the testimony which that healed leper, that converted sinner of the Gentiles, had borne to the name of the God of Israel, so that at least the Syrian king does not now again look to the king (see chap. 5: 5), but to the prophet of Israel.

But I must notice the character of Hazael. He had come to Elisha with an inquiry from the Syrian king his master, about the disease under which the king was then suffering. Elisha tells him to say to his master, "Thou mayest surely recover." But having given this answer to the king's inquiry, he adds another word, "Howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die."

On hearing this, we read that Hazael "settled his countenance steadfastly until he was ashamed. This was hypocrisy. Under the eye of the prophet, before the truthful mind of the man of God, this show of his countenance witnessed against him. He feigned sorrow at this prophecy of Ben-hadad's death.

The prophet himself, during this little moment of Hazael's practicing grief, appears to have been following the course of divine inspiration through his own soul, and he weeps at the prospect of all the evil which this Hazael would do to Israel when he got into power—for into such scenes the Spirit of the Lord was now leading him. The prophet's sorrow was as genuine as Hazael's was hypocritical. It was the result in his heart of the divine vision which his eye was then beholding.

Hazael then returns to Benhadad, and misstates to him the prophet's answer to his inquiry. The prophet had said, "Thou mayest surely recover"—thereby intimating that there was nothing in the disease itself that was fatal; and then he added, "The Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die,"— thereby intimating that Benhadad was to perish by other means than the disease. Hazael, however, now tells the king that the prophet had said, "He should surely recover." Here was the misstatement, or the lie, of this hypocrite. But the end strikingly shows the full, unmixed truth of the prophet's words—for the disease does not kill the king, but by other means, even by the hand of this murderous Hazael. Thus Benhadad might have recovered, but he surely dies, as the prophet had spoken.

Short Meditations on Elisha, Shunammite Again, The

From this short notice of another incident in the path of our prophet, we see again how intimate he was with the mind of God. For here we are reminded again of that scripture, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."

The famine must be told to Elisha now, as to Joseph, and Agabus; and others, in older or more recent times. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" was the language of the same gracious Lord who thus treats His faithful servants as friends. It was the mind and the hand, the counsels and the strength of the Lord, which this prophet so gloriously carried with him.

And we find all God's riches still used in grace to others. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." Abraham used it to the profit of others; and, knowing the purposed judgment, interceded for the righteous remnant in Sodom. So Elisha here. He heard of the coming famine, and he warned the godly woman of Shunem to provide for her household against it.

Her circumstances are changed from what they once were. This loved and honored woman has, apparently, become a widow; her little child, the gift of God to this daughter of Sarah, has grown up. But the famine has separated them from their home and their fields in the land of Issachar. (See chap. 4.)And she had once loved her mercies there: she "dwelt among her own people." She valued not the court nor its patronage then; nor does she now seek it, save to be restored to the same simplicity of her home and her own people. And, surely, we may judge, that "the little chamber on the wall" helped to draw back her recollections and desires to that loved place where she had known the quickening and resurrection strength of her Lord and Savior, by the hand of His chosen servant.

Gehazi is in other circumstances also. It may be that the root of the matter was in him; "but he is a leper." He is separated from the prophet of God now. It was not famine, however, but covetousness that did this. He has now only to recollect, but no longer to witness, "the great things" of Elisha. Happy, if in repentance he can tell of them with holy delight to the king—happier, had constancy in faith and in the spirit kept him still in company with his master! But he had wronged his own soul, as we all do, beloved, in our way and measure: "Blessed is the man that heareth Me," says Wisdom, "watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors; for whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord; but he that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul." And gracious it is in the Lord to give us this parting look at

him. We may hope that as he had once pierced himself through with many sorrows because he would be rich (1 Tim. 6), so now that money is no longer the thing, his heart and his lips bring recollections of Elisha. For the Lord here graciously seems to use him again and makes him helpful to this dear and godly friend of the prophet in the day of her necessity. Happy is it to note something like restoring grace from the Lord, though His Spirit be so grieved with the backslidings of His people! Oh, that we may praise Him for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

“A word spoken in due season, how good is it,” we may almost say of the incident in this little passage. Gehazi and the king were talking of the Shunammite, as the Shunammite came up to the place where they were. And how often have we occasion to notice like happy coincidences! There are scarcely any who have not to recount some such things in their history. “We were just speaking of you,” has been said again and again to one suddenly making his appearance in the midst of a little group of friends. And faith will own the mercy of such harbingers casting up the highway, and making straight the crooked paths, which lead to some desired blessing, as in this case before us. And faith will not complain that it is not always so. For faith says, “It is well,” when providences either help or cross us.

‘Tis an equal hand of love that takes the thorn out of the flesh, or leaves it there. If left, it is only made to work further good.

Short Meditations on Elisha, Famine in Samaria, The

We have in this portion of our prophet’s history something of very peculiar significance. The richest ways of divine grace are illustrated in this striking picture of Samaria’s misery and deliverance.

The siege of that city by the army of Syria reduced it to the extremest wretchedness. An ass’s head was worth eighty pieces of silver, and mothers were compelled to feed upon their offspring.

One need not draw the picture of misery to greater length than this. Here it is, in all its horror! It reminds one of Legion in the gospels: another picture of what the unmitigated and unchecked power of the great captor could do with all of us.

But man is further disclosed in this history. He is seen in the character of his mind, as well as in his misery and state of captivity to his ruthless destroyer. “God do so and more also to me,” says the king of Israel, “if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.”

This was man charging on God (or His servant—the same thing) all the mischief that was occurring. It was like Adam at the beginning of our sin—“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” It was like Cain—“Am I my brother’s keeper?” It was laying the sin and the sorrow on that head which was alone clear and free of it all. This was an overflowing of sin. Like the cross of Christ, this was the height of evil. This was the moment of Samaria’s fullest iniquity. But, like the same cross of Christ, this same moment was just the occasion for the display of the divine grace. The ruin was complete, and without hope from man. Then it is that Elisha’s lips are opened with a promise, and he delivers a word from the Lord.

For if the power of Israel be gone, and there is none shut up nor left, will not the Lord repent Himself concerning His servants? (Deut. 32:36.) If God see that there is no man, no intercessor, will not His own arm bring salvation? If the enemy comes in like a flood, will not the Spirit lift up a standard against him? (Isa. 50:16-19.) And such was this moment in Samaria. Such a moment was the moment of God’s glorious grace —that where sin abounded, there grace more abounded—that, as in the cross of Christ, man was at the height of his rebellion so God was also at the height of the glory of His goodness; now when the sin and misery of Samaria were at the full, the cup of divine blessing was also about to overflow. “Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.”

“In the gate of Samaria!” Truly precious that thought is to the needy soul—blessed notice of the grace of the gospel! Salvation is not to be sought for either in heaven above or in the depths beneath. It has come to us. The sin offering lies at the door. The Israelite need not leave the lintel of his own house to accomplish the full security of that house from the sword of the destroyer. Grace brings the relief which grace has provided. The fine flour and the barley were to be had by the famished people at the very gate of their city! (See Rom. 10:6-8.)

How are the shining footmarks of the salvation of God to be traced in all this, beloved. “Mercy for fetching,” as one of old said, “nay, for desiring; nay, for nothing but receiving.”

This appears to me to be very striking indeed. And this was Elisha’s glory in this scene; he knew the mind of God. The wicked heart of man was working its worst. The king of Israel was laying the mischief, as I have observed, on the only one who was really clear of it; as the high priest, Caiaphas gave counsel that one must die for the people, lest the whole nation perish, and that one must be He who alone was guiltless of all the nation’s sorrow. (John 11.) But then it is that God’s remedy reveals itself. Then it is that grace abounds. And instead of the ass’s head being bought for eighty pieces of silver, a measure of flour and two measures of barley should now be bought for one shekel in the gate of the self-destroyed city.

But if we have thus before us the height of human evil met by the aboundings of divine grace, we have also the varied way in which this grace is entertained in the world.

It meets with rejection from some. The nobleman exhibits that to us. He would not believe that God could do all that His prophet was now pronouncing. There was a lion in the way. If windows were to be opened in heaven, might this be? And who ever heard of windows in heaven? This is all said just in the spirit of unbelief; in the evil temper of the heart that refuses to receive good tidings from God; who will not have happy thoughts of nor entertain holy confidence towards Him, but who, when He speaks of pardon and blessing, rejects the grace, and will rather cleave to its own hard notions of such grace being a thing impossible—so ignorant, so alien from the life of God, is the heart of man.

There is a generation, however, who have no other hope — a people who have spent all on physicians for the healing of their plague, and are not a whit better. There are lepers outside the camp still—poor convicted sinners, “too bad for any but Jesus,” as one of them once said. Death is before, behind, and around them. The Syrian host, as they judge, before—the famishing city behind—their own diseased, leprous, and dead bodies encompassing them around. To such this grace comes in suited, needed time. They find that it is all to them. It is either

certain death for them, or their last, only resource is in God Himself. And such arise, and take the spoil. Their necessities throw them into the place where Christ has gained the victory, and on the store-house which God hath both filled and opened.

Like the four lepers here, they had no help for it. Their very necessities, pressed in by death all around, threw them into the camp of the Syrians, where the Lord, all single-handed and alone, had been gaining victory. For it was the Lord who had made the Syrian host hear a noise of chariots and horses, and thus alone had put them all to flight. Of the people of Israel there are none with Him. It was the time and day of the Lord. Israel was dying in Samaria.

The lepers were dying without. And God meets the Syrian host alone. The poor lepers have nothing to do but to arise and share the fruit of the Lord's triumph—as the sinner, now. It has been entirely and altogether the victory of Jesus. None stood with Him, or for Him. Alone He met the enemy—alone He suffered the penalty —He drank the cup alone—and three hours of darkness fell from heaven because He was made sin—He alone hung a curse upon the tree. The gospel is the publishing of all this strife and triumph of Jesus, that sinners, dead as lepers, may come and feed and live forever on that feast, that spoil of glorious war, which Jesus has won for them.

And what does their own joy communicate to them? A desire to divide the spoils. They tell what a Savior they have found. They spread the good tidings which they have themselves received, and by which they live.

There is no temper of soul that the spirit of the renewed mind more thoroughly condemns than the selfishness of our old, wretched nature. The working of it is too well known by some of us; but the working of it is so contrary to the glorious and generous grace of God in the gospel, that it leaves, when indulged, the tinge of fear behind it in the soul. "We do not well:" said one of these lepers to the other, "this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." And they publish it at once, as in the high places.

All this exercise of heart is easily to be understood by the renewed mind which has tasted of, and been formed by, the grace of the gospel. But there is more in this striking picture. We see weak or slow-hearted faith in the king. He reasons about the good tidings. He does not, in the bold unbelief and scorn of the nobleman at once refuse them, but he reasons about them: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." But grace abounds. Grace, as in the case of Naaman, can provide a minister as well as a treasury—and the slow-hearted king, as well as the readier lepers, share the spoils of the glorious victory of the Lord, and all the famishing city follow. "The lame take the prey." None come short but the unbelieving nobleman. Distrust of the divine bountifulness alone cuts off in the day of this feast of Israel. But all is accomplished: the measures of flour and of barley are sold in the gate, and the nobleman perishes alone in his unbelief.

The great things of the gospel of God are thus illustrated in this very striking picture of Samaria's misery and deliverance—materials for our holy, profitable comfort and admonition. But not merely to investigate, and admire these skillful ways of the divine wisdom may it be our purpose, but to mark and digest them, that our souls may be refreshed, and our faith in the gracious Provider for all our need, and all our delights for eternity, be blessedly strengthened!

Short Meditations on Elisha, Syrian Host Struck Blind, The

I have already observed that testimony against evil, and consequent suffering, marked the history of Elijah; power, and the gracious use of it, the ways of Elisha. According to this, many instances of combined power and grace in Jesus stand reflected in the doings of Elisha.

In the scene that lies before us here, we have recollections of our Lord strongly brought to mind. He had twelve legions of angels at command, had He pleased; and so a mountain full of horses and chariots wait on our prophet. The simplicity of his faith is very remarkable: he needed not prayer for himself; he had already seen the "chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 2:12), and rested in the certainty that they were, at any time, ready for his use—and now in the time of his need, he knows that they are at hand.

He has not ,therefore, to pray for himself. All he does is to desire for his servant that he may stand on the same elevation of faith.

Elisha had seen, as I said, these horses and chariots of Israel already. He knew that the God of Jeshurun rode on the heavens for Jeshurun's help, and he would have his servant's thoughts, in the present hour of danger, full of the same sense of this divine security. These chariots and horses of fire which fill the mountain, and which in the day of the translation of Elijah were accompanied by a whirlwind, were, I doubt not, a host or constellation of angels, those heavenly creatures, which, excelling in strength, stand in the presence of God, or go forth to minister on account of those who are heirs of salvation. For of them we read that God "maketh His angels spirits [winds] and His ministers a flame of fire"; and again, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." At the divine behest, they get ready to serve in whatever the exigency of the saint, or the occasion under the throne of God, may require. They formed a traveling chariot to convey Elijah to heaven, and to carry Lazarus to Abraham's bosom. They now form chariots of war, when Elisha is beleaguered by the hostile bands of Syria. Either singly or in company they visit the elect on earth, and either alone or in concert celebrate the joy of heaven in the audience of the earth. They have drawn the sword to smite a guilty city, or with the strong hand of love dragged the too-reluctant one forth from the doomed city. They are either as winds or as fire. They are messengers of mercy, and executors of judgment, as "the Lord" who "is among them" may command. They attended on Mount Sinai when the law was published, and they hovered over the fields of Bethlehem when Jesus was born. And here, in their order and strength, they are as a wall of fire, a wall of salvation, round about our prophet.

Very blessed all this is. And still more blessed to know, that before long, the hidden glories, which are now only known to such faith as Elisha's, will become the manifested things. The threatenings of the enemy, the noise and the din and the clang of arms, which are the present, apparent things, full of fears and sorrows for the heart, shall have rolled by, like the past thunderstorm, to leave the sunshine the brighter.

But there is more than this calmness and certainty of faith. We have traces of the power and of the grace of Jesus in this path of our prophet. "When the wicked even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." Thus David spake concerning Jesus (Psa. 27). And accordingly, in the garden, when the band of men and officers came to lay hold on Him, "As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18). So here with our prophet. The bands of Syria came to Dothan to

fetch him, but the Lord smote them with blindness, as they were making ready to make him their prey.

Thus the glory of power in the Lord was reflected in Elisha. But the measures of this glory were again, as we have seen before, diverse. Elisha sought the Lord's power in this; Jesus stands in that of His own Person, and the enemy equally bows before it. "As soon as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground."

But there is the grace, as well as the power, of the Son of God here. The Lord, in His day, refuses to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax, nor lets the untimely zeal of a disciple call down fire from heaven upon His despisers. He refuses to use His strength and authority even for the righteous judgment of His foes. (See Matthew 12.) He will not strive nor cry, nor let His voice be heard in the streets, but, "suffering thus far," He overcomes evil with good. And so Elisha. He had the bruised reed, the smoking flax, at his mercy, but he will not break nor quench it. "My father, shall I smite them?" says the king, as he had the Syrian bands caught in the net of Samaria. But the prophet answered, "Thou shalt not smite them... set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master."

Blessed and precious expression of the mind of God! What constellations of moral glories shine in His ways! And these ways of the Lord, in combined power and grace, get their image in these ways of this honored prophet. How much he was in the intimacy of God, if I may so speak! How fully in His friendship, knowing His secrets! And how largely does his history illustrate those words, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but, He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). He knew of mountains of strength and salvation that were altogether invisible to others: he knew of abundance at the doors tomorrow, though today all was famine and death in the city. And if he be not told everything (such was the marvelous condescending love of the Lord to him, and with which his soul was familiar), it is rather his wonder (see 2 Kings 4:27). And so of each of us (not honored prophets, but the weakest saints), it may as really be said, "We have the mind of Christ." Oh, for power in our souls to value such goodness in Him, and such dignity and blessing for us!

Short Meditations on Elisha, Iron Made to Swim, The

This is a simple, domestic scene, and yet, according to the same wondrous ways of Elisha, calculated again to call the doings of the Lord Himself to mind. For whether it be Peter, or the iron, that stands on the face of the waters, both are equally contrary to nature. Neither is there any natural alliance between the cause and the effect, between the casting in of a stick, and the swimming of the iron, as there was none afterward between the putting clay on the eyes and the restoring of sight. It is neither the skill of the workman nor the fitness of the instrument that is to be considered, but the excellency of the power of God. How natural and easy was the behavior of our prophet here! In a moment he is one of a company that are busied about the simplest domestic concern. The great Apostle of the Gentiles would gather sticks to help to make up the fire; and the Lord of prophets and apostles, even after He had risen from the dead, would get ready the dinner on the seashore! And yet what august power lay in their hands all the while. The Apostle shakes a venomous beast into the very fire he was kindling, and the *prophet makes the iron head of the ax to swim on the face of the water! Oh, the beautiful, godlike condescension of real power!

But I read another lesson here.

It has been observed, I believe, that properly speaking, there is "nothing either great or little with God"—His nature opposes the thought. That may be so. But we are less able to infer consequences or truths from God's nature than from His revelation. Indeed, we dare not assume to know His nature, but from His revelation. From His revelation, however, we are led, in some sense, to see this to be a truth:there is nothing either great or little with Him.

We may trace some expressions of this in all His ways.

At creation, so to illustrate it, the wing of an insect was framed with the same care as the heavens or the earth. The small and the great, in that way, then stood before Him.

In settling the nation of Israel, protection for the roofs of the houses by battlements, lest blood should be shed, was ascertained by a divine oracle, with as full and clear decision as the services of the sanctuary or the allotments of the tribes.

Jesus, in His ministry, would take the little children in His arms, as He would His most honored disciples up to the mount of glory. This was still of the same character.

So, in feeding and ordering the churches afterward—the details between men and women, old and young, with other relations, are attended to by the same Spirit, who was at the same time revealing mysteries kept secret from the foundation of the world. He gives directions about taking a little wine for the stomach's sake, as He would unfold the inheritance of the Father of glory in the saints.

And it is the grace of the Holy Spirit, in this equal care about the great and the little things, which has especially dwelt on my heart at this time. For though His due, yea, and happy work, is to take of the things of the Father and of Christ, and to show them to us, still He turns to matters of discipline for the comfort of the weakest of us. And is not this done, to speak after the manner of men, at some personal cost? "Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, to go to be promoted over the trees?" The blessed Spirit's joy is to deal with Jesus. But in His grace, He consents to deal with all the possible exigencies of the saints.

And thus indeed it is: Whether the divine action be in creation, in providence, or in redemption,—whether it be in Israel or in the churches; whether dispensationally it be the Father, the Lord, or the Holy Spirit, still we see the big and little equally the care of God—the great and the small standing alike before Him—as we read again and again in the Apocalypse.

This is to be observed also in more private actings of our God. By His prophet (as we have it in this passage) he will raise an ax's head from the water, because the recollection that it was borrowed was distressing the mind of one of the prophet's companions. So the Lord (as another once observed) encourages His people to pray that "their flight might not be in the winter," simply, of course, because flight in that season would be the more uneasy and difficult; thus showing His care about the most ordinary conveniences of His saints, as well as about their troubles and anxieties. The little scene in this passage, as I have said, is one illustration of this.

And what is all this? It is not merely the condescension of power, though that is beautiful, but the grace of benevolence. It is because these little things concern our comfort and present well-being, that they are thus waited on. And we, in our measure, should be imitators of this. It may not be the delight of the spiritual, nay, it cannot, to forsake the sweetness and good fruit of the doctrine of the Father and of Christ, for matters touching the discipline of the saints—to be promoted over such thorns and briars as they are—but still, this pattern of divine benevolence, which thus parcels itself out on things, be they great or small, provided they do but concern others, puts it upon us as our duty: “Be ye imitators of God,” it is written, “as dear children.” “Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”

Short Meditations on Elisha, Multitude Fed, The

In the preceding little narrative we saw in our prophet a bright expression of the power of the Son of God in meeting the power of death. It was as the stronger man entering after the strong to spoil him—the power of life casting itself into the place of death, to clear away death and destroy it.

Here we have a gentler expression of the power of the same glorious Jesus. It was still the same time of dearth as before (vs. 38). But with twenty barley loaves and some ears of corn the prophet feeds a hundred men, to the amazement of his servitor—as afterward Jesus fed five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes, to the amazement of His disciples: fragments were left after both meals that we might know the aboundings of our Father’s house, that there we find “bread enough, and to spare.” We have to go to Him as One who has overflowing treasures as well as overflowing affections. We are straitened neither in Himself nor in His resources. “His love is as large as His power”—and, I may add, His power as His love—” knows neither measure nor end.”

There is a difference, however, not only in the size of these two miracles, if I may so speak, of Elisha and of Jesus, but in the style and bearing of them. Elisha feeds the people “according to the word of the Lord”; Jesus, by His own word. Elisha says, “Thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof”; but Jesus says, “Make the men sit down.” The glories are thus diverse. Jesus was “the Word,” according to whom Elisha fed the people. Elisha carried the name of the Lord with him, but Jesus was Himself the Lord, and bore about with Him, and exercised the rights and authority of His own name. We know the Son of Man in Thee, Lord Jesus, but we know Thee also God over all, blessed forever!

Short Meditations on Elisha, Deadly Pottage Healed, The

The incidents of our prophet’s life are like so many emanations of glory through the cloud of his apparent poverty and nothingness in the world. And this was one character of the life of the Son of God on the earth.

Here we have a very bright expression of Elisha’s ways, and of the way of Him whom he foreshadowed.

There was “death in the pot”; death, where indeed life should have been—death invading the place where life looked for its support and strengthening. But the prophet has the remedy for death here, as he had for the curse at Jericho. We know One of whom we sing, “Where He displays His healing power, Death and the curse are known no more.”

And here, our prophet, the shadow of Jesus, has meal to cast into the pot, as before he had salt to cast into the waters, and both are healed. Moses typified this also at Marah, where he had the wood for the bitter waters. The Son of God has cast Himself into the scene of death and intercepted its course. He has come with His healing cross and “destroyed him that had the power of death.” “By His stripes we are healed.” There is a cry at the discovery of death that has entered, but the Son of God has answered it. We eat of what in our willfulness we have gathered, but Jesus changes the feast and gives us meat indeed and drink indeed, on which we live even in the time of dearth, or in the regions of death.

Death and the curse are altogether at the disposal of Him who has cast Himself into the scene and action of this world, on our side. “I have the keys of hell and of death,” He says, and His strength shall rescue even creation from the curse, and cast death itself into the lake of fire (Rom. 8; Rev. 20).

Why, we may ask with amazement of soul, did we ever gather our wild fruit and bring death in? Why did we not sit at the feast as it was first spread for us? What a miniature picture of the whole great mystery does this little incident give us! What has Adam done? What has Christ done? Have we not the answer here? The prophet prepared a feast. Though it were a time of dearth, he had resources. He had pottage for his guests, and the pot was seething on the fire. But there was someone, it matters not who, save that it was neither the prophet nor his servant, who thought to improve the feast, and intrusively gathered some wild gourds. But his gourds brought death into the prophet’s pot. And what did Adam but this? The Lord, the Creator, had spread a feast, rich and dainty, and abundant for him in Eden, but Adam must needs improve it. He gathers wild fruit, something that the Lord had not ordained for the table, something in addition; but he spoils everything, and brings death into the pot: death upon that board which the Lord had loaded with the sweetest, richest food of life!

The prophet, however, has the remedy, and heals the pot, and then his guests retake their seats at the feast with only fresh appetite to still more savory meat. It is now a healed table, and not a spread table merely. They may admire and love the man and his resources, who could then, in un-upbraiding grace, restore their good things—the good things which in their wanton pride they had thought to improve, but had utterly ruined and defiled. Is not this Jesus and ourselves? I ask. Do we not sit at a healed table? We are at a happier table than the bowers of Eden would have ever shaded. We sit at the feast of the Redeemer with new affections. We admire the healing as well as the creating virtue of His power, and lose ourselves in love and praise at the thought of the un-upbraiding grace that has thus repaired the mischief.

Short Meditations on Elisha, Shunammite, The

Here we have another exhibition of the power of Elisha's walk through the earth. This is very glorious: savoring, as we shall see, very strikingly of the energy and authority of God that was with him. And yet, though walking thus in such power toward others, he has himself, all the while, nothing. Poor indeed, while making many rich: seeming to possess all things, yet really having nothing. Receiving bounty and care in the ordinary need of life from those in whose behalf he, at the same time, is opening resources which were altogether beyond man.

And, besides, he walks alone in the world, and yet all wait on him.

All this gives us a strong expression of the ways of One who could call Himself Master and Lord, receiving the homage of faith, even while He had not where to lay His head. In all this our prophet is marking out for us, as in a reflection, the path of Jesus in one of its most striking, remarkable characters.

The woman whom this passage introduces to us was evidently one of the godly seed in the land. She lived in the distant tribe of Issachar, and does not appear to have personally known this mighty prophet of God. But she quickly apprehends something of the Lord about him. She had been already taught of God: her religion was that which discerned God's mind and way in an evil day, when apostasy was clouding everything. New moons and sabbaths, as her husband wrongly judged, did not constitute her service, nor mark out the path of her spirit with God. But Elisha, who was at that day the channel of divine grace and power apart from the temple and its ordinances, was her object and hope, as he was God's object and instrument.

She accordingly prepares him a place of sojourning in her own house. And her intelligence of him is further and strikingly marked by the preparation she makes for him. It was but a little chamber, with its bed, its table, its stool, and its candlestick. All was in the simplicity of a man of God who stood apart from the world, a stranger in the midst of its corruptions.

She knew him because she was like him. One spirit was in them both. She understood his pilgrim thoughts and habits, just because she was exercised in them herself. And this is the only way really and divinely to know either the children of God, or God Himself. It is by the union and mind of the same spirit.

She dwelt among her own people and cared not to be spoken for either to the king or to the captain of the host—even as Elisha, who, though he had the ear of the king and of the captain of the host (as well he might after feeding their armies in the day of battle), yet would be a stranger and pilgrim in the land, and lodge in a little chamber with a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick.

These are the sympathies in the spirit between the children of God. She could receive a prophet in the name of a prophet, according to the tastes of a prophet. And the great prophet of that day, God's witness in the land, the vessel of fullest divine treasure that was then, in the name of the Lord, shedding its blessing wherever it was borne in the might of the Spirit, is of one mind with this unknown and distant daughter of Abraham in the borders of Issachar. Precious are the traces of one Spirit thus quickening and forming every elect member of the same household.

And we shall find not only Abraham's daughter, but something of Abraham's house and Abraham's faith in this honored and interesting place. This woman had no child, and her husband was now old. But as the Lord Himself had once said to Abraham, "According to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son," so now the Lord's prophet says to this Shunammite, "According to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." And so it was—as with Sarah, so with this woman; the quickening power of God entered her house, and, as it was promised her, she embraced a son.

More, however, than even this is to be witnessed in this house; she is to learn, through the hand of Elisha, resurrection as well as quickening power; just as, in the house of Abraham, it was learned from the Lord Himself. Isaac, who was at the first quickened in the womb of Sarah through the power of God, was afterward received as from the dead. And so here. The sentence of death is laid on this child of promise; but the same power of God, through Elisha, raises him from the dead.

This is Abraham's house again, and a distant woman of Issachar is thus noticed, thus honored, and graced, by the Lord God of her people. This makes this house of the Shunammite a sample of that glorious mystery in which we are all concerned, a witness of every soul where the power of God is known: for it is there a quickening and resurrection power, which calls up those who were dead in trespasses and sins to live in the life of the Son of God.

Faith possesses itself of this—faith, which apprehends death in ourselves, but life in Jesus: the simpler, the happier, the more unquestioning, and the more according to God's mind. It was so in this Shunammite. Her faith, as we saw, was ready at the first to apprehend the prophet; it was ready to know that all was well, or should be well, even when death had entered the house. And it was ready, in spite of all tempters, to cleave to God's prophet, God's object and instrument, and to him only. This was precious simplicity of confidence. And throughout the trial of her faith, to which she is now put, as was her father Abraham in his day, I observe the same calmness and certainty. When the patriarch was ordered to take his son and offer him up for a burnt offering, he went forth to the trial with the unhesitating obedience of faith. The ass and the young men were at once put in readiness; and the knife, and the fire, and the wood, were all prepared. Faith counted on resurrection. Abraham reckoned on God's being able to raise Isaac from the dead, as of old He had quickened him in the womb of Sarah; and Abraham was undisturbed. When the deliverance did come, and the voice from heaven announced the substitute for Isaac, Abraham is not amazed. He does not wonder, or suspect, or ask again whether indeed this be so, but he looses his son in the same faith and certainty that he had bound him. Oh, what depth and character there is in that calmness! Faith had anticipated resurrection. And altogether in the same spirit is the path of faith trodden here by this dear and honored daughter of Abraham. Death was in her house again, but she knew of a quickener of the dead; and, therefore, the ass and the young men are again got ready. "It is well" is the language of her faith in sure and certain hope of resurrection of the dead, and at the end, life is no amazement to her. She received her dead brought to life again (Heb. 11). She can loose her son by faith, as well as bind him. She falls at the prophet's feet and bows her head. She owns in thankfulness and humiliation the precious gift, but she bears it away without amazement: it was no wonder to her. She does not curiously examine the child, whether indeed it were alive again. Faith had counted on such an hour, and already had received her child as in resurrection, and her soul had only to know that her loved one was warm and living in her bosom again.

Indeed, all this is the pattern of a sinner's faith. Should it be thought a thing incredible with us that God should raise the dead? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Faith is to say, "With God all things are possible." And we are to go forth from a state of death in trespasses and sins into life and liberty—from the spirit of bondage and of fear, and from under the guilt of an unpurged conscience, without amazement or

suspicion because the Lord has done it. “Once was I blind, but now I see,” may be the calm, happy, and thankful certainty of the sinner who has met the Son of God in the healing virtue of His blood.

But there is still more in the faith of this dear soul. I find her faith tried in the two ways that the faith of Elisha had before been tried. The sons of the prophets on the one hand, the word of Elijah on the other, had put the faith of Elisha to sore trial, as we saw in chapter 2; but it prevailed, and onward he followed his master until the chariot of Israel separated them—and so here.

The thoughts of her husband first, and then the way of Elisha, both rise as tempters of the steadfastness of her soul. “Wherefore wilt thou go to him today?” says her husband to her; “it is neither new moon nor Sabbath.” Elisha commissions Gehazi for her relief, and would have him go forward and lay his staff on the face of the child. But the woman’s faith silences both. And she presses through the hindrance in the same decision and fervency that Elisha himself before had done, saying, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee” (2 Kings 2:2; 4:30).

The great enemy and deceiver, that old serpent, often proposes some delegated virtue—some servant and his staff. But faith ever withstands. Through his subtlety and darkening of divine counsels, confidence in ordinances was prevailing in Galatia; but Paul clung to the cross, and cast the bondwoman out of the house. For the trial of the soul, even the Lord Himself, like His prophet here, can make some such offer. “If thou wilt enter life,” says Jesus to the young ruler, “keep the commandments.” But faith would have answered, “Lord, Thou hast the words of eternal life.” The young ruler, however, may try the proposed remedy, and take the servant and the staff with him, and go his way; but Paul, and faith, and this dear woman of Issachar, must cling to Jesus only.

There is a greatness in the work of the Spirit in her soul that is indeed blessed. Elisha already had been known to her in the quickening of her dead body. She had learned him, or God’s power through him, in that; and to that she now clings, in the face of every temptation. She holds fast the beginning of her confidence. Elisha, the Lord’s witness at that time, was her object at the first, and so shall he be to the last. And so with the sinner and Jesus. The sinner who believes has learned the Son of God in His quickening power. He has understood the mystery of death and resurrection. He has been at Calvary and at the empty sepulcher. There he has seen things, and known the meaning of them for the full clearing of the conscience toward God. And no ordinance, as people speak, can take the place of them in the believer’s soul. One may talk of new moons and sabbaths; another of the prophet’s staff in the hand of a vicar or delegate; but the faith of a divinely-taught sinner apprehends nothing but the precious, unchanging, imperishable virtue of Him who was dead, and is alive again; from whom, as this dear woman did from Elisha, he has learned where alone this quickening, redeeming, and saving power of God is to be received and enjoyed.

Sweet and fruitful indeed is this spot where the feet of the prophet oft-times tarried, and where our thoughts, wearied with ourselves and the world, may as often turn to get refreshed in God!

Short Meditations on Elisha, Widow's Oil Multiplied, The

“According to your faith be it unto you,” was the Lord’s word to the two blind men. Wondrous and blessed indeed that in any wise our faith, or patience, or expectation of hope, should be allowed to measure the active and bounteous power of our Lord! But so it was. “According to your faith be it unto you”; and, again, “As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee” (Matt. 8:9).

And this is the voice of the miracle wrought here through the hand of Elisha. For as long as the poor widow produced her vessels, the pot produced its oil. The oil waited on the vessels. The vessels were the measure of the oil. In other words, divine power waited on faith—faith measured the active resources of God on the occasion. This was like the Lord of old standing with Abraham. For as long as Abraham stood interceding, the Lord stood promising (Gen. 18:17-33). This blessed grace of God has its illustration here.

But there is another thing. “What hast thou in the house?” said the prophet to the woman—as Jesus afterward said to His disciples, “How many loaves have ye?”—or, as He had said to Moses at the hill, “What is that in thy hand?” For it is suitable that whatever we have should be put to use. It may be quite unequal to the necessity; but whatever it be, it should be occupied. It may be but a shepherd’s staff, and Israel has to be redeemed; it may be but a pot of oil, and the creditor, who has a right to sell children and all, has to be paid; it may be but five barley loaves, and five thousand hungry ones have to be fed. But still, let what there is be occupied and brought forth. “She hath done what she could.” And, accordingly, the word here is, “What hast thou in the house?” And then, on bringing forth the pot of oil, the all of the house, let faith count on the power of God and His word of promise, and not only shall the creditor be discharged, but life sustained for many days over and above the payment. Not only shall the multitude be fed, but fragments gathered. Not only shall Israel be redeemed out of Egypt, but the same shepherd’s rod, now God’s rod, shall feed and keep the flock to the end of the desert.

Short Meditations on Elisha, Judgment of the Scoffing Children, The

Another meditation is suggested here: children of Bethel are another order of persons altogether. If Elisha presents the strong one in Christ, the true Levite, who had turned his back on all but the glory, and the chariot of fire to conduct him to it; and if the sons of the prophets are the weak ones—still, however, by divine grace in the same company as Elisha—then these children of Bethel, on the other hand, are the mockers, or infidels. They despise the word of the Lord. They mock the thought of ascension:. “Where is the promise of His coming?”they say (2 Peter 3). The whole mystery of God, made known for salvation and glory, is their sport. They put the Son of God to open shame. “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head,” they say to Elisha, as mocking the thought that Elijah had already gone up. And here the curse falls. Ministers of wrath come forth—the bears on the children of Bethel, and the eagles on the carcass— to vindicate the divine truth against the gainsayers. Creation, it is true, is not to groan forever under the curse which our sin has put on it—but shall be delivered from bondage into glorious liberty (Rom. 8), as Jericho had just been. But the curse will rest on the Cain—children of Bethel, who despise God’s remedy for the misery wrought by sin. And it is written of such mocking, infidel children—children of disobedience, whether of Babylon, of Bethel, or of Edom, “Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones” (Psa. 137).

There are different elevations among the saints: Lot did not stand on a level with Abraham, nor did the “seven thousand” hidden ones with Elijah. But all were equally the elect of God, known to Him, and preserved by Him .It is so here: Elisha and the sons of the prophets illustrate the same thing. We have just seen the one pressing through all hindrances after heavenly honors, but now we are to see others with a mind too sadly formed by the earth.

These sons of the prophets were, Nicodemus-like, slow-hearted to believe. Their thoughts do not rise above the mountains and valleys of the earth. They had never seen a heavenly chariot. They cannot think but that Elijah is still somewhere here—and they search for him here. Elisha would have led them at once to his place of light and elevation; but they must be taught through their own mistakes and unbelief.

Elisha can, however, own them. Weak and inapprehensive as they may be, they share, however, his company and his blessing. The city where they dwelt had been under a curse (Josh. 6). But he brings healing to it. “There shall be no more curse” was the language of the prophet over Jericho, as it will be the language of the Lord over the inheritance (Rom. 8; Rev. 22). And this is comforting, while it is humbling to us, consciously weak ones—to us who, from what we know of our poor souls, stand more with the sons of the prophets around Jericho than travel in the strength of the Holy Spirit with Elisha through the Jordan. It should humble us to think that we are not on his level, while it may blessedly comfort us to know that the Lord is still ours. The small and the great stand before Him.

But here I would observe that from the moment when our prophet took up the mantle of his master, God was all he had; but he found Him enough for all he needed. This need, however, like that of Jesus, was not his own. It was for others he used his resources and strength in God. He was rich, but not for himself. Thus he meets the inconveniences of nature: Without a purse, he relieves the poor; without a commissariat, he supplies armies; the deadly thing, he makes harmless; without bread, he gives food to a multitude, and gathers fragments; without medicine, he heals disease; without arms or soldiers, he defeats enemies; in famine, he supplies a nation; though dead, he communicates life.

All this tells us of Jesus. For Jesus had nothing, yet He made He many rich. He had the worlds of nature and of grace for the needy children of men. And His ways are reflected in His servant Elisha.

Short Meditations on Elisha, Translation of Elijah, The

These verses give us the first distinct portion. Long before this, Elijah had invited Elisha into ministry with him (1 Kings 19) by passing by and casting his mantle upon him; but Elisha was not then quite prepared. He pleaded his father and mothe: “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.” Upon which Elijah, as it were, withdrew his mantle from him and recalled his invitation, saying, “Go back again: for what have I done to thee?” (The Lord seems to refer to the call of Elisha, in Luke 9:62. Elisha was then at the plow but seemed to look a little back. See 1 Kings 19:19-20.)

This was significant. For though Elisha is for a moment seen ministering to Elijah after this (1 Kings 19:21), yet we do not again find him expressly in company with his master until now that his master is just about to be taken from him.

And to what end is he now seen with him? Just to abide the fire, just to stand the test, whether indeed he were or were not fully prepared for the mantle.

Elijah can leave his mantle behind him. He needed it not in heaven to which he was going. As soon as he entered the fiery chariot on which the whirlwind attended—as soon as he was borne by angels (Heb. 1:7) up to heaven, he may, and must, disrobe himself. The mantle stands for the instrument of power, the gift for service here—and the servant lays that aside when his service is over; just as the sinner at his conversion, when his old estate is passed, can cast away his garments (Mark 10:50). “We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

But though Elijah may now dispense with his mantle, is Elisha prepared for it? That is the question. And this trial is made by two instruments—Elijah himself, and the sons of the prophets. Both were used by God to prove if, indeed, Elijah’s mantle were chief in Elisha’s esteem—whether he carried within him the spirit of a true Levite, of one with whom the Urim and Thummim might be,now being found able to say to his father and his mother, “I have not seen him” (Deut. 33:8-9). This was the test: the Lord was weighing Elisha’s value of the glory. He was ascertaining how heavy a share in the joy and honor of being in the spirit and ministry of Elijah was in the scales of Elisha’s affections, and he stands the test; nothing slackens his hand. He silences all temptations; he declares plainly that he coveted the mantle, the double portion of the Spirit. He turns his eye from every object but the glory. It is no more his father or his mother behind him whom he would return to kiss, but it is his father in the faith, his kindred in the Spirit, he clings to and follows, upward and onward. “My father, my father,”he said, as Elijah was ascending, “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof”!

This was enough. There was a slight flaw in his title to the mantle at first, as we saw (1 Kings 19), but now his title is perfect. He is a true Levite. “He knows no man after the flesh,” and the mantle is his.

And this is a holy lesson for us. For how little do our hearts, surely we know, value the mantle—value the honor of serving Jesus, or a share of His coming glories! This tested not the prophet’s title to God Himself, or salvation. Elijah had no doubt that Elisha was the Lord’s; but this was trying his estimation of glory. And that is properly our only question. We are to examine ourselves whether we are walking worthy of the Lord’s glory—whether we value a share in it. And well for us if discipline lead us to covet it, as it did Elisha—well if nature, which is so tenacious of its life and its rights in us, be rebuked. While it says, “Go back and kiss father and mother,” we rather listen to the voice of the mantle which tells us to go forward after the prophet of God.

And humbling it is to know that the heart, left to itself without the Spirit, cares not for God or His glory. It once sold Him for a mess of pottage, then for a herd of swine, and then for thirty pieces of silver—and would still, for anything. The chariot may go back to heaven empty for all we

care. This is the language of the heart. But, oh for grace to value a portion with Thee, blessed Savior! Oh for power in our souls to long for a seat with Thee in that heavenly chariot that shall separate us from earth and its interests, and take us in Thee, and with Thee, and through Thee, to the height of glorious bliss!

Short Meditations on Elisha, Conclusion

We have now gone through the actions of Elisha, whose name signifies “Salvation of God.” It has given us many an expression of the marvelous power and abounding grace of Jesus—some faint, but true, traces of the Son of God, in that divine mystery of strength, and divine tenderness of goodness, which manifested Him in the days of His flesh.

All of Jesus, it is true, is not seen in Elisha. Where should we find that? As a suffering witness against the world, Elijah, as I have said before, rather reflects Him. But in His ways of power and grace we see Him in Elisha.

There was no suffering for Elisha, I may say, after his master left him. It was not with him, as it had been with his master, the wrath of the throne prevailing to exile and harass him. But chief captains wait at his gates, and kings send presents to him. He discloses the secrets of one of them, disappoints the purposes of another, gives pledges of victory to a third, and grants supplies to the combined armies of them. Every path he treads wears after him some trace of the greatness of him who had been traveling there. Chariots of salvation fill the mountain, attending on the prophet. Famine, disease, and death own him. Nature again and again changes its course at his bidding. He goes onward in the Lord from strength to strength, and even his dead body puts forth strange and surprising virtue.

All this is seen in the ways of Elisha. And the goodness and power that was in him of God was well-known among the people, as the words of the little captive in the house of Naaman may easily assure us (see 2 Kings 5:3). And, yet, all the while he was personally nothing in the world. The more like Jesus. Elisha received bounty and care in the ordinary needs of life from those in whose behalf he was opening resources which were altogether beyond the reach or range of man’s ability. How like to Him, who, though He Himself was “an hungered,” again and again fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes; who asked for a cup of cold water from a woman at a well, and took the loan of an ass’s colt from its owner, though the cattle on a thousand hills are His!

Remarkable it is, that in the dark realms of the kingdom of Israel, the place of the revolted tribes, the Lord should have raised up such prophets as Elisha and his master. Lights they were truly in dark places. Judah, which had still the sanctuary and the priesthood, was never so visited. A rich unction of prophetic spirit was known in the waning hours of that kingdom, or after its sun was set, as in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others also in earlier days. But none of these were, in their scene of action, working miracles, executing judgments, ministering mercies, as Elijah and Elisha were.

We have no book of either the prophet Elijah or of Elisha, as we have of Isaiah; yet he was in no way important in the history of his day, as they were in theirs. In no sense was he a type of the Lord, though His prophet. But Jesus stands foreshadowed in them, in the most distinguishing features of His history. They tell of Him as the suffering witness who ends His course in heaven, and as the gracious, powerful, but self-emptied Friend of Israel, who went about dispensing the virtues of life and salvation through their cities and villages, giving a pledge, through His death, of their quickening in the last days.

These are “the great things” which cast a strong and bright light over the whole path of our prophet—every little spot in which bears the trace, as we have seen, of grace to Israel. May our souls rejoice in the prospect of their final joy! Then, “Praise ye the Lord from the heavens—praise the Lord from the earth,” shall be the burthen and chorus of universal gladness. For in the dispensation of the fullness of times, God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him.” And “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Blessed anticipation!

Joy to His ancient people!

Your bonds He comes to sever;

And now ‘tis done,

The Lord has won,

And ye are free forever!

Joy to the ransom’ed nations!

The foe, the rav’ning lion,

Is bound in chains,

While Jesus reigns

King of the earth in Zion.

Our meditations began with Elijah, whose translation to heaven, after a life of suffering testimony on earth, tells us of that elect body, who, having continued with Jesus in His temptations, are to share His throne in the days of the kingdom; and, as their representative, in company with Moses, we see him glorified on the distant heavenly hill (Matt. 17:3). Then, in Elisha, after a ministry of grace and power, we see a quickening from the dead state of Israel, and bringing back the covenanted mercies of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to their seed in the land of their inheritance. As in a mystery, the tale of the heavens and the earth is told, and their divers glories are pledged. And the coming millennial days will verify this wondrous tale, and redeem these precious pledges.

“Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

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Short Meditations on Elisha, Dead Man Quickened, The

This is the closing expression of the power of God in our prophet. But the way of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, is reflected here still. For by His death we live. To touch the dead body of Jesus—that is, to have faith in His blood—is to be justified and live.

But it is not so much in that general way, as belonging to all sinners, that we get Jesus here, but in connection with Israel, whose prophet Elisha was. For Israel is to be raised up on the earth, after Elijah, theHeavenlyMan, has been translated to His place on high. And Jesus will yet raise Israel to life and the kingdom in the latter day, after He has accomplished His mercy and His purpose with the church, His heavenly witness.

And as the man of grace and power for Israel, here we see Elisha doing his last service. Israel was now in confusion before the face of their enemies. They were put to the worse by the Moabites. The most they can do is to bury their dead; for, we know, that is the service of the dead—”Let the dead bury the dead.” This is shortly, but strikingly, marked as their condition here; but One who has died already, carries life—unlooked-for life, for them. This is shortly, but strikingly marked here. The power of reviving lay in the sepulcher of this mystic prophet.

And so with Jesus, the Messiah and Lord of His Israel. Things will be seen in Him according to this pattern when it shall be said, “The Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left. And He shall say ... . See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal.” According to Ezekiel, the dry bones shall live; then the Lord will open the graves of His people and bring them out of their graves.

“At evening time it shall be light,” we read. And again, “He turneth the shadow of death into the morning.” Of these holy and august powers, we have faint touches in our prophet’s history.

For in the evening of his days, when he was dying, we saw a light shining, as in the case of Joash and the arrows, that was worthy of his life’s meridian hour. And now, after his sun is gone down, even in the night of the tomb, the full power of the returning morning appears. It all has still a mystery in it. It is mystic ground as well as holy ground that we tread through these histories, and in the spirit of our minds we must tread softly, as ever, with unshod feet, but still be in company with happy thoughts of Jesus and His ways.

Thus have we closed the story of “the great things that Elisha hath done.” Great things they surely were. We have, however, if I may so call it, a short appendix to it, which I read as very characteristic and significant. I mean the notice taken in the last four verses of this chapter, of the times of Jehoahaz and Joash. (See 2 Kings 13:22-25.)

We are told that Hazael of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz; but the Lord was gracious, and had respect to His people, remembering in their behalf His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He gave Joash three victories over the son of Hazael, according to the sign of the arrows with which, by command of Elisha, he had struck on the ground; and he took out of his hand the cities of Israel which his father had lost to Hazael in war.

Here we get the God of the fathers of Israel and His covenant of blessing, in company, too, with the mystic arrows of our prophet, strikingly owned. And this is, as I observed, very significant and characteristic. For Elisha’s ways had been ways of grace and power towards Israel, shadowing, or typical, of the ways of Messiah in behalf of His people. And now that those ways of our prophet had all been run, as we have seen, and even in death he had given life, and made the buried ones to go up from their graves, in a little postscript we get this mention of Abraham’s God and His covenant, by which Israel was to be secured and blest, in spite of all that was against them.

Is not this like the moral of the whole story? Is not this, as it were, the key to the mystery, or the sense of the parable? Thus, in this history of Elisha, we learn that the Lord has pledged succor and strength and grace and revival to Israel in the latter day. It is Israel delivered and blessed that we get here.

Short Meditations on Elisha, Joash, King of Israel, and the Arrows

We now return out of Judah into the land of the ten tribes, and after an interval, the reign of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, we get a sight of our prophet again.

Joash had succeeded his father Jehoahaz on the throne of Israel, and still did evil in the sight of the Lord, as Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and the rest of the kings before him. In his days, Elisha had fallen sick of his sickness whereof he afterward died.

The longest day has its evening, it has been said, and so, too, of the ministry of this prophet. He was called by Elijah in the days of Ahab, and had gone through the reigns of Ahaziah and Jehoram the sons of Ahab; then, of Jehu, Jehoahaz, and now of Joash. Thus, he had been a prophet of God for some sixty years. But the evening of his day was now come; his sun sets in brightest tints, and with a glow which was worthy of its meridian hour.

Joash, we read, came down unto him and wept over his face, and said, “O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” This may surprise us. But it is clear that there was no pretense, or mockery, or insincerity in all this. It was nature. Perhaps Elisha had been hitherto much neglected by this king of the house of Jehu. And in the prospect of his being taken away, there was, as was very

natural, a quickening of conscience in him, and he accordingly seeks the dying prophet. Even Herod, a worse man than Joash, could do many things, and yet tremble at the thought of John's being alive, as Joash here could at the thought of Elisha's dying.

This was nature. Joash valued Elisha's presence in his kingdom. The prophet's sanctity, the power that had so often been manifested in him, the name and place he filled, were all enforced on his soul at such a moment as the present; and thus, not in mockery or pretense, but under this strong current of natural feelings, the king visits the dying prophet, uttering the very same words with which our prophet himself had hailed the ascending Elijah.

But nature is not up to the elevation of the Spirit of God. So, however promising things may be at the beginning of this scene, nature in Joash is not up to the occasion. He could not follow Elisha in the power of the Spirit. The motions of nature may carry one for a season apparently in that track, but they will not bear him to the end with those who are in the track of the Spirit. And so, though Elisha and Joash begin with the same language on their lips, Joash soon fails in this path.

But let me say in connection with this admonition, we must not question the goodness of God, though we may know the weakness and deceit of our own hearts. We are prone to suspect the sources of light, or joy, or strength that may be in us at times. Our reasoning may tell us that it is from simple nature, and not the Spirit of God. But this should not be. The heart is deceitful indeed; but, in simplicity of faith, we should accustom ourselves to trace our light, or joy, or strength of soul to His Spirit, without the dark reasonings of our own hearts.

There is warning against nature here, truly, but consolation for us in God. But there is something besides.

At the bidding of the prophet, the king takes bow and arrows and does with them according to the word of the prophet: the prophet interpreting the action to him. Then the king, taking the arrows by themselves, as Elisha bids him, smites with them upon the ground—but only three times. The man of God is wroth, and rebukes him: for he is grieved and disappointed. But why this heat in the soul of Elisha? The reason is beautiful. He had just told the king that "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrows of deliverance from Syria," were in his hand: had his soul been in unison with the prophet, had it glowed with thoughts of that glory which was thus brought so nigh to him, and had his heart sparkled at the sight of the Lord's own quiver then in his hand, how lustily he would have smitten the ground at the bidding of the prophet. Had Joash but valued the Lord's arrow as Elisha had valued his master's mantle, all would have been harmony of soul between them. But the king had not in spirit fallen into that current which was then bearing the prophet along, and with slack hand he smote the ground but thrice. And, oh, how much of this we know! Where is the fine, rich fervency of heart, the glow of soul, and power of utterance which were known among our tried and suffering brethren in other days? What smiting on the ground again and again was there, in company, as it were, with the soul of Elisha! But our hand is slack. The unction, the zeal, the earnests of the Spirit express themselves in feebler lines with us. Elisha had cried out as Elijah was leaving him, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof"—but he also took up the mantle of the prophet and smote the waters as the prophet had smitten them, dividing them hither and thither. The king comes to Elisha as he is leaving him, and utters the same words, but there is no kindred smiting. The king's heart is cold, and his hand is slack, where Elisha's had been fervent and bold. "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known."

We stand but little, nowadays, in the rich and fervent power of the Spirit of God. At least one feels this for oneself too sensibly. There may be extension in the field of vision, or multiplied truths dwelling in the thoughts, but the deep, unctuous virtue of the truth itself is less felt. Again I say, one speaks this at least of oneself, of the coldness and narrowness of one's own affections. May we still say, "Lord, revive Thy work!"

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