2 Kings - Commentaries by G.S. Byford

The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 24, The Ministry of

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“And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith Jehovah, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not. So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. And when he came, behold the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of Jehovah, even over Israel. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of Jehovah, at the hand of Jezebel” (2 Kings 9:1-7).

The time had now arrived for God's judgment to be executed upon the house of Ahab. And Elisha, whose ministry was so eminently characterized by grace, was the chosen vessel God made use of to sanction and attach His own authority to those retributory forces both in Syria and in Israel which were to carry all before them. We might have thought that Elijah would have been the more suited servant for such a work, and as to his personal temperament, if that were all, undoubtedly he was. It still, however, connected itself morally with the ministry of that holy man,1 but in the many manifestations of mercy experienced by Israel and Syria, mercy was debating with judgment, and now judgment must have its way. “Hath he smitten him as he smote those that smote him? or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? In measure when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind” (Isaiah 27:7, 8). It is interesting and instructive to observe the way by which the man of God approached this somewhat unusual service. He did not actually anoint Hazael, nor did he require of him any pledges as to his subsequent conduct, although the divine insight given him into the future by Jehovah was of such a disquieting nature that “The man of God wept.” Just the briefest intimation of the fact that he was to be king of Syria was enough to act upon Hazael's ambitious nature, and to urge to the commission of such deeds as he himself would under other circumstances have shrunk from in horror.

A different subject is before us here, but scarcely a more inviting one. The prophet does not personally act; he does not appear in the business, but he lays strict injunctions upon the young man as to his conduct in the matter. It may be that in this there is a lesson for us. Spiritual discernment was the great thing in Elisha's ministry.

He felt and rebuked its absence in those about him. In one way or another it appears in every one of his miracles. Truly it is no less important in this clay of the Spirit's presence upon earth and in the church. Christ Himself being now necessarily absent (John 16:7), the Spirit of Christ is here to make known what He is, and He produces that which answers to His character and that meets with His approval. A mechanical service will not suit Him. The written word throws its light upon the whole scene. The Spirit of God enables us to understand and apply it, and thus the spiritual character is developed in the saints. It is not enough that Christians are in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. We are exhorted to be “filled with the Spirit.” “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Then we shall be not carnal, walking like “men,” but “spiritual.”

The apostle Paul based all his exhortations in his epistles upon this fact—so lost sight of in Christendom—that the Spirit of God now abides in the Christian. It is not intelligence or vigilance merely, but the quickness of affection to follow up and act upon that which is grasped by the mind. Here the young man was to faithfully represent the one who had sent him. There were reasons, as we have seen, why Elisha could not go himself. There was to be no show of fellowship where it could not be real. Jehu was a vessel in which God could have no delight; nor could His servant Yet was Jehu put under the responsibility of specific instructions, with power given for carrying them out. If God lays a responsibility upon any He does not withhold the power needed for carrying it out, if looked to and counted upon. But power does not of itself set us in communion with God, or keep us in His presence. We see this in the history of Jehu, for did not power characterize him right through? Yet the spirit in which he fulfilled his mission was most offensive to God. However commended for his zeal, it was but a fleshly energy in which he could and did boast—it fell in with his own ambitious projects.

One scripture will be sufficient to illustrate this: “And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria. And as he was at the shearing-house in the way, Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, Who are ye? And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen. And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing-house, even two and forty men: neither left he any of them. And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him; and he saluted him and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot. And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for Jehovah. So they made him ride in his chariot. And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of Jehovah, which he spake to Elijah” (chap. 10:12-17). It was the fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy, and the answer to Elijah's complaint on mount Horeb.

We now come to the closing act of Elisha's ministry, so beautifully in harmony with his long life. “Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face and said, O my father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows: and he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow: and he put his hand upon it; and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him,

and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times, then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shall smite Syria but thrice" (chap. 13:14-19).

Scarcely less glorious than the translation of Elijah was the calm and dignified ending of Elisha's service. The king of Israel might lament over him in a natural way, but it seemed more like "late remorse" than any genuine appreciation of the great realities which Elisha's ministry represented. We know not whether king Joash had any understanding of the significance of his own words, but certain it is that just as the cloud in the wilderness appropriately enough represented Jehovah's care and goodness in guiding and protecting His people passing through that great and terrible wilderness, so just as suitably the chariots of fire represented Jehovah in all His power and majesty on behalf of Israel against their enemies. God might at all times be trusted to do this, but the failure has always been in His people, who would not trust Him; and Elisha immediately puts the question to the proof with the same result as ever. God in His power and goodness was the same still, but Israel was not ready, they would not trust God or give Him credit for sincerity. "According to your faith be it unto you." The faith of Joash could only trust God for three victories, but the five or six would have been definitive. So we see the apostle Paul at a later day rebuking the half-hearted timidity of the Corinthians: "But as fellow workmen we also beseech that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have listened to thee in an accepted time and in a day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold now is a well-accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1, 2). "Our mouth is opened to you Corinthians. Our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. But for an answering recompense (I speak as to children), be ye also enlarged" (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

This dear, dying saint, we might almost say, like Paul, would commend to God and to the word of His grace. Israel was not then, nor are they now, ready for the glory. The "chariots of fire and horses of fire" might go back without them, as indeed they have, but the day shall yet come when Israel shall own and worship Him who shall come in the name of Jehovah. The praise that is now silent in Zion shall then be rendered to its worthy object. This joyful resurrection of the nation seems to be typified in the incident which closes Elisha's history. "And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha. And when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet" (vers. 20, 21).

When Israel are confessedly in the place of death, and bow to the righteous judgment of God, then will they find that One has been there before them, who has robbed death of its sting and of its victory. "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for Jehovah hath spoken it." "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they rise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isaiah 25:8; 26:19).

"The glory" cannot identify itself with the people until they have reached the lowest point and are ready to own it. "Then shall they look upon him whom they pierced, and mourn for him." Elisha's ministry was the pledge and guarantee of that faithfulness which never fails. He will guide by His counsel, and "after the glory" He will receive them (Psalm 73:21; Zechariah 2:8).

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The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 23, The Ministry of

"And Elisha spake unto the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for Jehovah hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land. And the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now" (2 Kings 8:1-6).

God was still dealing with His people. An unusually protracted famine came upon them; and He would have them know that His hand had done it. Moreover, He could exempt whom He would from its operation. The Shunammite woman had passed through her trial, and had glorified God under it. The discipline to which she had been subjected had indeed brought forth the "peaceable fruit of righteousness" to her exercised soul, and God does not prolong discipline unduly. "He doth not willing afflict, nor grieve, the children of men," and in all cases where the object of the trial has been attained, His holiness and truth vindicated, and the lesson learned, He withdraws the trial. In the case before us we have reason to believe that this woman had now become a widow, otherwise it would be difficult to understand her taking the independent action she does here, so evidently in contrast with the propriety of her action on a previous occasion (4:8, 9). The sorrows of her people are strikingly illustrated in her experience, but in close connection with the grace that sustains, and the faith which shines out all the brighter for being tried. The kindness of God toward her is beautifully shown out in His caring for her during these seven years of famine. Jacob and his household were preserved and nourished by Joseph in Egypt.1 Both are typical of the nation preserved and spared and kept alive, until God's time for bringing them back to the land of Israel.

Yet there is another side of the truth as to Israel in exile; and we must not omit to notice it. "It came to pass in the days that the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, with her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth; and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband"

(Ruth 1:1-5). Here we see a proud, self-sufficient Israelite, who, if he find difficulties in Palestine, will go to live elsewhere. He attempts to run away from the hand of God, and death overtakes him. His two sons choose themselves wives of the women of Moab in disobedience of God's warning, and the hand of God reaches them also. Then it is that Naomi, humbled and weakened, submits to God's hand, and foreshadows the spirit of the remnant, who in the coming day of their repentance, will cast themselves upon the mercy and faithfulness of Jehovah, and will find Him gracious unto them.

Here it is the faithfulness of God secretly working for His people and restoring to them the land and its increase. They will get more than they have lost, and possess it in Christ, the Heir, who has been brought again from the dead. This, however, is still in the future; the seven years are meanwhile running their course; but the land is being reserved for them, and they are preserved for the land. When that time comes it will be seen how God wondrously over-rules and causes all things to fall in with His plans for the accomplishment of the promises made to the fathers, and will indeed give to the people the sure mercies of David. God, in His own due time, after many preliminary dealings with His earthly people, will dispose the hearts of even the most unlikely nations to assist them; but that is when He takes up their cause, as we learn from many scriptures. Even now there is the providential secret working of God on behalf of His people and land, as beautifully portrayed in the scripture before us.

Gehazi (spiritually, a castaway) has advanced greatly in the things of the world. He enjoys the royal favor. To the king, who had asked him to relate all the great things that Elisha had done, Gehazi tells the story of the woman's son restored to life. No doubt it was gratifying to the king to know that he had such a remarkable man as Elisha in his kingdom, as it also ministered to Gehazi's self-importance. But had these miracles no voice from God? Was not the guilt of Samaria increased tenfold thereby? Ought not the king to have understood that these gracious displays of the power of God were so many calls to repentance? Where there is exercise of heart and conscience the goodness of God does indeed lead to repentance. Is it not evident that the hearts and consciences of the people were as insensible to the ministry of Elisha as to that of Elijah? The spirit of scornful indifference so painfully manifested by Gehazi and the king (as also by the king's attendant in the previous chapter) was identical with that which opposed itself to the ministry of the Lord Jesus, of whom Elisha was indeed a type.

“But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped to you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of tax-gatherers and of sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. Then began he to upbraid the cities in which most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe to thee, Chorazin! woe to thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tire and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, It shall be more tolerable for Tire and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee” (Matthew 11:16-21).

It is exceedingly solemn to find every testimony and ministry of grace closing in judgment; the more hopeless because the light has been practically extinguished, patience exhausted, every warning neglected, and the pleading of grace answered by the scoffing of unbelief. The Lord Jesus, the rejected Messiah, described and judged the nation's criticism of Himself, as well as of John the Baptist. So too the Holy Ghost here closes the public ministry of Elisha and unsheathes the sword of judgment—first, that of Hazael, then of Jehu (see 1 Kings 19:17); shaking to the very foundations the throne of David, and sweeping away the whole house of Ahab as a thing of naught. Not that Elisha's service in Israel was yet ended, but it had to give place to judgment. Indeed, the office of anointing both these kings, committed to Elijah, had been relegated to Elisha, the minister of grace. With this burden upon his heart Elisha came to Damascus, and the king of Syria (with no true piety, but with a false idea of the superhuman powers of Elisha,) sought to propitiate him with a present, as formerly in Naaman's case. Certainly there was no real turning of the heart to God, any more than there had been with Ahaziah, the king of Israel, when he sent to Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, a precisely similar message. In the case of the Syrian king, however, though it was Jehovah that was appealed to, yet the known character of God was despised. Ben-hadad had come to know a good deal about Jehovah—the cleansing of Naaman, the refusal of the king's gifts, the exposure of his plans against Israel, the sending of his bands to take Elisha, their discomfiture and inflicted blindness, together with the generosity shown them and liberty of return to their master—all these displays of the power and goodness of Jehovah made the Gentile king responsible and without excuse for such a sad mistake.

How offensive to God it is for unrenewed man to ignore the question of sin and come before Him with a gift. We see this plainly in Cain's case; yet infinitely worse is it now since God's Son has been here in grace, meeting only with hatred and death! We have now the Spirit's testimony to the full display of all that God is in Christ. There can be no mistake now as to God's true character—light, love, righteousness and grace—all have been declared by Him who is the “brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person.” It was not, however, here a question of correcting mistakes, or of instructing, as in Naaman's cleansing, but of judgment. This was Elisha's business in Damascus, not himself exercising judgment personally, but giving the divine authority to such as were to execute it, and to whom it would be congenial work. “And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of Jehovah by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit Jehovah hath showed me that he shall surely die. And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept” (vers. 7-11).

Here is the light of God shining through Elisha, and making manifest all the workings of the unrenewed heart. Man in the presence of that light is as uncomfortable as he can possibly be. Hazael simulated grief, but Elisha, with a heart overcharged with unaffected sorrow, gave expression to his feelings in an unmistakable way. The servant of Jehovah felt the solemnity of the message given him to deliver, and so it is to-day with every true servant of Christ-divine sympathies are awakened and declare themselves in a way not to be imitated by the cold-hearted professor. Thus it was with another faithful servant of God in his day. “Hear ye, and give ear: be not proud; for Jehovah hath spoken. Give glory to Jehovah your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because Jehovah's flock is carried away captive” (Jeremiah 13:15-17).

But if the man of God was thus affected whilst giving his testimony, very different was it with Hazael. First, a hypocritical show of grief-"the show of their countenance witnesseth against them "; then, an outburst of indignation that he should be thought capable of such enormities. "And Hazael said, But what is thy servant? a dog, that he should do this great thing?" And having failed to deceive the man of God, he returns to his master, gives him a false version of the prophet's message, and proceeds at once in the most callous way to fulfill the prediction of Elisha. "So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead" (vers. 13-15).

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 21, The Ministry of

A Touching incident follows in the little domestic scene, of which the prophet is the chief actor. It seems to illustrate the deep interest taken by God in all that concerns His people. Nothing is too trivial if it troubles us. "In all their affliction he was afflicted." Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Matters to us very important are as nothing with Him; while sometimes an important principle affecting His glory is involved in things which appear to us insignificant. In fact, there is nothing great or small before Him, who "knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust."

The borrowed ax must be returned to its owner, while the manner of its recovery brings before our minds the truth that Christ in His humanity has come down into our very circumstances in grace, that He might sympathize with us, and also that He might by power lift us above them.

A great difference manifests itself here between Elijah and Elisha. The former maintained at all times an almost forbidding attitude. There were none in Israel with whom he could associate. "I, even I, only am left." The latter was ever a gracious man, though no less holy, but he was one to rally the faithful in Israel, had there been such. Grace in him was seen in its power to attract and to charm the hearts of Israel, foreshadowed perhaps early in his history by his request for a minstrel. But the nation was like a deaf adder which refused to be charmed; only a little remnant gathered around him.

An important change is now to be noticed in his ministry. Hitherto in a comparatively secluded sphere, now we see him controlling the destinies of armies in connection with Israel and Syria. "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there not once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?" (2 Kings 6:8-12). It was of little use for the Syrians to plot and plan if the light of God was thrown upon their schemes, and their secrets became known to the enemy. God's goodness to His people Israel is thus shown in a remarkable way. Unsought, He continues to defeat the plans of the enemy without any special intervention in power.

Quite different was Jehovah's way with Judah in Jehoshaphat's reign about this time. "And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went forth Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; believe in Jehovah your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto Jehovah, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise Jehovah, for his mercy endureth forever. And when they began to sing and to praise, Jehovah set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir which were come against Judah, and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir utterly to slay and destroy them, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped" (2 Chron. 20:20-2).

The people still held to their profession, and whenever their relationship to Jehovah was pleaded God would make good all that was involved in that relationship, although even here we may notice a change in the manner of the divine interference as contrasted with the times of David or Solomon. The personal faith and piety of the king, and the institutions which God Himself had appointed were there. Here, however, there was nothing in the nation that God could own, yet His mercy still lingered over the guilty people. Although they had forfeited all claim upon God, Jehovah disappointed the plans of the enemy and delivered His people for His own name sake.

For the time Elisha was the real link between God and His people. He had the secret of Jehovah; and we see what power and peace this brings to the soul, and how it makes us superior to circumstances because it is God with whom we have to do.

The times of Elisha corresponded in a remarkable way with the present day of grace in this respect, that the nation participated in the blessings associated with grace which then flowed in a certain channel without any interference with the course of judgment, except indeed there was a respite. God would not allow the enemy to triumph over His servant. The presence of the latter saved Israel, for we cannot doubt that God wrought in a remarkable way for Elisha's safety. Men could not do as they liked with him. When Jonah ran away from God and took his passage in a ship bound for Tarshish a terrible storm was sent on purpose to wreck the ship or to compel the surrender of Jonah. And if God used such exceptional means in the case of a disobedient prophet, how much more would He take a real interest in the preservation of one not disobedient, but exposed to peculiar danger. "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not, for they that he with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, O Jehovah, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (vers. 15-17). But there was, in fact, nothing unusual in this; it was not wonderful to Elisha, though quite a revelation to his servant, affording a striking illustration of the truth that "The angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear Him."

The springs of human action are in the unseen world; whilst man is weak and shortsighted. He should, therefore, be consciously dependent. If he is not, he is nevertheless influenced by the prince of this world or restrained by divine power and made to do the will of God blindly. “He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him.” We greatly need to have a sense of the power of God, and that it is on our behalf; so that we may reason with the apostle, “If God be for us who can he against us?” We can see what is ordinarily around us, but the illumination of the Spirit of God is needed to give us an apprehension of things spiritual.” The apostle's prayer was that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:17-20).

The wisdom of God characterized Elisha, yet he could not impart the same to those about him, but he prayed, and God answered him as one familiar with His way and having a heart trained in subjection to His will. The promise of the Lord to every believer now was surely made good to him.

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” Although we have many illustrations of prayer and its uses in the Old Testament scriptures it does not there represent the ordinary resource of the people of God. It seems rather to have been special and exceptional. In ordinary circumstances there might not appear the call for it. The power which undertook for Israel's blessing provided for every contingency sufficiently and liberally, and left nothing to chance. But for its smooth and regular working, obedience was required, and here, alas, Israel broke down. The necessity for prayer is seen when something is wrong in the relations between God and His people. It was practically so in Elijah's day. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (James 5:16-18). Nor can we have the least difficulty in perceiving the object God's servant had in view. The people were to be exercised in conscience about their recently introduced Baal worship; hence Elijah's deep disappointment with the result (see 1 Kings 19:1-4). God threw out a challenge to Israel (therefore the showers were withholden), and they could not reply, yet they continued in rebellion until Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah were written upon the nation.

God was constantly in love and faithfulness dealing with them for restoration, creating circumstances of such difficulty that in their misery they might look to Him and He would save them. Elisha lived always in the consciousness of what that power was upon which Israel might count, and of what was its general way of working. Prayer should be with us constant and systematic, for the course of this world is evil and presents constant difficulties in the way of the Christian. It is not alone our personal need that should lead us to God, but the circumstances of the testimony, the need of such as cannot pray for themselves— “Lord, open his eyes that he may see.” There is a real danger of becoming intensely selfish in prayer, from which an earnest desire for the glory of God and the blessing of souls would deliver us. If “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” were garrisoning our hearts and minds, would it not at times give us to be silent, restful, and trusting in the presence of God rather than to be ever putting God to the proof (so to speak) as to His ability and willingness to answer prayer? There is nothing that so searches the heart and judges the motives as prayer. With too many of us it presents a ready and easy way of getting relief from difficulties. We know that “all things work together for good” to us, but it is our real, spiritual good, and it might to the natural eye be anything but good. The question, “What use am I going to make of the answer?” is an important one, for we read of one (Hezekiah) who “rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him.” The king of Israel would have greatly dishonored God and seriously compromised Elisha had he been allowed. “And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them; wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them; and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel” (vers. 21-23). But God was over-ruling in this case as in many others, and proving that He was working, not by kings and their armies, but by the self-restrained, well-disciplined servant who had the mind of God.

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

Gleanings From the History of Naaman, Naaman, Gleanings From the History of: Part 4

"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." 2 Kings 5:11-14. It was not alone the simplicity or the brevity of the message sent out to Naaman which stumbled that "great" and "honorable" man; but Elisha refused to acknowledge the glory which distinguished him among men as of any account before God. His gifts, too, which would have made way for him in his own sphere, were altogether valueless in the presence of God.

It is a great and fundamental truth of the gospel, and that which staggers the pride of man, that "there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." As long as man keeps away from God, differences can be made and maintained for whatever they are worth; but God has decreed that no flesh shall glory in His presence; and where a soul is consciously in the presence of God, there is as little inclination as there is power to maintain the conventional distinctions of men. The light of God entering the soul gives it to bow to the truth of God's Word and to own its authority. "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." Job 40:3-5. "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel

without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Chap 42:1-6.

Only in one of two positions can man stand in God's presence-either as a repentant sinner bowing to God's righteous judgment of him, or as a worshiping saint justified by faith. All attempts to establish a character or a righteousness to satisfy even oneself must break down. The instructions as to leprosy in Israel (Lev. 14) illustrate this, as we have seen before; but what is so exceedingly important and interesting to notice in the cleansing of Naaman is that in the absence of all ritual God yet required that which signified the entire submission of the soul to death, and the obedience of faith. Israel has long ceased to be the executive of God's righteous government of man in the world, and it refuses the mercy and grace in which the blessed Son of God came to them. The present testimony is one of sovereign grace, and addresses itself to the whole world. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the holy Scriptures,) concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name." Rom. 1:1-5.

But if God has rejected the fleshly confidences of Israel (Jer. 2:37), still less could He regard with favor the boldness of religious profession which would ignore the difference between Israel and the Gentiles, and, taking advantage of the unbelief of the former, would at least claim equality with, if not superiority to, anything of which Israel could boast. Nothing among Gentiles has ever had the shadow of divine authority to plead in justification. The objection of Naaman witnessed that the carnal mind is indeed enmity against God, that it entertains nothing but contempt for what God may have established or for what meets with His approval upon earth. Naaman was disposed to prefer the waters of Syria to those of Israel. We may be sure there were no inherent qualities in either for cleansing from leprosy. All such virtue rested in the word of God, and this demands the obedience of faith.

The river of Jordan doubtless had its typical import, but then was not the time to reveal it. We who now know something of the precious truth that in the death of Christ we have also our death to sin might be disposed to dwell somewhat on this part of the history; but, as the 6th of Romans has its typical counterpart, not here but in Josh. 3 and 4, we pass on and would seek to learn the purpose of God in dealing thus with this Syrian leper. Do not the words of the leper himself supply the answer? "Behold. I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." We see here how ready the human mind is to reason about the divinely simple hut efficacious way of blessing for man's deep need, instead of bowing thereto in simple trust in God's unerring wisdom and gracious means. Naaman attached importance to his thoughts-how vain are the thoughts of man (Psalm 94:11) -and (lid not disguise his contempt for the people and land of Israel. He betrayed the very same spirit which in an earlier day had brought the judgment of God upon his nation (see 1 Kings 20).

The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and displays itself in this way-that, where obedience of faith is required, intellectualism is ready to question. But "He [God] giveth not account of any of His matters" (Job 33:13). The gospel is preached among all nations "for the obedience of faith," and the simple and lowly receive it and get the blessing. So in the case before us it was the servants of Naaman who, by their remonstrance with him as he turned away, helped their master; and so also had the little captive maid been used of God at an earlier stage.

The simple, cogent reasoning of the servants proved its superiority to the vain thoughts of Naaman, disclosing at the same time their affectionate solicitude for their master's welfare which was truly touching. They put before him how he had nothing to lose, but everything to gain, by complying with the prophet's instructions. The very simplicity of the gospel is what first stumbles the soul. The "Wash, and be clean" of this chapter strikingly points to the "Believe... and thou shalt be saved" of the New Testament. There is a kind of desperation of soul, the result of trying human schemes of reformation, only to be disappointed, in which the Spirit of God works for the bringing of the soul to give up its own thoughts and way, and unreservedly cast itself upon the mercy of God. If not, indeed, faith of an exalted order, yet still it is faith. "If I perish, I perish," said Esther; so similarly, the answer of the twelve apostles to the Lord's challenge exhibited the same character of faith. "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." John 6:66-69. Peter confessed his faith in Christ, and his love for Christ; but it was not knowledge or intelligence which held the disciples. They could not better themselves elsewhere. "To whom shall we go?"

By whatever means the sinner is brought to believe in God and to cast himself upon Christ for salvation, the result is ever the same. It was not the healing virtue of the waters of Jordan which Naaman proved, but the virtue of the prophet's word, and that Israel's God was indeed a Savior God. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: bath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Numb. 23:19. "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." Job 33:25. That which washed away the leprosy of Naaman cleansed his soul from its unbelieving utterance. Dipping “seven times in Jordan,” his lowly submission was complete; so was his cleansing. “His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

Gleanings From the History of Naaman, Naaman, Gleanings From the History of: Part 2

The cleansing of this Syrian leper was indeed a wonderful witness to the sovereign grace of the God of Israel—a witness not without blessing to the Gentile, even if disregarded by His people. "The law of the leper in the day of his cleansing," as set out in Lev. 14, was no longer known in Israel; for though there were many lepers in the land, none of them was cleansed. And where was either priest or sacrifice that God could own? The ministry of Elisha was outside the nation's ritual, such as it then was. The altar of Elijah had testified in its day (1 Kings 18), but where afterward do we read of it? It is a serious thing when the ordinary channel of blessing, because of its defilement, can no longer be made use of; for grace must maintain its own character of holiness, and will be neither hindered nor defiled by human interference. So, as we review the miracle now before us, we cannot but feel that for this reason it was that Elisha avoided reference to the Mosaic rite.

Let us now examine for a little the details of our chapter as affording a representative case. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man

in valor, but he was a leper." 2 Kings 5:1. Here we have an experienced soldier, an able general, a successful man, justly esteemed, honored, and rewarded, by his master. His name signifies "agreeableness," and Jehovah had used him to bring victory to Syria in chastisement of His own guilty people.

We read, again and again, how in the time of the judges God was grieved for the misery of His people, and raised up one and another to deliver them from their oppressors. Not because Israel deserved deliverance, but because He pitied them. So here the distressed condition of the Syrians had appealed to the tender mercy of Jehovah. God had permitted Israel in the reign

of Ahab to defeat the Syrians repeatedly (1 Kings 20). "And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD." v. 28. Three years later, however, when Ahab attempted to recover Ramoth-gilead out of the hand of the king of Syria, Israel was scattered and Ahab slain. Jehoshaphat, in guilty league with Israel's wicked king, was nevertheless delivered, "so as by fire." Subsequently recovered, Ramothgilead appears again in the possession of Israel, who used it as a military center.

Coming back to our chapter, however, we read that Jehovah had granted deliverance to Syria by one that was a leper. However great the victory, yet Naaman could not get away from the bitterness and sorrow of his being "a leper." This marred everything. Man in his best estate betrays the sin of his nature, and the dreaded, inevitable end is constantly in his thoughts, and casts its shadow on all earth's glory. Death!

And after death, the judgment! The greatest measure of worldly success and prosperity cannot shut out the gloomy prospect from the soul. Indeed, they only increase its terror; for, while death itself may come as a relief to the wretched and the poor, the wealthy and honored naturally cling to what vainly satisfies them here, with nothing beyond but eternal judgment!

The soldiers of Naaman had brought into their lord's house one who was indeed a messenger of mercy. A captive out of the land of Israel, this little maid waited on Naaman's wife. "And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

Seldom indeed is the heart of a proud rebel against God softened or improved by adversity. Much less is found a nation, or any great part of a community, truly humbled by reverses. Of such it can be said, "They cry not when He bindeth them." Job. 36:13. And again at a later day it is written, specially of Israel when suffering defeat at the hands of the same enemy, where we have doubtless a prophecy of the yet more acute tribulation of the last days: "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join His enemies together; t h e Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth.... For the people turneth not unto Him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts." Isa. 9:8-13.

The gracious ministry of Elisha, overlooked and despised by the great ones in Israel, had found a response in the heart of one of Jehovah's "little ones"—the unmistakable evidence that God had been at work. The "still small voice" bore witness that "His mercy endureth forever," and had found its way to the heart of the little maid that was "of the land of Israel." Grace with her had borne fruit, both for God's glory and man's blessing. Naturally she might have brooded over her wrongs, over the loneliness and misery of her now daily life. For although in the midst of affluence and splendor, she might naturally have regarded her lord with aversion, as being the direct expression of the power of the enemy in the havoc wrought in Israel, separating her too from her home and friends.

Would it have been surprising if, instead, she had presented an impassioned appeal for mercy that would give her back to the land of her birth, to her friends, and to her home? Yet, on the contrary, her earnest desire was that her master, and not herself, were with the prophet that is in Samaria! How perfectly does grace deliver the soul from selfishness or self-occupation. How it enlarges the heart and elevates the downtrodden and oppressed! Who can doubt that there shone more true nobility of spirit in her than in her master, or in the king of Syria? Grace, in that early day, foreimpressed its own character upon the heart of the receiver (Titus 2:9-14). Surely, she had either witnessed with others, or proved in herself, the power of grace to change the heart. For it was not a studied part which she was acting, with selfish desires for her own ultimate good, nor yet a mere submission to the inevitable, but a truly simple, yea, almost passionate expression of what occupied her heart. Even for how long previously, we cannot say. But we may say of her likewise, "She hath done what she could."

For whom was it done, as regards her feelings and intelligence? was it for Naaman only? Was not the glory of God before her, however little she might be conscious of it? Whatever brings true blessing to the soul, has God for its source and its object. God's greatest and best gift has been His beloved Son. When that Blessed One was about to leave the world, having finished the work (as to His service of grace) given Him to do, we find the Spirit of God bringing together and connecting the beginning with the end of His course, thus giving us the object, the method of realization, and the results of His presence in the world in relation to God, to man, and to Satan. "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper," etc. John 13:1-4.

Blessing from God received by man in faith, returns to God in worship. So too the Apostle Paul, after tracing and expounding the ways of God with Israel and the Gentiles, brings us to the same conclusion. "0 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 bath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, a n d through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." Rom. 11:33-36.

There was then a purpose of blessing for Naaman in the heart of Jehovah. The leper was to be cleansed, but his heart was also to be renewed by grace, so that he might be brought to God as a worshiper. The first link in the chain of blessing seemed weak indeed, and all who were used in the work seemed to have been chosen of God with a view to humbling the pride of the Gentile. Man is slow to admit that there is any barrier between God and himself but what he can set aside. The faithfulness and simplicity of the little maid were admirable. The principles which guided her were in effect those upon which the great Apostle of the Gentiles took his stand.

The same power and grace were active in each case. "And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might not stand in men's wisdom, but in God's power." 1 Cor. 2:1-5; J.N.D. Trans.

Gleanings From the History of Naaman, Naaman, Gleanings From the History of: Part 1

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valor, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." 2 Kings 5:1-9.

A remarkable illustration of the principle of grace is here set before us in great precision and minuteness of detail. Divine purpose makes itself evident in every line of the chapter. The ministry of Elijah had not succeeded in effecting any radical improvement in Israel's condition (1 Kings 18:37; 19:

14). Elijah, in the great scene on Carmel, had summed up the whole case for Jehovah as against Baal; and the people had there confessed the supremacy of Jehovah. But their more deliberate and formal answer we see disclosed in the message of Jezebel to the prophet. The heart of the nation was not really turned back again; it was unchanged. But in the chapter now before us the question is, Had the grace which found its expression in Elisha's ministry softened their heart and turned it again to the Jehovah of hosts, the God of their fathers? Clearly it was not so. Yet it pleased God in His infinite wisdom to furnish this magnificent exposition of the way in which grace delights to act, with its characteristic methods, and its fruits, as also of its own essential principles. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation bath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," etc. (Titus 2:11-14). In 2 Kings 4 we have seen how this grace is inexhaustible. "So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD." v. 44.

But a more serious question than that of poverty comes now into view; namely, of sin in all its guilt and uncleanness, for "many lepers were in Israel"; yet were they indifferent to this manifestation of it in their midst. The Lord Jesus in the day of His visitation of His people witnessed to the excellence and efficacy of that grace in which He came to them as the sent One of God, when, coming to Nazareth and entering their synagogue, He read from the prophecy of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord Goo is upon Me," etc., and said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Yet their hearts were closed against Him, their consciences were not awakened, they refused to acknowledge their guilty and defiled condition and their own deep need. "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus [Elijah] the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath." (Luke 4:16-29.) They stumbled at the sovereign grace of God. So it was in our Lord's days, and so it is now. "For as ye [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [the Jews] unbelief: even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." Rom. 11:30, 31. The meaning of the latter clause is that the Jews refused the mercy shown to Gentiles, so that in the end they may come in also on the basis of pure mercy.

Grace displays itself to the unworthy where there is the confession of our sins and the submission to the righteousness of God instead of the establishment of our own (Rom. 10:3), and the acknowledgment of the Lordship of Christ. The fact that there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's time was a testimony to the uncleanness of the nation in God's sight. But instead of exercise of heart before God about it, there was none. Had Jehovah not said: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD Thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee"? Exod. 15:26.

From the time that sin found an entrance into this world, God has never ceased to plead with man, testifying to divine goodness in Himself, but to ingratitude and rebellion in the creature. The many uncleansed lepers in Israel in Elisha's day; the great multitude, in the days of our Lord, of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the waters of Bethesda's pool; the ten lepers of Luke 17; all alike bore unequivocal testimony to the real state and condition of the nation, and the insufficiency of ceremonial which, while contenting the people, did not meet the gravity of sin before God. So with Elisha, as we have seen, there was a similar testimony to the low estate of the people; yet was there the sovereign and waiting goodness of God for any truly confessing their need. The great in Israel discerned it not; yet, nevertheless, it could be known in its freeness and efficacy by the "stranger" who came in the expectancy of blessing.

This blessing was in the land of Israel—there to be found—for it did not travel outside of its own proper sphere as yet. God was not then making generous overtures to the Gentiles outside the land, however sorely Israel might provoke Him to do so. The Lord Jesus, of whom Elisha was but a type, would not allow Himself, as sent to the lost sheep of Israel, to depart from the path of obedience; nor would He distribute (without a protest) the children's food to dogs. For "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name. And again He saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles;

in Him shall the Gentiles trust." Rom. 15:8-12.

God, in blessing Jew or Gentile, is ever true to Himself. The foolish conceit of the Gentile no more will be allowed a place than the unbelieving pride of Israel. We get both in this our chapter; and we find the prophet so instructed in the ways of Jehovah that he rebukes• the one (v. 8), and refuses to acknowledge the other (v. 10).

A few words as to the leprosy itself may not be out of place here. Its moral significance is plainly enough set before us in Scripture. No doubt leprosy was more or less prevalent in Egypt and the East, and perhaps particularly so in Syria. But God could not tolerate its presence in the camp of Israel, as we learn from Numb. 5:1-4. God had taken the people at their word and had consented to dwell among them (Exod. 15:2; 25:8). His presence could not but judge all that was opposed to His holy nature. He would not be a consenting party to His own dishonor. So too, when the ark of God was taken into Dagon's temple, Dagon was judged (1 Sam. 5:4). They are commanded therefore to "put out of the camp every leper," etc. Everything unsuited to His presence as in their midst was to be put out of their camp, "for the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp."

Before very long, the children of Israel were called upon to put this word into operation in regard to a very specific case of leprosy which appeared in one of their three leaders (Mic. 6:4). "And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.... And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again." Numb. 12:10-15. She who had led the women of Israel in song after the passage of the Red Sea (Exod. 15) is stricken by the just judgment of Jehovah with leprosy, and is shut out from the camp. We know that Aaron the priest was himself guilty likewise, although for obvious reasons not dealt with in the same way. Still more awful was the divine visitation upon Uzziah, king of Judah, recorded in 2 Chron. 26

These scriptures are sufficient to show that the infliction of leprosy was the expression of God's righteous judgment of sin, and also of His rejection of man—religious man—in his fleshly pretensions and assumed competency to draw near to God, and in the refusal of the truth of his actual condition. Sin, in its inward workings as known to God, made to appear outwardly in all its repulsive, revolting character, is what is shown by leprosy. Its manifestation in the flesh of the leper occupies the greater part of Lev. 13, while the next chapter sets before us "the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing." What is within displays itself in outward acts; yet it is not these but the principle, or working, of sin itself that is signified by leprosy. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;.." and "the judgment was by one to condemnation," yet the law dealt with sinful acts and condemned them. It failed to condemn sin in the flesh. Had it done so, it would have had nothing more to say, for man is that and nothing else. But when the holy One was upon the cross a sacrifice for sin, then sin itself was condemned. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness [righteous requirement] of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. 8:3, 4. The believer now knows to his comfort and deliverance that as surely as Christ "was delivered for our offenses," so too He "was raised again for our justification." Death and resurrection are God's remedy for sin, and He requires submission to Christ (see Rom. 4:25; 14:9 Cor. 5:14-21).

It must be evident that when it is a question of what sin is before God, there can be no distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

"He is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head. And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in

him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be." Lev. 13:44-46. What God now calls for is the soul's bowing to His judgment of our state, and of our sins, in

Christ's death. Heart belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the abiding efficacy of His precious blood that cleanses from every sin, gives eternal forgiveness and peace.

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While grace thus manifested its presence and character by positive fruits in a way acceptable to God and cheering to the heart of His servant, the evidence of an exercised conscience bore convincing testimony to the reality of the change which Naaman had experienced. The circumstances before us are not the portrayal of the case of one breaking with old associations, or departing from evil habits, but of one returning a changed man to his responsible position in the service of the king of Syria. Worship of Jehovah and obedience to Him would not be easy in the midst of idolatrous surroundings, and already, before his return to Syria, Naaman contemplated in a very different way to formerly the circumstances and requirements of his honorable position. To be closely associated with his royal master on all state occasions, and to take part in the worship of Rimmon, had hitherto been congenial to his feelings, and indeed flattering to him as a distinguished courtier. But the very thing which formerly ministered to his pride is now distasteful, and becomes an act of sin calling for judgment if not pardoned. “And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way” (ver. 19).

What had changed? Only the heart of Naaman. What made the difference? The light had broken in upon his soul. A new moral standard was set up within him. “The entrance of thy word giveth light,” and all outward action must conform to the purity of that which had established its own authority within him. It was not a law from without requiring obedience under promise of blessing, or putting a restraint upon him with pain and penalties in case of disobedience. Nor was it only the divine authority of that word to which he had reluctantly submitted, but the revelation had been one of grace. Jehovah, the only God in all the earth, had interested Himself on his behalf—himself a miserable, unclean Gentile leper; and when the great ones of Israel would have sent him away, Jehovah had sent His servant with the message, “Let him come now to me.” Obedience of faith receives the blessing, and grace impresses its own character upon the receiver. “For the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared, teaching us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously, in the present course of things, awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ;

who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

In Naaman's case there was but a limited display of grace and personal to himself, having reference solely to his own bodily condition. It was not calculated to lift him out of himself, and did not set before him a "blessed hope." But the grace which came by Jesus Christ, and is now in presentation by the gospel, has appeared in all its fullness, bringing salvation for all men and opening up a prospect of glory and blessing, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the center and effulgence. It is impossible that such grace should visit the soul and leave it unchanged. Once received, it teaches, and so it was with Naaman. Divine wisdom characterized Elisha's reply. He neither sanctioned a relapse into idolatrous practices nor imposed the law of Moses upon a Gentile. "Go in peace" left him free to follow the leading of that light and grace which had entered his soul. This display of grace was perfect according to God's own character and way. But now we are given to see the counter working of the adversary of God and man.

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought, but as Jehovah liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him and said, is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow" (2 Kings 5:20-27).

A solemn picture indeed! needing but little in the way of explanation. We have seen that the same malignant power of Satan was actively working in many ways to prevent the reception of the blessing. Defeated in that, he uses the most suited instrument to his hand to give God the lie, and to rob Him of His glory. That instrument was found in the service of the man of God-one who dwelt in his house and had doubtless seen many other displays of grace, but who was himself absolutely indifferent to Jehovah's glory and unaffected in heart by all that he had been privileged to witness. He only saw in this recent example an opportunity of enriching himself at the expense of the testimony. See how contemptuously he speaks of the one whom God had blessed! and how profanely he makes use of Jehovah's name to sanction the infamy which he proposed! "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as Jehovah liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." As we have before seen, grace received imparts its own character to the receiver; and not only so, but having its source and spring in God's love as now manifested in Christ, it takes its course of blessing through the saints making them channels of blessing to others, and returns to God in worship. This is true now of saints individually (see John 7:37-39), as it will also be manifested corporately in the church's relations to the millennial earth, as we see in Revelation 22:1-3.

The reverse of this is to be seen in the ease of such as have become familiar with truth as to its outward expression and the present ways of God in grace, while themselves strangers in heart to the power and reality of either. Just as Naaman had exhibited the fruits of grace received in tenderness of conscience and devotedness of heart, so did the unrenewed heart of Gehazi display itself in all the horrible repulsiveness of nature. Satan works most readily and effectively upon the religiously instructed mind. It is those who have learned about God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, and who have thus some knowledge of the truth, that are more efficient servants of the devil than are those who have not such knowledge. The sin of Gehazi has been the sin of Christendom. In the early days of the church's history, the new testimony to the name of Jesus was maintained with such power and earnestness, and so abundantly blessed by the Holy Ghost in this same city of Samaria, that there was great joy in that city. Grace was there again asserting itself, and also maintaining its own proper character. But just as the covetousness of Gehazi betrayed him into the hands of Satan for the corrupting of the testimony, so in that early day the same evil principle manifested itself in New Testament times in one who had the reputation of being called "the great power of God," who also "believed" and was baptized, and was admitted into the Christian profession. Such was Simon Magus (Acts 8), a professed believer, but who was proved to have "neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

These tactics of the devil are more effective than open opposition; interfering with the action of grace, and corrupting the motives and testimony of such as proclaim it. But there was in the early history of the church the spiritual power and energy of the apostles, which exposed and judged these evil ways, and for the moment restrained its fuller development as manifested in later days. From 1 Tim. 6:10 we learn that "the love of money" is one of the roots of all kind of evil (not "the" root, but "a" root, R.V.), and the natural man is ever ready to turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and to use the Christian profession as a means of exalting and enriching himself, holding godliness to be a means of gain; and the lordship of Christ is practically, if not formally, denied. With Gehazi it was not alone the cupidity disclosed, nor the falsehood and deception practiced that exposed the offender to the withering rebuke of the prophet and the swift and solemn judgment of God, but the occasion-" Is it a time to receive," etc. God had drawn near to His revolted people in grace, which could neither be monopolized by Israel, nor patronized or purchased by the Gentile. Elisha as a spiritual man entered fully into the mind of God, and refused the gifts Naaman would have pressed upon him. Yet his servant had thought it a time to enrich himself by grasping at that which his master had refused.

The moral application to the present day is obvious. It is not here unbelieving Israel—forbidding that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, but the corrupt professor, the wicked servant, doing his utmost, and using his knowledge and position as a servant in the house, to counteract the work of God in the soul, and mar the testimony of grace so as to belie its true character. No sin is more heinous and deadly than sin against the grace of God, as seen in those who deny the Lord that bought them, and who bring upon themselves swift destruction. There were many lepers in Israel when Naaman was cleansed. One more was added to the many. "And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

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(To be continued)

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him; and he said, Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take, but he refused. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto Jehovah. In this thing Jehovah pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, Jehovah pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way” (2 Kings 5:15-19).

It is not to be supposed that the man of God was ignorant of, or indifferent to, the struggle that had been going on in, the heart of Naaman between faith and unbelief. It was in reality a conflict between God and Satan for the possession of a soul. The Spirit of God had brought it to a happy termination. Human instrumentality, insignificant and unpretentious in this case, had been largely made use of, but the chief actors had not, up to this point, discovered themselves. We cannot but admire the wisdom and propriety with which Elisha carried himself all the way through, standing aside while the conflict was in progress as a servant that “knoweth not what his lord doeth.” He has but to deliver Jehovah's message without addition or diminution, as becomes one entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation. But the mind of man reveals its disappointment and dissatisfaction with the gospel of the grace of God, and manifests, as in Naaman's case, its open rebellion against the means prescribed by God to induce the sinner to give up his own thoughts and the reasoning of unbelief. The ambassador has faithfully to deliver the message committed to him, and to leave the result with God. It is not his to try and make it palatable, by giving up what arouses opposition. He knows that at all times God is well pleased when His beloved Son is well spoken of, and the gospel faithfully preached. “For we are a sweet odor of Christ to God in the saved and in those that perish; to the one an odor from death unto death, but to the other an odor from life unto life; and who is sufficient for these things? For we do not, as the many, make a trade of the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, before God, we speak in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:15-17).

A spirit of earnest sincerity, witness of a love that seeks in order to save and bless, underlies the gospel, which in itself rarely fails to attract. “Let him come now to me,” awakened hope in the heart of Naaman, but the more peremptory command, “Go and wash,” destroyed those hopes which had been wrongly placed. “Behold, I thought,” revealed the pride of a corrupt heart, which (in the matter of salvation) would dictate terms to God, but the light of God had nevertheless truly dawned upon him, and so eventually we hear his confession of it in the words, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” What an amazing discovery! And in what a way of grace to make it! The only God in all the earth had been found of a poor Gentile leper; found, too, in Israel's land, while certainly Israel's king acknowledged Him not. But Esaias is very bold, and says, “I have been found by those not seeking me; I have become manifest to those not inquiring after me. But unto Israel he says, All the day long have I stretched out my hands to a people disobeying and opposing” (Romans 10:20, 21).

Well might the great apostle of the Gentiles, with a heart full of love for his brethren after the flesh, seek to use such a marvelous fact for the blessing of some of them. “For I speak to you, the nations, inasmuch as I am apostle of nations, I glorify my ministry; if by any means I shall provoke to jealousy them which are my flesh, and shall save some from among them” (Romans 11:13, 14). And will not God use it effectually in a day which is yet future, in answer to the prayer of an afflicted and repentant remnant (Isaiah 64:12, and 65:1)? Then will assurance and certainty, as the result of God's work in the soul, take the place of “vain thoughts,” fruits of a darkened understanding which had repelled grace and insulted Jehovah and His servant. “Better things... and things which accompany salvation,” we may say, were now to appear in the case before us, and these were wonderfully similar in character to those fruits which rejoiced the heart of the apostle Paul as he marked their development in his beloved Thessalonians. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you at our prayers, remembering unceasingly your work of faith, and labor of love, and enduring constancy of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3). The Thessalonian converts had believed the gospel which Paul preached, responding heartily and in all simplicity to the grace presented. They had borne fruit in like character to that divine grace which had visited them. And, in its measure, it was so with Naaman. One hardly knows which to admire most-the generous devotion of the cleansed leper pressing his gifts upon Elisha, or the faithfulness in which the latter refused all that was offered, declining to enrich himself by compromising the testimony of that free yet sovereign grace of which he had been the channel.

The tribute of the Gentiles has been rendered to God's earthly people in the past and will yet again be rendered to Israel in the future (compare 2 Chronicles 9:23, 24, with Psalm 72). Their gifts shall come with acceptance to the earthly dwelling-place and altar of Jehovah. But at this time Israel was unbelieving and contemptuous of the grace represented by the ministry of Elisha, so that no glory could in truth accrue to Israel, or indeed to any but to Jehovah Himself. It would be better and more excellent for the Syrian to return to his own land, and build an altar to Jehovah there, as in coming millennial days when God shall have accomplished all that He has ever promised for Israel, it shall be said, “In that day there shall be an altar to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to Jehovah.” “In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land. When Jehovah shall bless saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands; and Israel mine inheritance” (Isaiah 19: 19, 23, 25). Truly God has given in His word many a pledge and guarantee of blessing which awaits not only Israel, but the world, when there shall be the universal acknowledgment of Jehovah and subjection to His order then established in power on the earth.

How perfect is divine workmanship! He who had but a little before spoken disparagingly of “the waters of Israel,” now begs for two mules' burden of earth! Had it been suggested to him earlier as an essential condition to his cleansing, he might have regarded it as an unnecessary incumbrance; but in his altered state of mind the very soil of the land of Israel was sacred to him, where he had come to know God as Jehovah Rophi— “that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26). When God is known thus as a Savior God, to build an altar to Him (in a manner of speaking) is the suited thing to do. Now that Christ has come, God can only he truly owned and worshipped as a “just God and a Savior” when He is known as One who, in the death of His Son, has laid a righteous and adequate basis for the everlasting deliverance and blessing of man. So also did Jacob, at an earlier day, when bidden by God to “Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee.” “So Jacob came to Luz...that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-Bethel, because there God appeared unto him when he fled from the face of his brother” (Genesis 35:1, 6, 7).

Grace manifested in Christ removes man's disabilities, sets before him an object to be worshipped, and supplies both motives and methods such as God can acknowledge and accept. To have learned only that “there is no God in all the earth but in Israel” could but bring sorrow to Naaman; for he dwelt, not there, but in Syria. But this was not all that he had learned. He had learned the true character of God Himself, who had established him in the position of a worshipper, cleansed, accepted, and welcome to draw near, even as the heirs of promise. Naaman was to go back to his own land with all the riches he had brought. They had been refused, but he had been cleansed and accepted. The same God who had delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt and set Himself before them as the one object of worship, had been revealed to Naaman with the same result. To Israel, He had given the ten words, which proclaimed His holy jealousy against all false gods, and then He adds, “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen; in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee” (Exodus 20).

“And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods but unto Jehovah. In this thing Jehovah pardon thy servant: when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, Jehovah pardon thy servant in this thing” (vers. 17, 18). The revelation of God as He has declared Himself, the association of His name with the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, is that which gives the character of truth to worship; while the passing away of all forms and ceremonies now rendered obsolete by the death of Christ requires that worship rendered to a God as now revealed in Christianity should be spiritual. “Jesus saith to her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what; we worship what we know, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeketh such as his worshippers. God is a spirit; and they who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-24).

The question then arises, Who are they who are thus eligible to draw near and worship? Those who have bowed to the truth and believed the gospel. So did Naaman. The revelation of the Father which the Son alone was competent to make was not indeed anticipated, nor was it a question of place, or Jerusalem would have been insisted upon. But the same Spirit of God who now witnesses to the efficacy of the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:15) instructed in that day the cleansed Gentile leper in his acknowledgment of benefits conferred. We may well marvel at this propriety of action and correctness of expression on Naaman's part did we not know that the Teacher was divine and His way is perfect. Elisha could but stand aside, and refrain from hindering where he had no authority to sanction. For such a work was quite outside the revealed ways of God with Israel, and apart from all that had hitherto been made known, whether of leprosy and its cleansing, or of worship and its essential requisites. Yet surely Elisha was here a type of God's righteous Servant, who, when here on earth, in the same place and in similar circumstances acknowledged the faith which God had wrought in the heart of a stranger and accepted the worship (as unconventional as that of Naaman) which was rendered to Him by the cleansed Samaritan of Luke 17:11-19.

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

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It might be deemed only natural that the king of Syria, on hearing of a possible cure in the land of Israel for the leprosy of his servant, should address himself to the king of Israel, but he need not have ignored the prophet so entirely as to frustrate the mission, but for the over-ruling providence of God. Would not the king of Israel (if anybody) know all about it? And considering how recently Naaman had harassed Israel's land and people, a little diplomacy was, doubtless, called for. “A man's gift maketh way for him.” Certainly he did his best to get on good terms with the one whom he thought most likely to help him in the matter, and we cannot be surprised at this. The infidel spirit, however, shown by the king of Israel was inexcusable, but God is pitiful and was working in spite of hindrances. How many there are to-day who, in touch with the people of God and familiar, it may be, with truth in its outward expression, are found to be the greatest strangers to its power and reality. “They profess that they know God, while in works they deny him,” and are enemies of the cross of Christ. Here, in the case before us, is evidently set forth the present unbelieving state of the Jewish nation. God is owned in a way (“Am I God to kill and to make alive?”), but the witness and vessel of grace is ignored—Elisha was forgotten. The “poor man” who, by his wisdom, delivered the city, was not remembered by any one (Ecclesiastes 9:14, 16). The prophet's ministry stayed the hand of God in judgment, yet Israel's king ignored the prophet.

But the world was farther astray in regard to Christ than even Israel, for “the world by wisdom knew not God.” “He was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:10, 11). It is thus that the world in its wisdom has allied itself with a corrupted testimony, refusing the witness of grace and denying alike the disease and its remedy. The professing church responsible according to the grace now revealed has failed in its testimony of, and subjection to, Christ, the Son of the living God. Christendom, in its high-mindedness, is giving up faith, by which alone it can stand; and, not continuing in God's goodness, shall be cut off. “Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief they were broken off; and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee; behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but toward thee God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:18-22).

In the Apocalyptic address to Laodicea, we see how a boastful, self-satisfied spirit had usurped the place of dependence. “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Revelation 3:17, 18). Its judgment is thus already pronounced. Is not all this a stumbling block in the way of an exercised soul desiring blessing? The sin of Israel has been the sin of the church. The Lord Jesus scathingly denounced the hollow profession of the religious guides of the people in His day (Matthew 23:13-39). So also Stephen could charge against them, regardless of personal consequences, “Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in

heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy. Ghost; as your fathers did so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it" (Acts 7:51-53).

The sin of Elymas the sorcerer, with its judgment furnishes a striking illustration of Jewish infidelity and opposition to the grace of God; whilst in the record we meet with two expressions which aptly describe the poisonous nature and results of what we now know by the names of "The Higher Criticism" and "The New Theology." "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Paul... said, Oh, full of all subtlety and all mischief, son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord" (Acts 13:8-10)? The apostle Paul, notwithstanding his ardent love of his nation and desires foe their blessing, had to own that this obstinate refusal of mercy for themselves, and the persecution of those who were preaching to the Gentiles, was what would, in God's righteous government, bring upon them wrath to the uttermost. "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 14-16).

Although the king of Israel's words did not go so far as the attempt of Elymas "to turn away the deputy from the faith," they were yet the outcome of the ceaseless activity of the devil in seeking to hinder souls from getting blessing. But Jehovah interfered by His servant Elisha, who "sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (2 Kings 5:8-10). With the real or imaginary grievances of Israel Elisha had nothing to do. But he could not allow it to be said that Naaman, the leper, had come into the land of Israel asking blessing and cleansing, and had returned disappointed. It was not, however, the testimony for the moment that God dwelt in Israel, for Jeroboam, its first king after the division, had cast the God of Israel behind his back and discarded the priests of Jehovah. It remains for a yet future day for the testimony to go forth (to the terror of all enemies) that the name of the city shall be, from that day forth, "Jehovah is there." Naaman should indeed own that (ver. 15), but the measured utterance of the prophet was, strictly speaking, more correct than the language of the one who had but just learned what it was to have to do with God in grace.

Jehovah had been cast out of Israel, and had not returned to the nation. He had not, however, cast away His people on that account. On the contrary, He had sent His servant in grace that it might be manifest that there was a prophet in Israel. Man's way had proved distinctly disappointing, but God graciously opened up a prospect of deliverance and blessing, just as despair had, for the moment, taken possession of Naaman. A like experience we see in the case of God's redeemed people at the beginning of their history (Exodus14), and indeed all the way through, as they will own in a future day in words especially prepared for their use in Psalm 107 (see Hosea 14:1, 2). The word of God through the prophet to the king, arrests Naaman in his perplexity, and—in its form of an invitation, "Let him come now to me" —is suggestive of the present invitations of grace, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" (John 7:37). And in the closing book of revelation, "Let him that is athirst come; whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

It is the more necessary to press these generous invitations at the present time since the god of this world is blinding the minds of them that believe not lest the glory of Him who invites, and their own deep need should be discerned. For the time is near when the leper will be left in all his uncleanness in the outside place, and the sinner who dies in his sins will be raised in order to appear before the great white throne for eternal judgment. "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him he holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work is" (Revelation 22:10-12). "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (20:11-15).

Naaman responded to the gracious invitation in a very ungracious spirit, only to find that pride must be humbled. He might make a display of glory and self-importance at the king's palace, but it was altogether out of place at the door of the house of Elisha. He might be a "great man with his master, and honorable," but Elisha was not affected by the display of this world's glory. He saw in him who stood at his gate an enemy of the people of Jehovah, an unclean leper to whom he could not come out seeing he was not a priest (Leviticus 14:3). And he had a sense of what was due to God, of what alone could he efficacious for the leper. It is only in God's presence, and in subjection to His word that we realize how completely sin separates us from God and from His people if faithful. The thoughts of man are all wrong, both in regard to sin and its remedy. The brief message of the prophet to Naaman was a disclosure of what his real condition was in God's eyes. "And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean." Unclean, he needed to be cleansed. Up to this point everybody had spoken of "recovery" (vers. 3, 6, 7, 11; with Leviticus 13:45).

The thoughts of men to-day, and especially of religious men, are set upon recovery, improvement, reformation, whether by moral or scientific means. But the Christian has learned that the flesh cannot be improved. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love." "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (John 6; Romans 8:7; Galatians 5:6). How humiliating for the proud Syrian to hear the words, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times." The remedy was simplicity itself-"Go and wash." Yet did it imply that he was in his leprous condition unclean, so that the man of God could not tolerate him in his presence.

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him. And he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs and found a wild vine and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage, for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat: and it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, O man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot. And there came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husks thereof. And he said, Give unto the people that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat, for thus saith Jehovah, They shall eat and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of Jehovah (2 Kings 4:38-44).

The spiritual awakening of Israel having been perfected typically God sets Himself in grace to meet His people's need. It is life that demands nourishment. The mighty power of God had been shown out in resurrection. His goodness and tender mercy are now manifested in ministering to the needs of His creatures. “The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season.” There is a return to the beginning of Israel's history at Gilgal, where it was said in the early days of their occupation of the land, “This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you” (Joshua 5:9). Yet another reproach has been incurred. They have done wickedly, exceeding that of the original inhabitants of the land, and famine and desolation prevail around. Nevertheless, inside the house are the sons of the prophets sitting before Elisha in happy and patient expectancy. The miracles we have been considering have produced a profound impression upon them. All the more necessary was it then to deepen and strengthen this effect and to see to it that what is ministered should be good and wholesome. At the time to which this scripture points, there will be a great thirst for knowledge, and corresponding activity developed in supplying it. “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” It is not as vet the millennial kingdom fully established, for then there shall be no evil occurrent. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah.” The moral or spiritual education of Israel will be in progress during the millennium. Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss, but at this time—the time of the end—the greatest care will be necessary in regard to what is ministered, and as to what is received. “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and shall deceive many.” If it were possible the very elect would he deceived.

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament. And they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:14). The faithful remnant, looking for light and guidance would find both, as indeed does every earnest seeker after truth. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7, 8).

But the increase of knowledge should be met with increased vigilance on their part, lest readiness to hear and thirst for knowledge should lay them open to the fatal error which would be one of the dangers of the last days—a danger of which the Lord frequently warned His disciples. Their responsibility was, according to the light and privileges they had received from Himself, to “take heed lest any man deceive you” (Mark 13:5). Peter, more especially in his Second Epistle, seeks to put the saints on their guard. His watchful eye discovered the same danger. So also Jude, in a spirit of earnestness peculiarly his own. We need not refer to Paul's writings, which have more particularly in view the church. The earlier warnings, though having, without doubt, a present application and use, nevertheless point to a time still future, in which they will find a larger call than now. For this is pre-eminently the day of the Holy Spirit's presence and operation in the church. Every Christian is now sealed with the Spirit, and even the veriest babe in Christ, having an unction from the Holy One, should be able to brand as a lie the modern teaching that flatters and exalts man and belittles the Christ of God. The Spirit of God will indeed be working in the Jewish remnant in the last days, but not as an indwelling power as now; nor will all scripture in the same way as now be illuminated and used for the profit and blessing of God's earthly people. Is the reason not obvious? For what is now in course of building will then have been completed and removed from earth to heaven.

Many portions there are of scripture which are occupied with Christ risen and glorified in heaven—there in all the completeness of the work by which He glorified God in the propitiation of sins by the sacrifice of Himself. Other scriptures set forth the acceptance of the believer in Christ, according to the value of that work on the cross; whilst others again reveal the heavenly calling and hope of the church, that saints are now (to faith) raised up together and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. God the Spirit will indeed at that time satisfy those desires toward Christ which He will produce in the hearts of the faithful. He will open up those portions of the written word which shall be applicable to them. Nevertheless, there will be much of what we now rejoice in and turn to profitable use for present testimony that will be as a sealed book to Jews waiting for deliverance and looking for light. On the other hand, scriptures which we fail now to understand, through our unskilfulness or indolence (“for the slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting”), will then shine out with a peculiar brilliancy and sweetness that shall not fail to satisfy many a longing soul.

Scripture is complete in itself, yet the carnal mind can neither receive nor understand it, but man would presumptuously add thereto. Signs are not wanting to-day of this readiness. But when “He who now letteth” shall have been removed, how much more ostentatiously will this be the case, in spite of the warning of Revelation 22:18, 19. But God has surely anticipated, and in His word provided, that which will be suitable for those who in that day “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” “And therefore will Jehovah wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted that he may have mercy upon you; Jehovah is a God of judgment, blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; thou shalt weep no more. He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he shall answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:18-21).

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:3-12).

The association of this miracle with Gilgal is most significant (see Josh. 5). It was on Israel's first entrance into the land, the place where they submitted themselves to Jehovah's requirements and accepted the sign of God's covenant with their fathers, “wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day” (Josh. 5:9). But they were not slow in involving themselves in a vet deeper reproach, as portrayed by the prophet Ezekiel (chap. 20.) in great detail. First, in the land of Egypt (vers. 5-9); secondly, in the wilderness (vers 10-26); thirdly, in the land (vers. 27-32); the chapter closing with a description of the way in which God will cause them to “pass under the rod,” when He brings them into the land and into the bond of the covenant. The “dearth in the land” witnessed to Jehovah's faithfulness. It was His way of bringing them into the bond of the coven ant.

“And I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out from the countries wherein ye are scattered with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured forth. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord Jehovah. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant (Ezekiel 20:34-37). But this second gathering to, and occupation of, the land of Israel will be in virtue of the new covenant and not of the old. The latter was ready to vanish away in Paul's day (Hebrews 8:13); yet it has not, for its curse is still in operation. But in that day it shall have entirely disappeared, and if man, in his efforts to add to the feast, only succeeds in marring it, there is such virtue in the blood of the new covenant, such power in its bond, and such grace in Him who is prefigured in the meal, that when this was cast into the pot there was no evil thing there. The virtue of the work of the Second man annuls all that the first man brought in by disobedience (see Romans 5:17-21). The intercession of God in grace by the Man Christ Jesus has made it quite safe to sit at such a table where the Lord has healed, and to partake of the feast which He has blessed. All shall be satisfied, for the word of Jehovah must be fulfilled. Every pledge and promise of blessing shall be more than made good for Israel and the nations by Him who has brought life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel.

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 13, The Ministry of

“And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, laid upon his bed. He went in, therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto Jehovah. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and The child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out” (2 Kings 4:32-37).

We may notice here a striking analogy between this case and the similar instance of the son of the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17:17-24). In the earlier case God made it manifest that He would be no man's debtor, even when Israel was under His governmental dealings. His servant Elijah, the object of the people's malice, as also of Ahab their king, was not allowed to be dependent upon any in Israel for food and shelter. “I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta of Sidon, unto a woman a widow” (Luke 4:25, 26).

God graciously provided for the need of that Gentile widow and her son for “many days.” Nor was this all. When death claimed her son, and the mother was reminded of the sins of her past life, Elijah, in communion with the mind of God, would not allow it to be said that in yielding obedience to the claims of God she had really lost. Elijah took up her dead child and gave her a living one. It was sovereign grace acting in divine power which, if Israel refused, the Gentile would profit by. Here, however, in the woman of Shunem, a far deeper lesson is before us. Every one who has had to do with God in such extremities of need will have learned somewhat of His ways. Though the circumstances indeed may differ, the manner of the deliverance may have much in common. Nevertheless the distinctive pathway of each, with its fruitful results to the exercised soul, has its own appropriate character before God, as well as for ourselves. The obvious lesson for us in both cases is that whilst Christ, the Son of the living God, has broken the power of death for him that believes, the fruits of His victory remain to be realized and appropriated by faith.

We may also notice that the gracious sympathies of the one in whom divine power is acting have their full opportunity of display. They are not shut out or rendered superfluous by the existence of a power able and ready to act (see John 11:35-38). A living man, the obedient one, has gone down into death that so His love might be fully manifested, and that those subjected to death might be raised up. “Jesus said unto her [Martha], I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” The righteous sentence of death upon man had to be upheld, but God, manifesting His love, “sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9). “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Other truths, indeed, have their own place and value, but it is good for the soul to meditate upon the matchless love of God that takes account of our wretched condition to work for His own glory and for our deliverance. Christ has come down into our depths of misery and death, entering fully into our circumstances that we might be delivered and raised to His heights. He took hold of the seed of Abraham.

What amazing condescending grace! What abundant manifestations of love in considerate regard for others do we find! What untiring service! What self-abnegation, etc.! Surely all this should have reached the hearts of His people, and have made way for the message which he brought from God! But alas! instead of this, he had to say, “For my love I had hatred,” and “they hated me without a cause.” Notwithstanding the wonderful display of divine goodness-brought down to man in the person of Him who was “God manifest in flesh” walking this earth—divine goodness in the midst of all the circumstances in which man was found, and brought about by the presence of sin and death-we see that this display was in itself powerless to effect any real change in man as he was. The Son of God had become the Son of man, yet the corrupt heart of the sinner was hardened and closed against this love of God. This blessed One, God's righteous Servant, took account of every witness to man's guilty and helpless condition, and offered up Himself, the one infinite sacrifice which alone could avail for life, salvation and peace.

There were occasions on which it seemed as if the continual proofs of God's power and goodness were in some little way beginning to tell upon those who witnessed them. Such as, for instance, the desire of the Greeks to see Jesus. “And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship during the feast. The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:20, 21). But the Lord invariably rejected all these desires and professions that rested only upon the flesh, and by which man deceived himself and denied the truth as to his real condition in God's sight. “And Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (vers. 23, 24). “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (vers. 31, 32).

The solemn truth of man being wholly under the power of sin and death is constantly before us in the Gospel of John. It seems to be borne witness to in the restoration to life of the Shunammite's son, as also of the widow's son (1 Kings 17). In both, there is the personal contact of a living man with a dead body, that is, Christ's going into death, not to challenge Satan's right over the body founded upon man's act of disobedience, but to nullify those rights wrongfully obtained, and to set them aside by the completion of that one righteous act on which our salvation is founded. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.... Therefore, as by one offense judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by one righteousness the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:12, 18, 19).

But there is a great difference between type and antitype. Elijah and Elisha must needs make this personal contact, for they could not die for another. Their action was but figurative of Christ's great work. The Lord Himself, when on earth working similar miracles, had but to speak the word “and it was done.” Take, as an instance, the Lord by the bier of the young man, “the only son of his mother,” the widow of Nain. “And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother” (Luke 7:11-15).

And from another Gospel. “Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes; and his face was hound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go” (John 11:41-44). All this is but anticipating the greater power that shall be manifested at His coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). The victory over death, which Christ has obtained for the believer, is known and appropriated now by faith, even though death is working in our mortal bodies. And if we realized this truth more, it would save us much bitter experience, for we are far too ready to cherish desires and to form plans (even of a religious character) which suppose something good in fallen man that God will use. When this is the case, we have to learn experimentally the painful truth of Romans 7, that we may also know and enjoy the real deliverance and power of Romans 8-” The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

The glorious resurrection of the sleeping saints, and the equally glorious change and rapture of the living ones (the one event for which we wait), are made to depend upon a work already accomplished and accepted by the God who gave His Son, and which is also attested by the Spirit's presence on earth and His indwelling of the Christian. It is not dead bodies but living ones that He inhabits. “Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies because of his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:9-11). “Behold, I shew you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 0 death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

The victory which Christ has already obtained shall then he celebrated and published (at least to spiritual intelligences). With regard to the future restoration of Israel, other principles will be brought into operation. The elect of Israel forming the nucleus of the new nation will, individually and collectively, be the subject of the Holy Spirit's action, who will awaken, convict and instruct by the scriptures. This we may see prefigured by the Lord's gracious and convincing testimony to the two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27). He will open the understanding of the elect remnant that they may understand the scriptures, and more especially those parts in which the sufferings, sympathies, and graces of Christ rejected by His people are before us. Then will repentance, faith, and spiritual affections be evoked from His (now unbelieving) people in that day.

For proof of this two or three quotations may suffice. “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. And ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:25-28). “Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah unto these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you,

and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath into you, and ye shall live: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah." "Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (37:4-6, 9, 10).

"Thou hast increased the nation, O Jehovah, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth." "Thy dead shall live, my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isaiah 26:15, 19). The remnant of Israel will then he chastened and humbled that God may lift them up when He seeth that their power is gone. "Jehovah shall repent himself concerning his people."

God's purpose in thus dealing with this daughter of Abraham was now attained. The promise had been fulfilled, the power of God in resurrection had been established. All through the history she had shown herself to be a believing woman. She is now a worshipper. "Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out."

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

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The deep sorrow of bereavement was not the only burden pressing upon the heart of this saint of God. To whom should she look for comfort and consolation at such a moment if not to the father of her dead son? The lack of sympathy and inability on the part of her husband to understand her reasons for going to the prophet, must surely have intensified the trial, but it made manifest that she alone was the subject of the Lord's dealings at this time. Whilst many may pass through similar circumstances, yet few get the blessing in result which God has intended. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But it ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth a matter of joy, but of grief; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:6-11).

The unexercised soul goes through the trial in pride, or in the strength of nature. The heart is hardened and perhaps the conscience seared, and so the blessing is lost, for God would deal specially with the conscience. We see this in Elihu's answer to Job (Job 33:19-25). It is said of one of the most self-willed kings of Judah, that "At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him." "For Jehovah brought Judah low because of Ahaz, king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against Jehovah, and Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of Jehovah, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria; but he helped him not. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against Jehovah: this is that king Ahaz" (2 Chronicles 28:16, 19-22). Ahaz was a man whom affliction could not soften; on the contrary, it hardened him.

It was not that there was anything very bad in this woman's husband. We do not read that he opposed or attempted to hinder her, but he failed to hear the voice of God. Passing through the same circumstances as his wife, he was not exercised thereby. He received the gift without either astonishment or thankfulness. In the death of his son he had no question to ask of God or of His servant, and henceforth he disappears from view. Such people prefer instead to have some kind of religious profession-a lamp, even if they have no "oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Matthew 25:4). They remain satisfied with mere externals, "new moons and sabbaths." They know nothing of the power of revealed truth received by faith that sets the soul in the immediate presence of God outside and above all such influences. We may notice here that faith grows with exercise. The more that grace is manifested so much the more does faith press its demands. We need not marvel at this when we consider that the God who blesses is the same God who by His Spirit awakens desires towards Himself, which He alone can satisfy. Surely we may say with Hezekiah, "What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live" (Isaiah 38:15, 16).

The man of the world desires nothing better than uninterrupted peace and prosperity. The Christian can "glory in tribulations also," because every fresh difficulty or painful trial sends him to God in prayer, and each new experience of the Lord's unbounded love draws out his heart afresh in thanksgiving to God. Where this is the constant habit of the soul there will be no intemperate display of either joy or grief before the world. And so with this Shunammite; she has but one answer to all inquiries as to her trouble, for "the heart knoweth its own bitterness and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joys," and, in a way, even her husband appeared a stranger to her.

"So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite! Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, [Is it] well with thee? well with thy husband? well with the child? And she answered, Well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet; but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her; and Jehovah hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my Lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way; if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose and followed her" (2 Kings 4:25-30). It is evident that the deep exercises of her heart found no expression in her outward demeanor. Faith and spiritual discernment had drawn her to the prophet, and to no one else would she make known her sorrow. It would have been waste of time. Her behavior under this deep trial was beautiful. Like another, she could say, "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself like a weaned child." This is the first manifested result of having to do with God. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep

your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7). The trial may not yet be removed, but the heart is satisfied, and it is only a question of waiting His time. “Thou wilt keep [him in] perfect peace, [whose] mind is stayed [on thee], because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in Jehovah forever: for in Jehovah is everlasting strength” (Isaiah 26:3, 4). Faith gets the victory and blesses God for it, but the soul thus blessed does not spread before others the secret exercises of the heart. These are before God in the sanctuary.

“It is well” might suffice for first her husband and then Gehazi. But to the man of God she reveals the depth of her sorrow, yet in such a way as made it evident that she had grown wonderfully since the promise had been given. She reminds him that she had not desired the son now lying dead in the prophet's room. Was, not this equivalent to setting up a claim upon the living God that He should give her back her son in resurrection? Faith is bold and God delights in encouraging and satisfying the faith which honors Him. The unbelieving and the unspiritual are left far behind here and faith gains its end. Even Elisha finds himself at fault, although his ignorance of what had actually happened was used in the wisdom of God to complete the test that so she might be shut up to God Himself. Her knowledge of the ways of God, learned under Elisha's ministry, forbade her expecting any good results from the prophet's staff in the hands of his servant. This was to be classed with the “new moons and sabbaths” her husband spoke of, and which, through human interference with divine institutions, had been deprived of their value. In point of fact there was nothing real in Israel now. The emblem of power in the hands of a hireling could accomplish nothing. She was not to be put off with such. A very definite need was pressing upon her heart which God alone could meet. Her strong faith did not prevent her from feeling deeply the weight of the trial. Words and actions alike gave expression to it. “Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?” Her faith was indeed sorely tried, but the end was near. The divine Husbandman was purging this promising branch and pruning the tender plant with infinite skill and patience. Only what is of God will stand such searching tests. The dross is consumed, the gold abides. Human workmanship is destroyed, for “the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.”

From the very earliest days it has been the sin of the church to deny the presence and operation of the Holy Ghost and to substitute human activity and human wisdom, both in the worship and service of God. Of course, this has not been done openly, although the progress of “Modernism,” the “New Theology,” the “Higher Criticism,” etc., are every day bringing us nearer to the apostasy of Christendom and its judgment. They alone are safe who in the consciousness of weakness cling tenaciously to all that God has given, and which faith values. In Elisha's day what was there of reality in Israel but that tender mercy and compassion of God in which Jehovah visited His people? There was nothing he could connect Himself with, hence the necessity of getting rid of whatever interfered with the free action of God's Spirit, or that obscured the testimony to that boundless love and mercy in which God was yearning over His poor sinful people to do them good. The worldly wisdom of the husband must be set aside. He could see no reason or utility in drawing near to God or seeking Him at such a time. So, too, must the zeal of Gehazi for his master be disowned. It would have kept her away from the Lord she sought. Officialism or delegated power or authority breaks down and fails completely to meet her case, but she never trusted it. The words, “As Jehovah liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee,” attested the reality of her faith and the depth and intensity of her spiritual convictions. These words are the same in which Elisha's faith at the commencement of his career had declared itself in his own attachment to Elijah. These are not mere sentiments, but the unmistakable signs of divine workmanship giving the individual where all is lost as to collective and united testimony to take his stand upon divine principles and to say to the Lord Jesus, “Come what may, I will not leave Thee.”

“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Holy One of God” (John 6:68, 69).

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By the word of prophecy God kept alive in the hearts of His people the hope of Messiah's coming. His mercy was indeed the only resource. They had corrupted themselves in the very blessings they had received from God, and the hope of the faithful lay in the salvation to be brought in by the Eternal Blesser of His people, to whom all prophecy pointed. It was not indeed that the child promised and given to this daughter of Sarah was himself a type of the Messiah long promised to Israel, but his remarkable birth, death and restoration to life, taken in connection with the mother's subsequent loss of, and reinstatement in, house and land (2 Kings 8:1-6), form a chain of circumstances full of interest, and, at least, suggestive of Israel's future restoration to their inheritance, when they shall in deep repentance and genuine faith appropriate the Christ whom they rejected and crucified. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of [his] government and peace [there shall be] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7). This will be the divine way of re-establishing His people in the inheritance from which, by reason of sin, they have long been exiled. Here, if not a personal type of Christ we surely have a very instructive one of Israel, “of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came” —the mother widowed and exiled amongst the Gentiles, awakened by God's Spirit to a sense of her proper relationship to Him whom she once despised and rejected. In her case there was no expression of unbelief, only the very natural difficulty she experienced in understanding how the promise of the man of God could be realized. “Nay, my lord, man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid” (1 Kings 4:16), just gave expression to this difficulty. It was not unbelief, although very near it.

We find the same difference noted between unbelief and ignorance, in connection with the birth of John the Baptist and of the Lord Jesus. In the former case we are introduced to a righteous man, “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless” (Luke 1:5, 6), and having, in virtue of his office, unusual opportunities for making himself acquainted with the divine way of fulfilling the hopes and desires awakened in the heart by the word of prophecy. We may opine that Zacharias had often-times read the very Scripture we are now considering besides others already referred to. Cherishing the hope of Israel, he may well be reckoned with such as were at that very time awaiting its consolation (chap. 2:25). There were also the Old Testament Scriptures pointing to the messenger who should go before Jehovah's face. The study of the holy oracles had been his constant occupation, or ver. 6 could not have been true of him. His office necessitated it, and God acknowledged both him and his wife as righteous. Nevertheless, the divine announcement to him disclosed not ignorance but real

unbelief. “And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw [him] he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall. be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering, said unto him, “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season” (vers. 11-20).

Here, in one whose priestly occupation brought him into touch with the sacred writings and institutions connected with the worship and service of God, we find carnal reasoning and unbelief, as if the weakness of nature could prevent the fulfillment of God's promise. In pleasing contrast with this was the simple reverence and submission of Mary, sure evidence that the Spirit of God had prepared her to believe and to receive the promise. “And the angel answered and said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God.... And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (vers. 30, 35, 45). Truly, God has marvelous patience with our weakness and ignorance, but how obnoxious our pride and unbelief! A divinely wrought condition is indeed necessary for the reception of the blessing, but when faith is established and borne witness to by its fruits, there is the further dealing of the husbandman that the fruitbearing branch may bring forth more fruit (John 15:2).

“And when the child was grown, it fell on a day that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head! And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door] upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? neither new moon nor sabbath. And she said, [It shall be] well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not riding for me except I bid thee. So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi, his servant, Behold, that Shunammite! Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, [Is it] well with thee? well with thy husband? well with the child? And she answered, Well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the foot, but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her; and Jehovah hath hid it from me, and hath not told me” (2 Kings 4:18-27).

We may here call to mind the case of Abraham offering up his son Isaac (Genesis 22). As to discipline and fruitbearing, there might be, to a certain extent, a parallel, but we see far more of contrast than of similarity in the two cases, for we know that Isaac was a personal type of the Lord Jesus Christ, whilst we cannot say that of the son of the Shunammite. Nevertheless, it is an important and instructive lesson we are set down to learn, viz., that of man's inability to keep the blessing God bestows. If faith has been in exercise in connection with the gift and its reception, it is still needful that we should learn how necessary it is to have to do and go on with God alone, even in the surrender of His own gifts. For if we are unable to do this the blessing itself may become a snare. The creation of the woman and her presentation to Adam (Genesis 2:18-25) is set before us in a way distinct from the history of creation as such, given us in chapter 1. There is unfolded to us God's loving care and solicitude for the perfect happiness of the one whom He had set as lord of creation in responsibility to Himself. Yet did she not become a snare to her husband, who deliberately disobeyed the word of the Creator by receiving the prohibited fruit from her hand? God must be more to us than all the blessings He has bestowed. It is thus that God is glorified, and grace known and received becomes the principle of our relationship to Him, and the only guarantee for the permanence and continual enjoyment of the blessings bestowed. It pleased God to withdraw for a time the son He had given to this dear woman, that she might receive him again in resurrection, and recognize His power and prove afresh His goodness. It was remarkable that God did not make known even to His servant Elisha what He was doing. Man could not help her, she must come to God and have to do with Him alone. The occurrence of death had raised questions which God alone could answer.

We see this also in the two disciples going to Emmaus. They had known Christ after the flesh, and indeed had believed in Him, but the occurrence of death shook their faith, although it did not destroy it.” And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering, said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. And the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel, and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.... Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory” (Luke 24:25, 26, 18-21)?

But we shall see how perfectly resurrection as the witness of the mighty power of God, answers the questions raised by the presence of death, and establishes the soul before God in blessedness more secure and permanent than before death had broken in upon, and marred, the whole scene.

.[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

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The blessing brought into the Shunammite's household was entirely unsought. Welcome, indeed it was, but in striking contrast to the preceding case of the woman and the creditor. It is well when trouble leads us to God as the only resource in difficulty and trial. He does

encourage us to make of Him our refuge and resource at such times. “Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me.” And in the New Testament we read also, “Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God,” and this is accompanied by the assurance that “the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

But there are some things for which we never should have prayed to God. The chiefest blessings “of Christianity are the unspeakable gift of God-His beloved Son, and the gift of the Spirit. Of the first of these we may say, it was the measure and the expression of the boundless love of God to a ruined world which, so far from feeling its need of and praying for such a gift, did its best to get rid of Him when He came into this scene. Significantly true “there was no room for them in the inn.” “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). And again, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9, 10).

In giving His Son to die for us God was gratifying His own heart of love, as also in the subsequent fulfillment of His promise of the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This was the answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 14: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever: [even] the spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him “not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you” (vers. 16, 17). This promise of the Father (not to the world, or to men in their sins, but to the Lord Jesus, who had already prayed for it), the Lord when risen and exalted on high, received, and so poured out the Spirit upon His disciples when waiting for the promise they were all together in one place (Acts 2:1).

The natural man has no taste for divine things, nor appreciation of God's greatest and best gift. But in the case of this Shunammite we find beyond a doubt that by His Spirit God had already been working in the heart of this woman, producing spiritual discernment, faith in God, and an appreciation of holiness, which bore its own blessed fruit. So, too, in a later day a Lydia, of the city of Thyatira, was chosen and prepared by the same Spirit for the reception of still greater honor and blessing, “whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought [us], saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come in to my house and abide. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:14, 15).

It was the Lord Himself who said, “He that receiveth you receiveth me,” and the reality of a divine work in the soul may be discerned in this way. May we not look upon the instance of the Gentile widow to whom Elijah was sent (1 Kings 17) as affording both a parallel and a contrast? With the woman of Sarepta it was at the end of the Lord's dealings with her and as Elijah's visit was drawing to a close, that she learned to regard him as a man of God who had the word of Jehovah. “By this I know that thou [art] a man of God, that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth [is] truth” (1 Kings 17:24); while with the Shunammite she has this knowledge at the commencement and acts upon it. If the natural man raises difficulties and gives not God credit for being as good as His word, and able to perform what He promises, the believer it is who believes God and receives the blessing. But there can be no security of blessing in any promise of God to fallen man as such. The wonderful communications of God's word are for faith to rest on, and await the accomplishment of what is foretold. Some may ask, But did not the Lord God in Eden, while judging the transgression make a promise to man concerning the birth of a Savior? Not at all. There was no “promise” made to man-disgraced, discredited and judged-but there was an announcement to the serpent in the hearing of Adam and Eve of coming judgment, that the seed of the woman (not, of the man) should bruise the serpent's head. No doubt this declaration, mysterious as it must have appeared to our first parents, was meant for faith to lay hold of and confide in until it pleased God to give added light by the further revelations of His purposes of blessing for man, and the discomfiture and final judgment of man's greatest enemy and God's.

The Shunammite woman, then, had already been the subject of divine workmanship. God had opened her heart to give heed to the things spoken by Elisha. She perceived that he who passed that way so frequently and was pleased to accept of her hospitality, was indeed “a holy man of God.” It was the only character which justly became one doing the work of God in Israel at that time. Kings and priests had corrupted themselves, and blessing could not come to any in Israel through such defiled channels. So in a later day when Judah had become corrupt, and God would yet in mercy linger over His guilty people, foretelling to them brighter days to dawn upon them, we see that Ezekiel, who was given by God these prophetic communications, although himself a priest, yet was he habitually addressed as son of man, as was also Daniel, of Judah's royal family, although less frequently.

If we turn to the apostle Paul we shall find that in both of his epistles to Timothy he speaks of the “man of God.” In the first, Timothy is so addressed. “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast professed the good profession before many witnesses,” etc. (6:11, 12). And in his second epistle we read, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work” (3: 16, 17). A title without honor or authority of a worldly sort, it doubtless expresses the true character of such as God would use in His service in a day of declension and departure from the faith.

As to the particular manifestation of the power and goodness of God in this case, may we not see in it a personal type of the Lord Jesus Christ? We may note four such remarkable interventions of God in the history of the nation recorded in the Old Testament. Each one, doubtless, not without relation to the divine announcement in Genesis 3 already referred to. Each of a progressive character, too, i.e., in their typical significance, each being an advance upon its predecessor.

God in the exercise of His sovereign right made choice of Abram to be a witness for Himself, and to be the depository of promise. “Now Jehovah had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed..... And Jehovah appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land; and there builded he an altar unto Jehovah, who appeared unto him” (Genesis 12:1-3). This, however, was but general. It was not until he had refused the proffered gifts of the king of Sodom that God made a definite promise, which could only be fulfilled in his own family. “After these things the word of Jehovah came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I [am] thy shield, thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, 0 Lord Jehovah, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house [is] this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed; and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of Jehovah [came] unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels

shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in Jehovah, and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:1-6). But that which faith values is also used for disciplining the individual. It was so in Abram's case, as Genesis 15-21 abundantly illustrates. Moreover, it was not until twenty-five years had elapsed that God fulfilled His own promise. Each succeeding year must have seemed to make the promise still more unlikely of fulfillment, so that we can hardly wonder at Abram's laughter in chapter 17, nor of Sarah's in the chapter following. In the birth of Isaac, coupled with his surrender (in chapter 22.), we have by far the most striking type of Christ to be found in the Old Testament.

But when the children of promise had received the blessing because of God's faithfulness, and forfeited it because of their disobedience, God visited His people in sovereign mercy, and caused another barren woman to give birth to a deliverer. "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Jehovah; and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, who name [was] Manoah; and his wife was barren and bare not. And an angel of Jehovah appeared unto the woman and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now, therefore, beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean [thing]. For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb, and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:1-5). Here there was no discipline or trial of faith, as in Abram's case, but a beautiful type of the man whom God made strong for Himself, breaking the power of the enemy and delivering His people, although they did not deserve it and did not know Him when come. "And Manoah said unto the angel of Jehovah, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of Jehovah said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto Jehovah. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of Jehovah. And Manoah said unto the angel of Jehovah, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honor? And the angel of Jehovah said unto him, Why asketh thou thus after my name, seeing it is wonderful" (vers. 15-18).

Further, when the priestly family had corrupted themselves, and caused the Lord's people to abhor Jehovah's offerings, the faith of one (who in herself typified the godly remnant of Israel in the last days) finds approval and encouragement. Again the barren woman-Israel after the flesh-(see Isaiah 26:17-19) is made to be the joyful mother of children. On this occasion we see the spirit of prophecy awakened, the prayers of the godly are heard and answered, confidence in God sustained in expectation of what Jehovah would accomplish by His anointed king. "Jehovah killeth and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. Jehovah maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall be thunder upon them. Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his Anointed" (1 Samuel 2:6-10). Lastly, in the case before us, things are even worse in the nation, but God knows how to reach the hearts of His people. First of all He gives the hearing ear and then the understanding heart, leading them to acknowledge that God is indeed visiting His people in unsolicited goodness.

[G. S. B.]

(To be continued)

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The Spirit of God here sets before us in a systematic and progressive way the great results for faith now of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, going on to the day of His glorious manifestation when the dearth which man has brought in (2 Kings 4:38-41) shall have been cast out, and the abundance of the earth made to be sufficient, and more than sufficient for the blessing of such as acknowledge God and His Man-the "man Christ Jesus" (vers. 42-44).

The immediate result of the world's rejection of Christ was not, as might have been supposed, instant judgment, but the sending down of the Holy Ghost to witness to the sufficiency of Christ's work for the satisfaction of every demand of a righteous God upon man. The "Creditor" indeed come, but to make known to all who acknowledge themselves debtors that every claim had been fully met. In proof of this He who had become bondman for us has been released by divine power and glorified in the heavens. This was made known at Pentecost in every known language, that all might know and rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes the believer free. There was no longer any creditor to fear except for those who despised and refused such a settlement. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses... Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:32, 36, 38, 39). "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (3:19). Again, "through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (13:38, 39).

But God had still greater blessings than this for believing man, as the result of Christ's presence in heaven, and the Holy Ghost's descent upon earth. To be delivered from the fear of death is a great relief indeed to the soul, but what shall we say of the positive blessing into which the emancipated one is introduced? If "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," it is "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit "'(Romans 8:2-4). Here is the spiritual meaning of the words, "Live thou and thy sons of the rest." As believers, "we boast in hope of the glory of God." We know that, ultimately, things on earth shall be reconciled as perfectly as things in heaven; that the state and condition of man on earth will then answer to the mind of God in virtue of Christ's death on the cross. But the power by which He is able to subdue all things unto Himself is, as regards our souls, already known by faith, and will be known also for our bodies by and by (Philippians 3:21). We have here, then, God's immediate answer to the proved wickedness of man, and especially of Israel, in the rejection of Christ. That answer was the gift of the Spirit, and justification from all things, that we might enter upon the enjoyment of every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. Times of refreshing for this poor

world have indeed been postponed meanwhile, yet are held in reserve, when the futility of all man's energy and forethought shall give place to the glorious results for Israel and for the earth which shall be brought in by the Second man—the Lord from heaven. Our more blessed portion is to walk by faith, not by sight. The millennial earth shall be the theater of the displayed glory of Him who has already triumphed over death and Satan; but the world as it now is gives occasion for the moral victories of faith in which we are more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where [was] a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread. And [so] it was [that], as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this [is] an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi, his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what [is] to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among my own people. And he said, What then [is] to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily, she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, [thou] man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life” (2 Kings 4:8-17).

This story of the Shunammite woman is of exceeding beauty, and sets before us in figure what the Spirit will accomplish in the heart of the nation in a future day, when it shall turn to the Lord, and the veil that is now upon their hearts shall be removed.

The husband (of whom we hear but little) appears to have been profoundly indifferent to the presence of Elisha in their immediate vicinity, and as little affected by divine things and objects as Nabal the Carmelite, who only saw in David one of the many “servants that break away nowadays every man from his master” (1 Samuel 25:10). But with this man indifference did not develop into aversion, contempt, or hostility, as it did with Nabal. Still, there is no evidence of spiritual desire being awakened, or of any such response to the grace of God as was manifested in his wife. A veritable son of Issachar, “in whose inheritance they dwelt” (Josh. 19:18), he seems to have answered fully to the prophetic blessing of that tribe pronounced by Jacob. “Issachar [is] a strong ass, crouching down between two burdens, and he saw that rest [was] good, and the land that [it was] pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute” (Genesis 49:14, 15)—a description which is undoubtedly applicable to Israel as now. Here, however insensible the responsible man may be (as now with the nation at large) we see in the deeply interesting history of his wife how much God can accomplish with but indifferent materials and environments. His ways and methods are full of instruction for us, for we have in the case before us the general characteristics of the Spirit's work in the soul as in all true cases of conversion to God. There is first Israel's awakening; then, after severe and protracted trial, a re-awakening of faith and hope towards God on the part of Israel so long unbelieving. But it is not Israel after the flesh reawakened, but “the Israel of God.” “Behold, I will gather them out of all countries whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them; and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart, and with my whole soul” (Jeremiah 32:37-41). “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do [them]. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:25-28).

God will accomplish this in His own infinite mercy by working on the hearts of His people, who will become the nucleus of the new nation. It is now brought about in the case of any Jew now believing the gospel. He is henceforth separated from earthly hopes, being made “partaker of a heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1). The apostle Peter very forcibly puts it, “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again into a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3-7).

Observe here how carefully the inspired writer avoids giving the least encouragement to those false hopes of regaining earthly blessing and worldly power, which then occupied (as even in our day) the hearts of so many. Begotten again unto a living hope, the inheritance is reserved in heaven for them and believers are kept by the power of God, not for immediate possession but to be revealed in the last time. There is a marvelous similarity in the work of God in all ages. Our love to God whom we have not seen is manifested' by our love to our brother whom we have seen. Interest in divine things is evidenced by appreciation of such as minister them to us. Faith in God finds in the need of His servants its opportunity for fruit-bearing. So will it be in the last days, as Matthew 25 shows us. There are precious fruits of faith, and evidences of life, peculiarly gratifying to the Lord's suffering and faithful servants; but how offensive when looked for or demanded as a right! There is a gracious way of proffering, as of receiving, such acts of kindness as may be rendered one to another in the fear of the Lord. Christ is the divine test, and faithfulness to Him establishes a claim upon those who belong to Him. The love of God gives its own character to both giver and receiver.

The Shunammite had rightly gauged the need and ministered to it in simplicity and delicacy, not stepping out of her place in so doing. Her husband might be indifferent to the fact that God was visiting his house in the person of Elisha, but she joyfully and heartily owned it. Nevertheless, it was not for her to act, but rather to suggest. It would have spoiled all and given occasion to the enemy had she ignored her husband in such a matter. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us “that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godlily” (Titus 2), and to this grace, as far as then revealed, she was, we may say, in her day a witness. [G. S. B.] (To be continued)

The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 8, The Ministry of

“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant, my husband, is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear Jehovah: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bond-men. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors [even] empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought [the vessels] to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel, and he said unto her [There is] not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God, and he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest” (2 Kings 4:1-7).

In striking contrast to the great public and national events of the preceding chapter, where the affairs of nations were decided, we have here the sorrows and difficulties of a bereaved family. The case is far more simple. There were no complications. The pride of man, or self-will, so often opposing the action of grace, are not seen here. There are no unbelieving questions or reflections upon God, such as, “Alas! that Jehovah hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.” With earnestness and truth the facts are made known to the prophet, who immediately interests himself in the circumstances of the poor widowed woman. He enters into her sorrows, and brings her into touch with the fullness of the grace of God. It was a pitiful tale, and it pointed, not so much to the sins of an individual as to the nation's failure, and moral bankruptcy before God. The responsible man, the head of the household –had he been living—might have hesitated to disclose the sorrowful facts; but he was dead and the woman's plain speaking simplified matters exceedingly. Things were all wrong in Israel, for God had been forsaken and His covenant broken, yet was He visiting His people in grace, and it was for faith to seize the opportunity to count upon Him in its confession of the whole sad truth without concealment (Psalm 32).

Now, wherever the distinctive testimony of the people of God is obscured, it is for faith to go back to the truth, as originally presented, of God's relationship with His people, and to look in faith to Him for blessing according to all that is implied in that relationship. Again and again, in Israel, then, was what bore witness no less to the faithfulness of God than to Israel's unfaithfulness, and whatever of individual faithfulness there might be at any time, so far from screening from suffering, it would rather expose the faithful to it. In a day of evil the righteous suffer, whilst of the wicked there may appear to be no bands in their death as “they cry not when He bindeth them.” In this case the coming of the creditor was the trouble, and God in His word had anticipated and provided for such a difficulty (Leviticus 25:39-43). Faith and obedience would have recognized in such a case the opportunity of showing grace, especially towards a poor widow. But the compassions of God are deeper and richer than even the most merciful of His people. Faith sets up its claim upon the heart of Him who has said, “Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me” (Jeremiah 49:11).

“Thou knowest thy servant did fear Jehovah” –that is just the character of faith which delights the heart of God. The Lord Jesus looked for it in the day of His presentation to Israel, but looked in vain as far as the nation was concerned. “Now when he had ended his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum, and a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself, for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; wherefore, neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth [it]. When Jesus heard these things he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Luke 7:1-9).

It is the faith that will not be refused which honors God and gets the blessing. Nevertheless, God will prove it, that others may be strengthened, and the hearts of his servant cheered, by its manifestation. “That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). Then, again, God will exercise our souls as to what He has already given. Has he taken it away? Have we lost it? If not, why not use it? After the same manner did the Lord Jesus test or prove the hearts of the twelve. “When Jesus then lifted up [his] eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?... When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered [them] together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten” (John 6:5-9, 12-13).

The disciples failed to count upon the power and goodness of the Lord Jesus, with whom they were called to walk. Whenever we are made to feel the extent of our spiritual poverty, and the lamentable bondage— “the creditor is come” —which prevails amongst the people of God, it is well for us to remember that God has a house which “wisdom hath builded.” In patriarchal times we see isolated individuals and unconnected, who were called to walk with God, but they were not builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit, as believers now are said to be since redemption. If tempted at times to disown this truth and to walk alone, as easier and more agreeable to nature, though I may be forced or drawn into a very narrow path indeed, and my fellowship he very circumscribed, yet if I have learned the truth of the church, it must affect my walk and testimony in the most practical way. “Tell me, what hast thou in the house?” may well sound in our ears as a divine challenge to-day. The woman when she went to God about her poverty little thought that all the while she had in the house that which God would use for her deliverance. She was required in faith and obedience just to make use of that which she had already with her, just as was the case with Moses. “What hast thou in thy hand?”

Now it is quite true that the fullness of grace which came by Jesus Christ has been refused, as He also who brought it has been refused likewise. “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” Yet for all that “wisdom hath builded her house,” and furnished it sumptuously, providing abundantly for the need of all within it. “When he ascended up on high he led captivity

captive, and gave gifts unto men.” The testimony of the Holy Ghost to a risen and glorified Christ at God's right hand in Acts 2; 3 was of such a character as made its way to the hearts of those who had before despised and refused it. “And the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and of one soul. Neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands, or houses, sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” (Acts 4:32-35).

The power and grace which produced these blessed results in the early days of the church's history still remain, though the same effect may not now be seen. The Holy Ghost is sovereign in His action, and according to the Lord's own word, abides with us forever since Pentecost; for so long as the assembly is here, where His power and grace are needed, so does He remain. Elisha's instructions to the distressed woman reveal the character of God's usual way of acting when Himself appealed to. He will have His own really exercised about the need, but we have to learn that our sufficiency is of God, who works according to His marvelous patience and infinite wisdom. He may revive long-forgotten truths in all their original power and freshness within our hearts, just at the moment they are really needed, or He may set us down to learn the value and application to ourselves of scriptures we had long professed to believe and know as expressive of the doctrines of Christianity. But the challenge, “What hast thou in thy house?” sets us thinking, and casts us upon that which God has already given. And is not this truth peculiarly applicable in the present-day, since God has given now in Christianity all that He ever will or can give for this poor ruined world? All is presented in the gospel, which if refused to-day will form the ground of judgment another day. Of course, in Old Testament days there was always a certain reserve, something to hope for, and a great and wonderful reserve indeed.

“And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged [a place] for the wine vat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season, he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And, again, he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again, he sent another, and him they killed: and many others, beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said amongst themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard” (Mark 12:1-8). From the standpoint of the Lord's ministry upon earth love and patience could go no farther, and therefore judgment was the only thing. But now, from the standpoint of the Christian position, a completely new and unexpected development of grace is presented, in connection with Christ in heaven and the Holy Spirit on earth. What is more needed, then, to make effectual for man's blessing that which God has already given us, and which we have in “the house” (the church), than in simple faith and obedience to bring empty vessels into the house, and shut the door? God will do the rest.

“And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full” (verse 4). It is the truth so blessedly brought out in Luke 15. The great thing was to recover the lost. The prodigal was an empty vessel, brought into the house and filled. The elder son was not an empty vessel. He was full of the pride and self-importance which refuses grace. He would not go in. But what became of the full vessels? They are set apart—consecrated. Righteousness is vindicated, the creditor is paid in full, the lawful captive is delivered, and there remains an infinite reserve of grace, which we can never exhaust. “Live thou and thy children of the rest.” A beautiful illustration surely of divine grace in the manner of its present working, and everyday application to the personal needs of God's people, and connecting itself most blessedly with the Lord's gracious consideration for us in this present scene of disorder and ruin. [G. S. B.] (To be continued)

The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 7, The Ministry of

Little indeed remained in Israel in the degenerate days of the son of Ahab upon which any godly expectation of blessing could be founded, or around which faith might linger, but the Spirit of God would make the most of such as remained. The Lord Jesus, in the hour of bitterest sorrow and disappointment, did in like manner address Himself in words of gracious encouragement to His poor, weak, trembling disciples, freely and fully acknowledging and crediting them with all that which His Father had wrought in them. “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28-30). We have already seen that, disappointing as Elijah's ministry appeared at the time, the eye of God saw with clearness what His heartbroken servant did not know (1 Kings 19:18). Although “the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin,” still vitiated the public worship of Jehovah in Israel, giving it a false and human character, it would appear that the morning and evening sacrifices had not been altogether given up by the nation (1 Kings 18:36); for in the scene on Carmel we find the divine answer connected with the evening sacrifice. Yet, in view of the fact that in Ahab's days Baal was so openly and shamelessly worshipped, we may well question whether, at that time, the public offering of these sacrifices to Jehovah had not well nigh lapsed, and so, called loudly for this striking and decisive interference on the part of Elijah as Jehovah's witness, to recall the apostate nation to the worship of the true God.

Here, in 2 Kings 3, we have also the time of the offering, and the offering effected, and again, as with the “burnt offering” on Carmel, so now with the “meal offering” here presented (type of Christ in His perfect, uncorrupted humanity, Leviticus 2; 6), we have in both cases the blessing connecting itself with the offering.

“And it came to pass in the morning, when the meal offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water. And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armor, and upward, and stood in the border. And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side red as blood. And they said, This [is] blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil! And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in [their] country. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth

left they the stones thereof: howbeit, the slingers went about and smote it" (2 Kings 3:20-25). This connection with the sacrifice is not unimportant. In some way it may be traced in all Elisha's miracles. The condition of the people did not warrant any display of power on their behalf, but God is gracious, and full of compassion. "I Jehovah change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," When man can bring nothing to God, God finds in His own loving-kindness the reasons for merciful interposition. In Judah, when the temple service was maintained according: to the ordinances of Moses and of David—such as the blowing of trumpets, the singing of the Psalms with its musical service—this was used of God for the strengthening of faith and increase of piety, and as a means of blessing to the people as a whole (see 2 Chronicles 13:10-12; 20:19, etc.).

In the circumstance before us, however, it could not be that God would formally acknowledge either Israel or Judah as His people, yet would He not set Himself against Edom and Moab. It was a mere striving of the potsherd of the earth, and Jehoshaphat should have been outside all this. Six hundred years before had these two kingdoms been brought close together in the same place. The wilderness of Edom and the desert of Zin were not far apart. They served as a border for Edom. At an earlier period of Israel's history, before their entrance into the promised land, there had been no water for the people to drink, "and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Numbers 20; 21:4). But God had the people under His charge, and He was in no difficulty. He led forth His people in triumph, supplying all their need. If Edom then showed hostility to his brother Jacob in refusing Israel a passage through his country, it is not so on this occasion. In guilty indifference to the will of God, the king of Judah is here seen in unholy alliance with Edom as well as with Israel, but God was the same and knew how to succor His people without sanctioning their iniquity.

So in our day, the outward blessings of Christianity may follow the profession of the "Christian faith," and by some may be construed into evidences of the divine approval. Doubtless the widespread profession of Christianity has been an immense boon to the world at large-it could hardly be otherwise. Eliezer (in Genesis 24) brought (to speak antitypically) the gospel message and its heavenly call to Rebecca alone, who in faith responded and left her father's house, her kindred, and her country, as Abram had done sixty-five years before. Was not her family advantaged by the visit of Abraham's servant? For did he not give "also to her brother and to her mother precious things" (ver. 53)? Nevertheless, the blessings proffered to man in the gospel invitation of "to-day if ye will hear his voice," are only appropriated, realized, and enjoyed by. believing souls, while, on the other hand, the bulk of Christendom may go on content only with the outward appearances and accompaniments of religion, so called. For, in truth, the world has entirely mistaken the divine aim and object of Christianity. God's object has been, and is, not the improvement of the world, or the enrichment of man in it, but his deliverance from it-" Who gave Himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God and our Father" (Galatians 1:4).

This point is of such importance, and has such close relation to the subject before us, that no apology is needed for illustrating it by a reference to the Apocalypse, where is seen the final sweeping away of all human plans and purposes, and the ultimate accomplishment and display of the counsels of God. In this last book of the Bible we have presented to us three mystical women. The first is in Revelation 12, where, under the symbol of "a woman clothed with the sun," etc., we have God's earthly people Israel (whose history occupies so large a part of the Old Testament) in circumstances of sorrow and travail, "of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever." There is no room for the Jewish nation in the world as it now is, so "the woman fled into the wilderness" —after giving birth to the man-child "caught up to God and his throne," who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron— "where she hath a place prepared of God," and is providentially preserved, until the time of Israel's blessing and glory comes. Then in chap. 17, "a woman sitting upon a scarlet colored beast" —the residium of religious profession after the Lord Jesus has taken His own beloved ones out of it. This woman has made herself at home in the world, and is seen arrayed in all its glory and splendor, now ripe for judgment. And lastly (21:9-27) we are shown "the bride, the Lamb's wife," the contrast in every way to the harlot of chap. 17 Heavenly both in character and position, holy and without blame, she fully satisfies the affections of Christ, and, as "the holy city Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God," she is presented as "having the glory of God."

Whatever confusion now may be in some minds as to these three representations, each will stand out in its own clearness and distinctness by and by. The earthly people, Israel, shall be in their decreed position of earthly supremacy and glory, no longer "the tail," but the head. Christendom, having lost all reality, and utterly spurious, will be destroyed by "the ten horns... and the beast" (Revelation 18:6), "for strong is the Lord God that judgeth her"; whilst all true Christians, now "espoused" will be displayed in heavenly glory as "the bride of Christ," when His church is presented to Himself, "glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." Repeating, then, what has already been observed, the scene before Elisha is one of utter confusion—on man's part, inconsistency and perplexity, but on God's part patient grace in His waiting to respond to the cry of man's need. Yet was the divine attitude in perfect consistency with all that Jehovah had revealed Himself to be. Faith was indeed wanting, but an appeal was made to Jehovah, and the answer was immediate and complete. The use which man makes of the deliverance is another thing. "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:9-13). In the gospel is that which fully meets the deep need of the heart, yet does it not set aside existing conditions and obligations. All is rapidly ripening for judgment. That blessed hope is before us. We are delivered in spirit though not yet in body. Grace is a reality, and where accepted changes everything for the believer. Elisha could thus go in and out amongst men distributing, in obedience to God, whose servant he was, the blessed fullness of that grace of which he was the witness and expression. Having done so, he goes his way. We may remark as well the order in which these four kingdoms—Edom, Moab, Judah, and Israel—are named for judgment in the prophecy of Amos (1:11; 2:1, 4, 6), as also the apparent reference therein to this very event we have been considering (see 2 Kings 3:27, Amos 2:1). Those who despise grace do but "treasure up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." [G. S. B.] (To be continued)

The Ministry of Elisha, Elisha: No. 6, The Ministry of

"And Elisha said, [As] Jehovah of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the hand of Jehovah came upon him. And he said, Thus saith Jehovah, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith Jehovah, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye sec rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is

[but] a light thing in the sight of Jehovah: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meal offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water" (2 Kings 3:14-20).

Whenever God has been graciously pleased to intervene between man and the fruits of his sinful folly, it has been at the same time necessary to maintain a testimony for truth and holiness; and, further, that whoever might be the witness for God in His grace visiting poor sinful man in the circumstances of his sorrow and wretchedness shall, in whatever time, be identified in spirit with the One who sent him. Most blessedly was this manifested in "the faithful and true witness," the Lord Jesus Christ, who was here, the Sent One, "full of grace and truth." If God in His own character were not fully revealed man's need could never be perfectly met. God must be made known as He is to those who have lost that knowledge, before we can benefit by that which He has for us. This accounts for the many occasions of seeming delay or reluctance in the ministry of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, before accomplishing the coming miracle. Not that there was any real reluctance on the part of the blessed Lord, for His grace was ever ready, but man himself, with the working of his thoughts, stood in the way of the blessing. When people came to know something of the wondrous power of the Lord's ministry, there was a desire to take advantage of it in their own interests, rather than inquire why the blessing and the Blesser were here. Still less did they care to inquire too closely into the causes of their poverty and misery, as we may see more clearly, perhaps, from the following scriptures.

"But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed [them]. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching" (Mark 6:4-6). "And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tire and Sidon, and entered into a house, and would have no man know: but he could not be hid. For a woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation, and she besought him that he would cast forth the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast [it] unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord; yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the demon is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed" (7:24-30). "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain" (32-35). "And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that, he put [his] hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly" (8:22-25). "And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit. And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him, and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away; and I spake to thy disciples, that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child; and ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things [are] possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people were running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, [Thou] dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him" (9:17-25).

Many more examples might be cited, but these instances, all to be found in that Gospel which presents the Lord Jesus as the servant Son of God, may suffice to show that the Lord never made the removal of human misery, or the satisfaction of man's need, His primary object, but the glory of God. Yet His gracious, loving heart, again and again, was "moved to compassion," and "in all their affliction he was afflicted." With us, indeed, how different it would have been! But He was the Sent One of the Father, and delighted to do His will and pleasure. His activity received a divine, not a human impulse. He would not be forced or hurried beyond or before the will of God, not even to appease His hunger. He lived by every word of God. So again we find, "Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Juda into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4:46-49). "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith he to the disciples, Let us go into Judæa again" (11:5-7).

In the activities of daily life and service amongst men here below, never did Jesus depart from the holy intimacy of His own proper relationship to the Father; and what was exhibited in divine perfection and beauty in the service and walk of Christ on earth, is here seen, in its own scanty measure, in the way in which Elisha entered upon the scene of his service and testimony to Israel, and how much depends upon the spirit we cultivate. It is easy for one with favors to bestow to become popular with men; and the preacher of grace will be acceptable in proportion as he makes light of sin, denies the judgment of it, misrepresents God, and flatters men. It was the mission of the Son of God to reveal the Father in light and love in the midst of a ruined world. Such an exhibition must and did bring Him who made it into circumstances of suffering, because "the darkness apprehended it not." He became an object of scorn and hatred to those whom He would fain have blessed.

Elisha at once takes the place, of a witness to the truth and, of a servant of Jehovah. He was not flattered by the inquiry of Jehoshaphat, nor by the coming down to him of the three kings. If a matter of urgency on their part, not so with him. To him the question was, Where was God in all this? and what about Jehovah's glory? His name had lightly, and with profanity, been brought in, but they had not sought the will of God. What had Elisha to do with Jehoram? And why had the king of Israel, in the present extremity, sought to a prophet of Jehovah? "Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." These former were, ostensibly, prophets of Jehovah. Were they not sufficient? Alas! it had been fully and openly proved that they were as much the creatures of the king his father, as the prophets of Baal were the creatures of his mother Jezebel. Satan could as well use one as the other (see 1 Kings 22). Now, in very truth, this is the position of Christendom to-day. Principles of Biblical interpretation, as dishonest as they are profane, have been applied to Scripture until such as have still, if but a modicum of, reverence for God's word are vainly searching elsewhere for a divine pronouncement worthy of the name of truth. Is

this “The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture,” or is it not?

In what a solemn way do we see, all around us, the fulfillment of scripture warnings! “Behold the days come, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find” (Amos 8:11, 12). Religious people are, to-day, exultant over the decay of faith and the advance of rationalism under false colors, who will vainly seek light once despised and rejected. How faithfully does the inspired apostle Paul, who clearly anticipated the present developments of ecclesiastical iniquity (as did also Peter and Jude), set before us the judgment in store for those who reject the present testimony of grace and falsify the truth. “For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only he who now letteth [will let] until he be taken out of the way. And then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the manifestation of his coming: [even him] whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and wonders of a lie, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish: because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12).

It is the spiritual discernment of evil principles, that hide their proper character in the “great house,” which attest the man of God now, and his well-pleasing to the Lord Jesus. Clearly and unhesitatingly did our prophet, in the scene before us, expose and denounce the hidden evil. Judgment would in due time be pronounced upon the Edomite scoffer. “The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye; return, come” (Isaiah 21:11, 12). The inconsistencies of the godly king of Judah would at another time, and in another place, call for rebuke. It is not God's way to rebuke His servants in the presence of the enemy: but the spiritual mind feels and sorrows over the moral confusion of the whole scene. The playing of the minstrel soothed the spirit of Elisha, and enabled him to rise above the depressing influence, which weighed upon his spirit. Like another, he would “stand upon the watch-tower.”

When in the heart of man confusion prevails, and the issues of life and death are involved, the soul instinctively feels and realizes that God must speak-that He alone can act to any real purpose: “My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither fruit [be] in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah God [is] my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' [feet] and he will make me to walk upon mine high places” (Habakkuk 3:17-19). When God is thus sought and appealed to, He acts in a manner worthy of Himself—the deliverance overlaps the need— “this is [but] a light thing in the sight of Jehovah,” etc.

Thus, meditating upon such displays of mercy, we feel constrained to say, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20, 21). [G. S. B.] (To be continued)

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