2 Kings - Commentaries by William Woldridge Fereday

Elijah and Elisha, Returned Shunammite, The

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Let us adopt the Revised Edition's rendering of 2 Kings 8:1, for it will help us in the understanding of the passage: "Now Elisha had spoken unto the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn, for Jehovah hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." The incident was thus earlier in time than the doings recorded in chapter 7. Whenever it was, the departure of the Shunammite from the land of Israel took place by divine command through the instrumentality of Elisha. A time of trouble was approaching: "And surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Such was Jehovah's care for the pious Shunammite that He sent her away beforehand. Is it not good to have to do with God? The emigration of this family was thus on an altogether different principle from that of Elimelech and Naomi (Ruth 1). Their move was just a matter of human expediency, and great sorrow was the result. The true line for us all is indicated in our Lord's words in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Behold the hungry One in the wilderness, possessed of power to supply His need, yet refusing to act without a word from God! If we could but wait in times of perplexity our God may be trusted not to fail us, and He will give the suited words of guidance in His own time Saul lost his kingdom through a little impatience in an emergency (1 Sam. 13:11-14).

Observe that the trouble was limited— "seven years." He who sits upon the throne will never suffer the reins of government to be seized by the enemy. His controlling hand measures everything that must needs fall upon His own, and the enemy is powerless to exceed that measure. Thus the sufferings of the elect during the great tribulation are for 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6), and Satan could not make it 1,261 were he ever so desirous. When he sought the ruin of Job he was only allowed to afflict him step by step as prescribed by God. "Times and laws" (religious institutions) may be given into his hand, but not God's people (Dan. 7:25).

When the Shunammite returned from her seven years exile she appealed to the king for the restoration of her house and land, and she obtained it really through the instrumentality of her son, the story of whose restoration to life so deeply interested the king. She is thus a picture of Israel, away from the land during the present dearth, but yet to possess all things again in virtue of the dead and risen Christ. In that happy day they will say, "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" (Isa. 9:6). It will be to them as life from the dead.

Gehazi happened to be near at the moment of the Shunammite's appeal to the king. The hand of God was in this. The man was actually relating her own story. Jehoram was just then in the humour to be entertained; thus he said to Gehazi, "Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done" (2 Ki. 8:4). He was not seeking divine instruction from this one-time servant of Jehovah, but (as we have said) entertainment. In like manner many in Christendom today, who would refuse a plain talk about the realities of eternity, would have no objection to discuss preachers and their doings. If Jehoram had sought such talk from John the Baptist, or Paul the Apostle, he would have heard such words concerning "righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come" as would have made him quiver in his shoes (Acts 24:25). But Gehazi was useless for such work now. He had been associated with the testimony of God committed to Elisha, but he was, alas! out of it, and could only dwell upon the past. For him the present was a spiritual blank. Oh, the sorrow of it, and the danger that his case suggests for us all! Our God have mercy upon us!

Money was his ruin. How very solemnly does the apostle warn us concerning this peril in 1 Timothy 6. He distinguishes between those who desire to be rich (vv. 9-11) and those who are rich (vv. 17-19). Those who desire to be rich expose themselves to fearful danger, and those who are already rich have a great responsibility resting upon them in view of the coming day.

Scripture presents to us a number of spiritual wrecks. Amongst them are the old prophet of 1 Kings 13, and Demas. We need not raise questions as to the salvation of such persons, for it is not the point before the mind of the Spirit. The point is that, through paltering with the world, they lost their testimony for God in the present scene. Any of us may do the same. In that case, how solemn will be our manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ! The Lord keep us all walking in humility before Him!