Notes on 1 Kings

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1 Kings

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1 Kings 1 - 8.

The books of First and Second Samuel show us the failure of the priesthood, and, in consequence, when a state of evident shame and dishonour overspread the face of Israel, the heart of the people desired a king, to the disparagement of the prophets that judged Israel whom the Lord had raised up in extraordinary grace. But, thereupon, the Spirit of God, even before all this, was manifest, declares in prophetic communication the immense change that was about to take place; for while it was man's sin to have desired a king, like the nations, to go at the head of Israel, it had always been the purpose of God, only — God made His own counsel to coalesce with their sin — one of those mysterious but admirably divine ways of the Lord that we find continually in scripture. Thus man has ever showed how little he is to be accounted of God has ever shown how worthy He is of all our trust. God made use of man's infidelity to Him to bring in what was not only better then, but the type of that which will be infinitely good in its own way in the day that is coming. For all this furnished the beautiful shadow of a king after God's heart. Nevertheless, this did not come in at once; for as the people were faithless towards the Lord, they did not ask the Lord to choose them a king — they preferred to choose one themselves. They chose one to their own still greater shame and hurt, and consequently, the first Book of Samuel is that which is naturally in regard to king

Saul. The second Book is, at any rate, the type, and in a certain sense the reality, as far as a pledge was concerned, of that which was spiritual. The king after God's heart is established on the throne of Israel in the person of David. This is the great subject of the second Book of Samuel, and I have made this prefatory observation in order that we may the better understand the connection of the two preceding books with those that come before us now.

It is clear that the Books of Kings are the natural consequence and successors, if I may so say, of the Books of Samuel; so much so that they are, in some copies of the scriptures, all classed as Books of Kings. But here we have David approaching his end; and the eldest of his sons that then survived — Adonijah — takes advantage of the king's infirmity for his own ambitious purpose. There was no fear of God in this. For it was well known in the house of David, and in the land of Israel, that as God chose David from the midst of his brethren, so He had been pleased also to designate Solomon for the throne of Israel. Hence, therefore, it was not only human ambition, but we learn this very serious lesson for our souls — that the indulgence of what is fleshly assumes a graver character in us than in the people of God in their measure, of old; in us still more now. It was not mere ambition in Adonijah. In one totally ignorant of the word of God and the will of Jehovah for Israel, it would have been ambition. But if we have an incomparable blessing in the word of God, we have a greatly increased responsibility, and further, sin acquires a new character. The sin of Adonijah was not merely therefore ambition; not merely, even, rebellion against the king, against David; it was

rebellion against Jehovah. It was a direct act of setting himself in contradiction of the declared and revealed purpose of God.

Now it is always of the greatest importance that we should bear this in mind, because we are so apt to look at things merely as they lie on the surface. When, for instance, Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of their sad sin in the church of God, how does the apostle Peter treat it? Not merely as a lie. They had lied to God. Why was this? Why was there in that lie something altogether beyond an ordinary lie, bad as a lie always is in a Christian; indeed, in any one? But why was it so especially and emphatically a lying to God? Because Peter, at any rate, believed that God was there; that it was not merely therefore the general moral feeling against a person saying what was false and deceiving another, nay, not merely that it was against God's will and word, but it was an affront done in the very presence of God. And consequently, as the sense of the presence of God was so fresh and strong in the minds of all of them — in, Peter above all — he, in the power of that Spirit who manifested God's presence, pronounced the judgment — no doubt according to God's guidance — on the sin; and Ananias at first, his wife shortly after, breathed their last; a sin manifestly unto death. So that in the very earliest days of the church of God, we may say, the solemn truth had this voucher before them all, that God will not tolerate sin in that which bears the name of the Lord Jesus upon the earth. The very object of the church of God is to be an expression of the judgment of sin. We begin with that; we begin with Christ our Passover sacrificed for us; consequently, the lump must be a new one, as ye are unleavened — as ye

rare unleavened — not that ye may be unleavened, but ye are unleavened, and, therefore, the old leaven is to be purged out. Whatever might be the natural tendency, whatever might be the special wickedness (for what will not Satan attempt?) just because God has wrought in the might of His own grace, this furnishes further occasion to the devil. He takes advantage of the goodness of God to bring a fresh slight upon Him and to dishonour Him the more because of the greatness of His love. Accordingly, therefore, God showed on this very occasion, by His servant, His deep resentment of the dishonour that was done Him, and, as the consequence, the judgment of the man and his wife that had been guilty of this great offence.

So it was upon this occasion. Adonijah had presumed upon his father's old age and infirmities, for he was stricken in years, and covered with clothes, but even thus found little comfort from it. And Adonijah accordingly at once takes his measures; but then there is more than this. There is another lesson that we have to gather from it; it is written for our instruction. His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, "Why hast thou done so?" A good man, a man after God's own heart, a great man, too, for such, surely, was David; one of those rare men that have ever appeared in this earth, not only rare as a man, but remarkably blest of God and honoured too. For who has furnished, as he has done, that which has filled the heart and expressed the feelings of saints of God from that day to this? I do not say that there was not the constant, inevitable (as far as man is concerned) blot. For indeed there was; not always of the same kind, but alas! we see in him, as we see too commonly, that where there was most

conspicuous power and blessing and honour, there might be a most shameful evil against the name of the Lord. There is no preserving in any honour that God puts upon us; there is no possible way for any soul to be kept from sin against the Lord, except by his self-judgment and dependence; and therefore even, the more exalted a man is, the more liable is he to fall. There is no greater mistake, therefore, than to suppose that the signal honour of David, or the grace that had wrought in David, was any preserving power. Not so; rather the contrary. Where the eye is taken away from the Lord — and this was exactly the case with David — we are all liable to it. There is no security, I do not say as to eventual recovery and as to the preservative grace of the Lord in the end, but there is no security against dishonouring the Lord by the way, save in continually looking to Him.

Now David had failed greatly at home as well as abroad on particular occasions. Alas! at home in this very respect; he had a tender and a soft heart. He was one that greatly enjoyed the grace of God towards his own soul; he felt the need of it, but, instead of making him careful for the Lord, grace is very apt, if we are not watchful, to be severed from truth. In Christ they were perfectly combined; in the Christian they should be. It is what God looks for, expects from us. In David there was a failure, and there was a failure at home — very often a critical place for any of us. It was so, at any rate, with king David. This son of his seems to have been a special favourite — as bad a thing for the son as for the father. His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, “Why hast thou done so?” And if his father had not displeased him he must reap the bitter fruit; he must be

displeased himself. The son would certainly displease the father if the father had not displeased the son. There was no greater failure in jealous care and in loving care, too; for, after all, to have been displeased for his good, for his reproof, would have been a deeper love — not so showy, not so apparently gracious. But we must distinguish between grace and graciousness. There was a deal of graciousness in David in all this. I do not think there was much grace, for it is all a mistake to suppose that grace is not watchful. It was just the want of grace. It was a father's kindness, a father's tenderness, but it was not grace. Had there been grace there would have been truth. Real grace always maintains the truth. The truth was not maintained in the relationship of David towards his son Adonijah. Adonijah lives therefore to be the shame and grief of his father. This was not merely to manifest his father's fault before all Israel, to manifest his father's failure before all the saints, all the people of God of all times, but, beloved brethren, for our profit, if we are wise.

Now it takes then a public shape. The son — the failure at least (to speak of it by the mildest name) — the failure that had long gone on at home bursts out abroad. Adonijah therefore confers with a suitable person. He confers with Joab, the man that had constantly used David for his own purpose. Joab reckoned now that David would be of very little use to him any longer. The opportunity seemed fair; he embraced it. Policy is always ruinous work in the end, at any rate among God's people. There was no faith in Joab. He was a wise man after the flesh; he was an extremely political individual. Joab was a person who saw directly what could turn to his own profit, what offered an opportunity for his

talents, for he was a man of great ability; and Joab now made up his mind. Adonijah was the man for him, so that they suited each other. Joab was remarkably adapted to Adonijah's object, and at the same time Adonijah suited Joab's policy. Had there been faith Joab had resisted Adonijah far more sternly than he once did David. This was the man that reproved David's numbering the house of Israel, for a man that has not faith is sharp enough to see the failure even of a man of faith when he steps out of his own proper line. Joab well knew that the day was when David single-handed fought the battle of Israel. He, after the Lord's most signal exaltation and blessing, he to be guilty of that which would have been poor work in any man of Israel, but most of all in David! he to be merely numbering the hosts of Israel as if they were the strength of the people, and not the Lord God! Therefore it was that Joab considered that the danger was too great for the result. He would not have minded the sin; he was afraid of the punishment, he was afraid of what it would involve. He had a sort of instinctive sense that the thing was wrong; that it was peculiarly wrong in David. He warned him therefore as we know. David would not be warned, and he fell into the snare completely.

But now the same man that could warn David could not warn himself. What lessons! beloved friends, at every turn. How wholesome for our souls! Of what importance it is that we should go on simply in the path of faith.

Joab, then, confers with Adonijah. The priest, too, is found necessary as well as the commander-in-chief, and they follow Adonijah and help him. "But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada," who was the true servant of the king's purposes, not Joab — Joab, had the name, the title, but Benaiah was the man that did

the real work — “Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet,” the man that was the interpreter of the mind of God — these, as well as “Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which belonged to David, were not with Adonijah.” Adonijah might have his feast and invite all his brethren the king’s sons! For this is another thing too that we have to observe. A departure from the mind of God is always apt to be successful at first. Every step of unfaithfulness has a great result in the world where there is ability, where there is the marshalling of all that would act upon the mind, for no doubt this was well calculated. Joab would influence a certain set. Abiathar the priest would have his religious name and reputation. And above all there were the king’s sons — all of them save Solomon, and “all the men of Judah,” as it is said, “the king’s servants.” It was a widespread, and it seemed, a prudently concocted rebellion. “But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.” And there is just where faith can rest — on God’s word. That was what gave the weight to Solomon; for there was nothing very particular known as to Solomon at this time, if indeed we leave God out. Yet that is really the root of all his blessing; for there is no vital blessing except where the call of God is. It matters not where his choice lies, the blessing of God is found, and the power of God too, with His election, and only there. And this was the very thing that was left out. No, it was this that irritated Adonijah; for naturally he had superior claims if the flesh was the rule and not God. The flesh may govern for a while in the world, but God must rule among God’s people.

This then becomes known. The mother of Solomon goes to the aged king after conferring with the prophet; and

there she showed that whatever might be her weakness her heart was right. She went to the one who, above all, could give the mind of God — to Nathan — the one that had himself reproved the king in the midst of his power, the one that had courage to speak for God whatever the consequence. She goes to Nathan. And allow me to say, beloved friends, as a matter of practical profit, we always show where our heart is by our confidence. Supposing a man is going wrong in his will. He is sure to take advice just in the very quarter where he ought not. He looks for advice where there will be weakness if he cannot count upon positive sanction — where at any rate there will be the feeblest protest, if not a measure of encouragement; for weakness is apt to lean on weakness. Whereas, where there is a single eye we are indeed conscious of our weakness, and ought to be; but if there is a single eye we want the will of God. “He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Whatever is not the will of God perishes, and ought to perish, for what are we sanctified for if it be not to do the will of God? It was the very character of Christ; it was what all His life consisted of. You might sum it up in this one word, He came to do God’s will. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” There is no one thing that more unvaryingly describes Christ than that very thing. Not miracles; He did not always do miracles. He did miracles in a comparatively small compass of His life. He was not always working atonement. No greater mistake, and no more injury done to the atonement itself, than to confound it with what is not atoning. He was not always suffering either, still less was He suffering in the same way, even when He did suffer. But He was always doing the will of God.

And this is what we are sanctified to, not merely to obey, but to obey as Christ obeyed. For this is the meaning of "sanctified,'' where it says that we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the spirit unto obedience." Yes, but it is the "obedience," as well as the "sprinkling of the blood," of Jesus Christ. It is not the obedience of a Jew; it is not the obedience of the law. It is the obedience of Jesus Christ. Not but what this does accomplish the righteousness of the law. For there is no man that so thoroughly loves God and loves his neighbour as the man that obeys in the same spirit as our blessed Lord. And this is what we are all called to as Christians. Those that have merely the law before them as a thing to obey, do not really meet the righteousness of the law. Those that have Christ do, as it is said — "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." You observe the language is exceedingly strong. He does not merely say, "fulfilled by us," but, "fulfilled in us." "Fulfilled in us" shows the reality of it; the intrinsic character of the fulfilment of the law in its great righteous character and requirement. And so it is alone fulfilled in Christ, or the Christian, as it was, in a measure, by those who were looking to Christ in the days before.

Well then, Bathsheba showed her own confidence in the will of God — her faith in short — by coming to Nathan. She went to the right quarter. She told him of the conspiracy of Adonijah and his party, and she goes to the presence of the king. Nathan followed. The consequence was, the king shows that, however aged, he was perfectly alive to the solemnity of the occasion. He saw and judged the crisis that was coming, and the only

effect of Adonijah's conspiracy was, not to hinder, but, to forward Solomon to the throne of Israel. Had there not been the conspiracy, Solomon would have waited, we can hardly doubt, for the death of the king, but the result was just simply to secure it and to secure it at once. So it is that if we are only calm, God always accomplishes His purpose. Who would have thought that the way for Joseph to be exalted — so that his father and mother and his brethren should bow down to a thing that at first rather irritated Jacob, much as he loved his son, and which irritated still more his brethren — who would have thought that the way in which this was to be accomplished was by the wickedness of his brethren — either wanting to kill him, or even the most mild of them to sell him? But so it was. The pathway of sin, alas! which is so natural to sinners, is the very thing that God employs for the accomplishment of His purpose. This does not make the sin less, but it certainly exalts God the more. And there is the blessedness, beloved friends, of reading, and of growing in the knowledge of God as it is shown in the precious word, because we are growing in our acquaintance and intimacy with Him with whom we shall be for ever. And it is our privilege to have this acquaintance, and to cultivate it, and to enjoy it now. Hence, God has given us this word.

But now a word upon the great object of the Spirit of God in this book generally, and more particularly what has come before us. For this is particularly what I desire, not merely to draw your attention to great moral lessons, which would detain us too much with the detail of the chapters, but to give simply a wide and general sketch which you may fill up in your own reading of this book — I trust with some moral suggestions to profit and

help. My purpose now is to gather the great object of the Spirit of God — that which is not so easily seen and laid hold of by souls, unless someone shows it; but that which if true you will prove to be true, and which you will enjoy so much the more, the more simply you receive it. But it is the word of God that will either confirm wherever one is true, or set aside wherever there is a mistake.

I say then that the grand point here is the establishment of the son of David, not merely man's kingdom set up in Saul and God's kingdom set up in king David, but now it is the son of David. And inasmuch as there were many sons this was the question. The devil was quite willing to make use of a son of David against the son of David. This was precisely the question now, and God was pleased to make use of the wickedness of those that insulted the king by practically treating him as a dead man while he was still alive. The hurry and haste of Adonijah only the more confirmed the title of Solomon. We need never trouble ourselves with our schemes for the accomplishment of God's plans. All man's efforts are in vain. God has His own way, and very often through man's sin. Do you suppose that if Joseph had been out of the prison he could have come to be the chief man in Egypt so quickly as by the prison? That was not man's way to raise him to be the prime minister of the king of Egypt. But there was no way, I will not say so sure, but there was no way so straight. It looked no doubt very far, indeed rather a turning his back upon the throne, to go into the dungeon, but in point of fact it was not only the way of God but, after all, it was the speediest way of all. The story as given in the word of God will explain without further remark from me.

Just the same now. Adonijah no doubt was interfering, but then it seemed as if he had a claim. It only affirmed the superior claim of God. And this was a grand point to establish at the beginning of the kingdom of Israel — that it was not merely, as in ordinary cases, a king in God's providence. It was not, on the other hand, a thing that had to do with God's people as such; but the remarkable character of the throne in Israel was that it was a king by God's election — the only king that, in the full force of the word, was so. Nebuchadnezzar no doubt was by God's providence, but there was more than providence in the case of the throne of Israel. And for this simple reason. The throne of Israel was in a very true and real sense the throne of Jehovah. And it is the only throne in this world that ever was the throne of Jehovah. This is the express statement of the word of God, as any one can see, but for this reason it has a character of importance that no kingdom ever had — I do not say will have — for what was done then is only the shadow of that which is going to be done.

And this is of great moment, beloved friends, for us to be clear about, for we are apt to be taken up by our own special blessings; yet the knowledge of the church of God ought not to hinder our interest in the kingdom of God, nor should the shape that the kingdom of God takes now at all obliterate that which God has given in the kingdom of old. It is not a proof of great faith to be only occupied with what concerns ourselves, but rather of little faith. I grant you that people who do not, first of all, and as the great lesson to learn, seek to know their own place are mere theorists, but when we have found our place in Christ — when we have got our need supplied, our relationship defined, ourselves in the

enjoyment of what grace has brought us into — what is the great practical object of God? Free for all He has to tell us, and free for all He bids us do, it is no longer a question of what touches ourselves. If so, then we shall enjoy each thing in the word of God because it is what interests God; it is what concerns Him; and there is no one thing which ought to be so dear to us now as that God means to have a kingdom — not merely a kingdom spiritually enjoyed as now; for “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink”; it is not eating and drinking, “but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” All that no doubt is spiritually enjoyed, and into that call we are brought now. We see that kingdom; we enter that kingdom now. We are in the kingdom of God now in that sense.

It is called also “the kingdom of heaven,” because He who is the King of it is not on the earth, but rejected and is exalted in heaven. Consequently “the kingdom of God” is also “the kingdom of heaven”; and we are now in the form of it which is called “the mystery of the kingdom of God.” But then it is not always to be a mystery. It is going to be manifested; it is going to be a place where God will tolerate no evil, where self-will will be manifestly judged, where righteousness will cover the earth, where there will be the manifest blessing of God, all produced by His own power here below, when the King Himself will be exalted over the earth, and very particularly over this portion of it — the land of the people of Israel. Any one familiar with the scripture must know that the land is a part of the deed, if I may so say — is part of that great charter which secures the kingdom; not merely the people but the land. The land and the people, I repeat, are both in the charter. Well

then that will be when the Lord Jesus is no longer in. heaven, but comes again and takes the kingdom.

But perhaps you say, “How does that concern us?” And I would answer that by another question. If God has revealed it, is it not for us? Never confound these two things. It is not merely that God has revealed what is about us. He has given us a great deal that is not about us, but all that God has revealed is given to us. We ought to enjoy all the word of God, and it is a failure in faith where we do not. And further, we shall find the want of it — we shall miss the blessing of it when we least expect it. The way to be truly strong in the day of difficulty is not to be collecting our arms when the enemy has come, but it is to be well armed before he appears. I grant you that it is only dependence upon God that after all can be strength, but I speak now as far as armour is concerned, and I repeat, it is too late in the day of battle to be looking after our arms. We ought to prepare, beforehand.

The kingdom then is of very great moment, and particularly so. For if we do not understand the nature of the kingdom we shall be exposed to those that confound it with the church. There is no more common error at this present time than to make out that the kingdom and the church are the same. Allow me to tell you that that is one of the great roots of popery. The papists think that the kingdom and the church are the same, and their great ground of assumption is that very identification for the simple reason that the kingdom supposes power applied to compel subjection. Hence, therefore, they ground upon that their title to put down kings, because what are the kings of the earth compared to those that have got a heavenly kingdom? They use, therefore, the

title of the heavenly kingdom to put down earthly kings and to make a priest a far more important person really than the earthly king. Hence, again, their vain dream is founded upon this great confusion. Well, but you will find the same thing among most Protestants. I will just give you one or two examples to show you how very prevalent this delusion is, and how very important it is that we should distinguish in this matter.

Take a very respectable set of persons in Protestantism — the Presbyterians. Well now the whole of their system is founded upon Christ being the King — not Christ being the Head of the church, but Christ being King. That was the battle cry of the old covenanters, and that was the great cry at the time that the Free Church was established. It was that Christ was the King — that the crown of England was using its title against the rights of Christ. In the case about which there was so much talk some years ago, and to which I need not refer more particularly, this was the great thought. It was Christ's title of King in the church that was disputed. So you will find in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is their grand standard of doctrine. In short, they always go upon the ground of Christ being King of the church.

So again with the Independents — just the same thing. When they managed to get the upper hand in England for a time they made very small scruple of sending the king to the block because they considered him to be the enemy of the King of the church — that Christ was the King, and not King Charles; that King Charles had behaved very badly and deserved to suffer, and so on; and they were the asserters of the rights of Christ the King.

Well now there was a grand fundamental error made by all of them. Thus Protestants are just as guilty in another way as the Romanists, for although they do not use the title of Christ to exalt themselves against the powers that be, habitually they do use it when the powers that be fail (as they consider) to behave themselves quite right. Then they think they are perfectly entitled to call them to account, and, if necessary, to put them down, or even send them to the block. Now all this you see is a complete inversion of the right relationship of a Christian man to the powers of the world, and all founded upon the very plausible idea that whether you call Him Head of the church or call Him King of the church, it is all one and the same thing. They say that it is only "hair-splitting brethren" that see anything different; that it is only persons who continually put themselves disagreeably forward and tell people that they do not understand the scriptures; that it is only persons that have that rather quarrelsome, disagreeable style of convicting persons of not knowing the word of God.

Now, beloved friends, I say that however disagreeable it may be to be proved guilty of not knowing the word of God, this is the very thing that we do affirm; this is the very thing that we do assert now, that this is a subject of the greatest possible moment, that is, that our true relationship to Christ is not King of the church — that He is never so treated — nay, that He is not even called "King of saints" except in a passage in the Revelation which every scholar knows to be a mistaken translation, the true meaning in that case being, "King of nations," and not "King of saints," or King of the church at all. In short, there is no such thought, and the fact is very

important. It is no mere idea, and it is no litigious objection to people's dogmas. It is a vital point, not for salvation, but for the true place of the church — the true relationship of the church — and you must remember our duties always depend upon our relationships. If I am wrong about my relationship, I am certain to be wrong about my duty. I am certain to make a duty of what is wrong, and that is exactly what the effect was to one or other of the different classes that I have referred to. That is what they have done. I need not repeat it, but I say that the opposite of the relationship is a fatal thing. The way it works is this. If my relationship to Christ is that of a member of the body to the head, my relationship is of the most intimate kind; my relationship is of the closest nature, and the Head loves me as He loves Himself, for no man ever yet hated his own flesh. Such is the relationship of Christ to the church. It is so intimate that you can have no person between you and the Head — none whatever. You see all depends upon it. The principle of the clergy depends upon it, because if that is the relationship the clergy are at an end. There is no such thing; it is only an imaginary class of beings as far as the truth is concerned. That is, they have no real title in the word of God. There is no such being in the word of God. There is no such position at all. It is only a thing that has been conjured up by persons who do not know the relationship of the church of God to the Head. So exactly that of which I am speaking now — the relationship of the members to the Head — excludes all dealing of the church with the world. The world is nothing to the church. The church is a thing separate from the world — not controlling the world — not punishing the world, not putting the world under force to compel it to render unwilling subjection. All this is a

total confusion between the kingdom and the church — the kingdom as it will be by and by with this only difference, that then, as we know, the obedience will be real except only in a certain set who afterwards become rebellious and are so judged and punished.

Now all this then I maintain, beloved friends, is of a very practical nature, because the reason why so many saints are troubled in their souls among Presbyterians and Dissenters generally is this very thing. If I am only in the relationship of one of a people who have a king, well there is a long distance between the king and the people. No wonder I am not very intimate with the king. No wonder I am not on very happy terms with the king. I ought not to expect to be. My business as one of the people is to remain in a lowly outside place altogether, feeling indeed how poor my subjection is; but as to pretence to draw near the king — to go continually into his presence — it would be a very unbecoming thing in a subject to dare to do such a thing. Thus you destroy the very vitals of Christianity by this doctrine. It is not only that I speak now of great public errors, but I say that you destroy practical Christianity every day and every hour, and I hold, therefore, that this very mistake now of confounding the kingdom and the church is one of the most fatal in its consequences, not for sinners as a question of looking to Christ to be saved, but for Christians as a question of enjoying their own proper relationship, and of walking accordingly. Whereas if you know your place as brought into the church of God — the body of Christ — then there can be no intimacy more complete; there can be no oneness more absolute. You are put, therefore, as a part of Himself before God, and instead of its being too high or presumptuous, or

anything of the kind, on the contrary, it is merely faith in the truth — it is merely appreciation of the grace that He has shown you; for it would be perfect nonsense for the body not to share the blessing of the Head; it could not be, and therefore you must deny the fact — you must deny the relationship — not to enjoy this blessedness which you have in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God.

But then there is another thing that goes along with it — absolute separation from the world; but I do not go farther on this subject. I just touch upon it to show that whether it is the soul's oneness, or whether it is the separateness of the church from the world, all depends for its power upon appreciating that, besides being spiritual in the kingdom, we are really and truly and fully, every one of us, members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, and that these relationships, instead of being the same, are wholly distinct, and that, in point of fact, although we are in a certain sense in the kingdom, we are never said to be a kingdom. We are never said; in that sense, to be the sphere except in a mere figurative way. We are said to be kings, not subjects. We are subject, of course. When use the term "kingdom," I mean in the sense of subjects. Subject we are, and I admit that the subjection ought to be more complete and absolute than even that of mere subjects of a king; but the character of the obedience of a subject is distance. The character of the body in subjection is nearness, and this is essential to Christianity.

And now in this Book of Kings, as we shall see, you never get the church. You never have the body of Christ. You have only the relationship of the kingdom — a very weighty and important thing, and, indeed, very strongly

and practically important for us as showing us the distinctness of those new relationships into which we are brought. But the grand point, you observe, even in the kingdom, was this — to maintain God's choice, God's will, as the foundation of all action. It was this that led king David, for I do not suppose, and it is never said, that king David made such a pet of, or made so much of, Solomon as he did of Adonijah. We are not told that so it was with all his other children. Adonijah evidently was the spoilt boy, and Adonijah was the one in the family that the father never could bear to displease, and, consequently, the trouble came in by him; it could not be otherwise; it was right that it should be. It is according to God's government that whatever man sows he must reap. So it must be if he sows to the flesh, and so he had done. Of the flesh he reaps corruption. This came to pass now, but, on the other hand, how marvelous the grace! What a recovery is that of God! Think of David now. Think of Bathsheba now. Think of Solomon now. When one remembers who and what Bathsheba had been, of whom Solomon had been born, how wondrous the grace of God, and what a comfort, beloved friends, for anyone that has to look back bitterly upon what was most humiliating — most painful! How the grace of God not only triumphs, but makes us more than conquerors through Him that loves us. So we see it even in the kingdom.

Well, the thing is now established, and the very effort to destroy it brings out, as I have already said, the speedy establishment of the will of God. Solomon is caused to ride upon the king's mule. The trumpet is sounded. The real men that had fought the battles of the kingdom and that had guided the counsels of the king, and the king

himself above all, put their seal upon this great transaction, and Solomon is fairly seated as the king on the throne of Jehovah in Israel. Such then is the introduction of this book.

In the second chapter we have David's death, and the charge that was given before he died to king Solomon to judge righteously, for David evidently feels that, for his own word's sake, he had spared more than one wicked man. This lay upon his conscience. He could not but deliver it over to king Solomon. It is wrong to call this vindictiveness; there was no vindictiveness in it whatever. It was really a burden upon the king's mind. It was not because of their personal opposition to himself, but that it was so grave a sin against Jehovah's anointed was what filled the king's heart. He tells it to his successor Solomon, and, accordingly, the day comes when these sins rise up and call for judgment, but all in God's time. There was no hurry. Adonijah, however, is the first to bring on his judgment upon him. The king had treated him kindly, had pardoned his offence and rebellion; but now he asks for a request which inevitably suggests the idea of a second and subtle effort after the kingdom. He sought the one that had been the youthful companion of the aged king. He sought — and this, too, through Bathsheba — "Adonijah, the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on men that I should reign; howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the Lord. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny

me not. And she said unto him, Say on. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king (for he will not say thee nay) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife."

It did not look much in appearance, but Solomon was wise. Solomon detected the unjudged ambition and rebellion of Adonijah's heart, and so, then, although it was Bathsheba his mother who was in question, he judges. She presented what she called a small petition. That is often done when there is something great behind, though not always known, for Bathsheba, on this occasion, was but the instrument of one who did not seek something small, but the greatest place in the kingdom, and Abishag, accordingly, is the request. "And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother. And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother, even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. Then king Solomon sware by Jehovah, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. Now therefore, as Jehovah liveth, which hath established me" — you observe how simple and how real is the sense in the king's mind that it was of Jehovah's doing, and, so long as this was held fast, Solomon was strong as well as wise; but, says he, "as Jehovah liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he fell upon him that he died."

Thus we see that although Solomon was not the man of blood that David was, and was not the conquering king

of Israel, he was a type of the Lord Jesus when He goes forth as a man of war, which He surely will, and when He executes vengeance upon His adversaries, when He will bring them before Him and have them slain before Him, as He says in the parable. He is the type of the execution of righteous vengeance. There will be great examples made — not merely the awful carnage of the day of Edom, but there will be also the tremendous judgment that will cast even into eternal fire — that punishment which is prepared for the devil and his angels; that is, there will be what far more than fills up the picture, for, indeed, the anti-type is much greater than the type. Nor is it confined to Adonijah, when Solomon further acts by thrusting out Abiathar and accomplishes the word of the Lord that was given to Eli, for there it was that the wrong family — not Phineas, but the other line that had usurped the place of Phineas — crept into the high priesthood, now restored according to the word of the Lord. The priesthood in the house of Phineas was to be an everlasting priesthood. All was in confusion for a considerable time. Solomon now is acting righteously, and is ruling in equity according to his measure. Further, Joab at once feels the treatment. He sees that the hand of righteous power is stretched out, and his conscience smites him. He pronounces his own judgment when he turns away and flees to the tabernacle of Jehovah, and vainly lays hold on the horns of the altar. It was told king Solomon, but he simply bids Benaiah execute judgment upon him. Nor this only. The story of Shimei comes before us, and as Joab suffered the due reward of his deeds, Shimei broke a decided fresh lease, if I may so say, which the king gave him. He violated the terms of it, and came under judgment by his own manifest transgression. Thus, righteous judgment

executed by the king on the throne of David is the evident intimation of this second chapter.

In 1 Kings 3 we have another scene. Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt. Alas! one cannot say that the righteousness in this is maintained; but how wonderful that God should make a thing that was wrong in itself to be a type of what is perfectly good in Him, for, as we know, there is no way in which the Lord has manifested His grace so much as in His dealings with the Gentiles. However, we cannot say that this was according to the mind of God for a king of Israel. “He took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of Jehovah.” And I do not think, beloved friends, that that order is without its teaching. It was not until he had built Jehovah’s house and his own. He was thinking of his own first. No wonder, therefore, that he was not so particular about Pharaoh’s daughter. We are never right when the Lord’s house is not before our own. “Only the people sacrificed” — for this, alas! accompanied it too. “Like king like people.” “Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of Jehovah, until those days.”

Now, I do not mean to say that that had the same flagrant character that it had afterwards. We must always remember that it was where Jehovah had placed His name that they were there, and there only, to sacrifice to the Lord. But that was not yet fully, or, at any rate, publicly established; it was about to be. There was to be the house of Jehovah. This would be the public witness of that great truth before all Israel; but that house was not yet built. Therefore, although it might have been a failure, still it was a failure for which the

Lord showed His tender mercy and compassion to His people until His own power had established the visible memorials of His worship; and then to depart to the high places became a matter that at once drew down the judgment of the Lord. Now here is an important thing to consider, because it looks plausible in an after day to say, “Well, here you observe people sacrificing in the high places without any condemnation; and, therefore, evidently the Lord had pity for His people at this time, and did not treat it at all in the same way as afterwards.” Thus the wicked heart turns the mercy of God — His forbearance in a day of difficulty and of trial — into an excuse for sin, when there is no excuse possible. So it is that men habitually divorce the word of God from God’s object. The king, it is said, “loved Jehovah, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.” His father had not done so. “And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.”

We have noticed elsewhere, I am sure, most of us, how remarkably David showed his sense of what was due to God, because he is found before the ark. The ark was what attracted. This was the more remarkable, because the ark is not at all the public link with God like the great altar. The great altar was in the court; the great altar was before every eye; the great altar was the place where offerings were. The ark was, comparatively, a little thing, and it was unseen. It was purposely behind the curtain veils. It was a matter, simply and purely, for faith, as far as that could be for an Israelite. It was his confidence that there was where Jehovah’s glory was

most of all concerned. That was what drew king David. Not so much king Solomon — not so characteristically. We are told this particularly in contrast with his father. This you observe in the chapter where the tendencies to departure first begin to be perceived. Affinity with Pharaoh's daughter is one; sacrifice at the high places is another.

With his father it was not so. In Gibeon, however, Jehovah appeared. And how great the grace of God — that although it is here put in contrast with his father's deeper and higher faith — in Gibeon Jehovah appears! What a God was He! He appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and asked what He was to give him — nay, told him to ask — and Solomon answers with great beauty to the call of the Lord, for he asks what would enable him to govern His people rightly. He asks neither length of days, nor wealth, nor honour; but wisdom, and wisdom that he might govern Israel; and the God that gave him this wisdom, more than to any man that ever reigned, failed not in any other thing, for, as we know, there was none outwardly so blest as the king, none outwardly so renowned as this very king Solomon. I do not say that there was not a very deep and painful departure, as indeed the spirit that overlooked the ark and that went to the high places, must have its fruit in the latter end. For, beloved friends, the failure that is found at the beginning of our Christian career — to apply it now to our circumstances — does not fail to show itself still more as time passes over, unless it be thoroughly judged and departed from. A little seed of evil bears no small crop. I speak now of the seed as buried. The seed that is sown, not merely that exists, but

what is allowed and covered up will another day rise up and bear bitter fruit.

So it was with Solomon, and although this does not appear for a time, it does not fail to appear afterwards. But in the same chapter we have a striking proof of his heart carrying the stamp of God's power along with it in the case of the two women who claimed the living child. I need not dwell upon it. He perfectly understood the heart of man; David entered into the heart of God. There was the difference. Solomon understood the heart of man well — no man better; no man so well; and God has employed him as the vessel of the deepest human wisdom that even the word of God contains. I call it human, because it is about human affairs. It is about the heart; it is about the things in the earth; but still, it is divinely given wisdom on human topics. This was just as well suited for king Solomon, as the Book of Psalms that lets the heart of the saint into the understanding of the heart of God (according, of course, to a Jewish measure) was suited to David. That is the difference. The man after God's heart was just the one to write the Book of Psalms; the man that so well knew the heart of men and women was just the person to judge in this case between the two contending mothers, as they pretend to be.

Here then Solomon was king over all Israel, and, accordingly, the honour and glory and administration of his kingdom come before us in 1 Kings 4, as well as his great wisdom, wealth, and glory.

In 1 Kings 5 we see the action, not by affinity, but by alliance, with the Gentiles, and how they become the servant of his purposes; nay, we can say even God's purposes for the earth, as far as Solomon was the

servant of them. This is given in a very interesting manner in this fifth chapter.

In 1 Kings 6 we see the fruit. The temple of Jehovah is built — the temple for His praise and glory, and this is described with great care in that chapter. I shall not dwell upon the details of it at this present time. They would rather take me away from the great purpose of giving the sketch that I propose.

In 1 Kings 7 we have the house. “He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon.” We have the difference between what was connected with Solomon in contrast with that which was for Jehovah; and we find one remarkable fact, too, that long as he was upon Jehovah’s house, he spent nearly twice as long time upon his own. It is quite evident, therefore, what Solomon was coming to. It might be slow, but the fruit was yet to appear — bitter fruit of self. Further, we find that Solomon assembles all the elders of Israel, and the heads of the tribes, and the temple is consecrated. And here we have what is incomparably better and deeper than all — the manifest accompanying proof of God’s presence. It was not merely that Jehovah’s throne was filled by a man — by king Solomon — His throne upon the earth, as He deigns to call it, but Jehovah took a dwelling-place. Jehovah deigned to come down in a manifest way to dwell in the house that Solomon built. There was no greater act now known in Israel, and this is brought before us in a deeply interesting manner. The priests brought in the one great object that was unchanged. In all the other vessels there was, no doubt, the old type of the tabernacle somewhat changed and enlarged for the temple. The ark was the same. How beautiful when we think of One who is emphatically the same yesterday,

today, and for ever, and there was no one thing that more represented Him than the ark. The ark was brought in and the staves were drawn out, and there was nothing in the ark, now, save the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb when Jehovah made the covenant with the children of Israel. In short, what was so strikingly found in the ark before is now absent. We see nothing now of that which had been so strikingly the comfort of the people of God in the wilderness. The law, and the law alone, remained. It was not that which was meant for maintaining them in grace through the wilderness. The reason is plain. What was now manifested was the outward kingdom — what will be when Satan is bound — when the Lord reigns, when the power of evil is checked. But if there is not an emblem of grace any longer found in the ark, there is the expression of the authority of God, because the kingdom will be precisely that. The presence, therefore — the combined presence of the tables of stone in the ark — is just as striking as the absence of the emblems of grace and priesthood which are now, as you know, the great force of preserving the people and bringing them through the wilderness. Aaron’s rod that budded was just as strikingly suited for the ark in the wilderness as only the law was suited for the ark in the land and in the temple — the house of Jehovah.

But then Solomon breathed a most striking prayer to God suitable to the new circumstances of the king, and this fills the rest of the chapter.

One thing, however, I must say a word upon. Even he puts it entirely on a conditional ground. He does not fall back upon unconditional grace. He falls back simply upon government. I do not doubt that this was all

according to God. It would have been presumptuous, and, indeed, it would have been beyond his measure, to have pleaded unconditional grace. This is only done fully when Christ Himself is seen. When we know Christ and have Christ, we dare not ask any other ground than unconditional grace for our souls. For our walk we must own and bow to the righteous government of the Lord; but for our souls for eternity we dare not have any other foundation than the absolute, sovereign, unconditional grace of God.

Now Solomon has, no thought of this. It is governmental dealings. It is conditional upon subjection, and accordingly, this is carried out throughout the chapter. But the end of it all is this — that the king is seen. And here is another point that I may draw attention to — the king is seen in a most interesting position: he offered sacrifice before Jehovah. “And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings.” How remarkable! The king, not a priest, now. How is that? It is exactly what is predicted in the beginning of the first of Samuel — that it would not be the anointed priest now, merely, but another anointed. He should raise up a faithful priest before Jehovah’s anointed. Zadok is the type of that faithful priest, but then here is another anointed — a greater anointed. In the days before the kings, the great anointed one was the priest; but when the king was established he takes the superior place — the evident type, of Christ. The priest retires into a secondary place. The king, accordingly, not only is then the highest in the throne, but he is even the highest in point of sacrifice. It is he that sacrifices before all Israel. So, it is said, “Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he

offered unto Jehovah, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep."

It is connected with himself; and even more, too, we find. He drove, as we saw, an unfaithful priest out of the priest's office. He takes the superior place over the priest. "The same day did the king hallow." It is all connected with the king now. It is not the priest that hallows. The priest might be the instrument; I am not denying that for a moment, but it is all connected with the king. "The same day did the king hallow the middle court that was before the house of Jehovah" (as he had dedicated the house of Jehovah) "for there he offered burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings: because the brazen altar that was before Jehovah was too little to receive the burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings. And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation" — the type of the great gathering of the latter day when the Lord Jesus, as the true Son of David, will more than accomplish all that is given here. He did so seven days and seven days, that in the mouth of these two witnesses every word should be accomplished — the duplicate witness of perfectness. "On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that Jehovah had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people."

I shall not prolong the subject now, but I hope in a future lecture to give the end, and, I must say, the sorrowful end of king Solomon, as well as the continued failure of those that succeed.

1 Kings 9 - 15.

Solomon was now at the height of his glory, a vivid type of a greater than Solomon. And it is only when we see that he really does thus prefigure the Lord Jesus as King that we can understand the importance that God attaches to the history of such as David in one light and Solomon in another. David as the warrior-king who puts down the enemies actively, Solomon as the man of peace who will reign over the subjugated nations and kingdoms, more particularly Israel; but in point of fact, at the same time, the glorious Son of man that will have all kingdoms and nations and tribes and tongues then. Now I am persuaded that every one's faith has something lacking who does not leave room for this glorious future. I do not mean now in the smallest degree as a question of one's soul with God, but I am speaking of the intelligence of a Christian man. And I repeat, that he who does not look for the kingdom of God to be established by and by in this world has neither a key to the Bible nor, in point of fact, can he understand why God permits the present confusion. There is nothing more likely to fill the soul with perplexity than leaving out the future. Bring it in and we can understand why God exercises such amazing forbearance. The present is but a revolutionary time, and so it has been for ages, marked by the solemn fact that even the very people of God are the most dispersed of all nations upon the earth. I speak, of course, of Israel now, and I say that if there be a people that are no people, Israel is the one that comes up before our view. The devil may have a kind of imitation of it in some other races that are scattered over the ends of the earth, but then the man that could confound Israelites with, for instance, the

Egyptians would be evidently doing the greatest injustice to one of the most remarkable people even as a race, as a nation, that has ever lived upon the earth. The other is only a kind of Satanic imitation of it; but no man can wisely despise Israel, even as a man. Still more, when our hearts take in the real truth of God and remember that God Himself in the person of His own Son deigned to become an Israelite, was in truth the Messiah, the Anointed, was the born King of the Jews. He who takes this in can understand the great place that Israel has in the mind of God, and that it is a proof of very little faith and of great occupation about ourselves when we do not relish what God has given us about His ancient people.

I grant you that it is a poor thing for the soul to be occupied with that in the first place, and it is, therefore, of great consequence that as now it is no question of Israel, but of Christ. And if then of Christ, of Christ as a Saviour, and further as the Head of the church. We are called now to know Him as a Saviour, next as members of His body to know what the Head of the body is, and what is involved in these relationships both of His to us and of ours to Him. But having the truth as to these, the more intimate and of the deepest personal importance to us, the question is whether our souls are not to be exercised on that which God has given us here, and what is God’s thought, God’s lesson, God’s intention, for our souls in it.

This I shall endeavour to gather, not by forcing it to speak Christian language, not by what I may call “gospelling” the different parts of Scripture, which is really very often a perversion; not even by taking profitable hints from it that are most just and true and

concern the grand living principles of divine truth, most important as all these are. But still there is another thing that we ought all with jealousy to care for, and that is to seek the real mind of God — what is intended by the scripture that comes before us. This leaves perfect freedom for every other application, but we ought to have first and foremost what God intends us to understand by His word. The time will come when we shall require to know how far any application is just. Because, needless to say, the divine purpose in the scripture necessarily has the first place for him that respects God, and who is not uneasy and anxious, and who is not coming to scripture always asking, “Is there anything about me here?” or, “Is there anything for me?” The great point is this, Is there anything about Christ there, and what is it that God is teaching us about Christ there? I am supposing now that the soul’s want has been already met.

What then is it that God is showing us here? Why, clearly He is bringing once more the man of peace, Solomon, the type of Christ Himself when reigning in peaceful glory. But, alas! it was not Christ yet; it was only a shadow and not the substance, and the consequence is that although God has written the scripture very especially to keep up the type and to exclude what would be inconsistent with it, nevertheless, we have the truth; and God intimates here the danger that was before Solomon and his family. He intimates the conditional ground which he must take until Christ brought in sovereign, unconditional grace. It is impossible not to speak in the way of condition except in view of Christ, of Christ personally. It is there alone that we get the full mind of God and heart of God, and

whenever that is the case it is no question of conditions but of perfect love that works for His own name's sake, and that can do it righteously through the Lord Jesus. But this gives me reason to speak of a very important principle that I shall have many opportunities of illustrating; what might seem a very strange thing in setting up the kingdom in Israel. Of all things in Israel there was nothing that illustrated the principle of one master so much as the king. Even the high priest did not in the same way, though he also did in another form. But the king determined the lot of the people in this way: if the king went right there was a ground for God's blessing the people, simply and solely for that very reason. On the other hand, if the king went wrong judgment fell upon the people. Alas! as we know, a king might go right, and it did not follow that the people would; if the king went wrong, the people were sure to, follow. Such is the inevitable history of man now. Well, this principle would seem very strange, and always does appear so till we see Christ. Then how blessed! God always meant to make Christ, and Christ alone, the ground of blessing. For any other — for any of the children of Adam to be the pillar, so to speak, on which the blessing should repose, would be a most precarious principle. We know well what Adam's sons are. We ought to know by ourselves, but when we see God looking onward to the Second man — the last Adam — then we understand the principle.

Well now, it is for this reason that, whether you look at David or Solomon, they have a very peculiar place as being personal types of the Lord Jesus as King. In a way, that is not true of others. Others might be in part, but they far more fully; but the principle is most true of the

kingdom in Israel. That is, that there was one person now on whom depended the blessing of the people, or, alas! who involved the people in his own ruin, and this is the great principle of the kingdom of Israel. Miserable! till we come to Christ. How blessed! when Christ comes to reign. Then all the blessing of all the world hangs upon that one Man, and that one Man will make it all good. Such is God's intention, and He will never give it up. Now anyone who takes this in has a wholly different view from the history of the world — from the gloom that must settle upon any man's heart that looks upon the earth apart from Christ. That God should have aught to say to such a world, that God should take an interest in it, that God should own such a state of things — how difficult otherwise to understand! The more you know of God, and the more you know of man, the more the wonder increases. But when we see that all is merely suffered till that one Man come, God meanwhile working out other purposes, as we know now, in Christianity, that as far as regards the earth and man upon it, it is all in view of Christ's coming again, and coming to reign; that is, coming to take the world into His own hands in the way of power — not merely to work in it by grace, but to take the reins of the world under His government, banishing him who is the fertile source of all the difficulty and contention and rebellion against God, that has filled it now, and indeed ever since sin came into it — the difficulty is solved.

Well then, in this second appearing of the Lord to Solomon, we have what, to a spiritual mind, would at once show the danger, nay, the sad result, the utter failure, that was to come in. Nevertheless, there was great comfort in it in the words of the Lord — for these

are most true — that His eyes and His heart shall be there perpetually; and, further, that that family, and that family alone, was to furnish an unbroken line till the fulness of the blessing of God be made good in this world. David's family is the only one that has that honour, for God preserved, as you know, the genealogical links until Messiah came; and after the Lord Jesus was born, before that generation passed away, Israel was dispersed. Where are they now? And where are the proofs now? All hangs upon Christ. But God took care that, till Shiloh came, there should be this maintaining of a man of David's house; and then, when the Lord Jesus was put to death, and it seemed as if all was gone, on the contrary, rising from the dead the work was complete. There was no need of any further line which was in the power of an endless life even as king, even in His kingdom. For David, according to Paul's gospel, must be raised from the dead, and so He is, and, consequently, He is brought in as unchanging. We can understand, therefore, that by virtue of Christ, the eyes and heart of God rest there. There may be nothing to show for it now. Of all places in the earth, the land of Palestine and Jerusalem may outwardly seem to be given up to be the prey of Satan. Nowhere has he more manifestly triumphed. Nevertheless, all is made good, and God will prove it, and prove it shortly. The truth is, the foundation is laid; nay, more than that, not merely the foundation laid, but the Person is in the glorious state in which He is to reign. He is risen from the dead, He is glorified, He is only waiting for the moment — waiting, as it is said, to judge the quick and the dead, but, waiting, also, to reign.

This then is what lies underneath the type of Solomon. But as to himself we see that in the very next chapter (1 Kings 10), although there was still the keeping up of honour, and the testimony to his wisdom in the queen of Sheba's coming up, and all her munificent homage to the wisest king that God had ever raised up among men — nevertheless, even then failure shows itself. The conditions of God are soon broken by man. "Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen; and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen." "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt." "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver" (1 Kings 10:28, 29). Was this obedience? Was this the king after God's own heart? Had He not expressly warned His king to beware of it? Had He not cautioned him against the accumulation of wealth, for he had had wealth of his own without seeking? God had ensured him that, but he sought it, he valued himself upon it, he laid no small burdens upon his people to accumulate wealth for the king; and at the same time he shows his dependence upon the Gentiles. He goes down to Egypt for horses, for that which would add to royal splendour, and would be an enticement to his sons, if not to himself, to seek conquest not according to the mind of God.

In short, whatever might be the object, it was a transgression of the distinct and direct word of the Lord, as we all know, given in the Book of Deuteronomy, where God had foreseen these dangers. But there was another danger too (1 Kings 11), and a deeper one. "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites." What!

The wisest king — the wisest king — so to prove his total ruin in the very thing where, least of all, it became him! So it is with the sons of Adam. You will always find that in the very point in which you most pride yourself you most fail. In that which it might seem to be least possible, the moment your eye is off the Lord, in that particular you will break down. Adam, it would not have been thought, would so soon have forgotten his place of headship — Adam, to whom the Lord spoke especially. I do not say — to the exclusion of his wife. Far from it. For indeed she was united with him in it. But undoubtedly he was the one who ought to have guided the wife, and not the wife her husband, and there was the first failure at the very beginning. But had not Solomon known that? Had he not heard of it? How had he profited? — this man with his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! And so we find that his wives turned away his heart. “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and went not fully after Jehovah, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And Jehovah was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from Jehovah God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice” (1 Kings 11:4-9).

The greater the privilege and the higher the honour, the deeper the shame. This was, I will not say the sad end of Solomon, but undoubtedly the rapid decline and fall of the man. This is the sad character that Scripture attaches to him, that in his old age he listened to the follies of these strange women, and, accordingly, God begins to chastise, not merely when Solomon was taken, but in his lifetime. And indeed there is no happier intimation of Scripture that I know of about Solomon. For while God deigns to give us his estimate of the elders that walked by faith, or that in some way signalized their faith, Solomon is not one. Nevertheless, that God did put especial honour upon that son of David, who can doubt? Who inspired him to give us some of the most weighty portions of God's word? And by whom was he given this signal wisdom of which Scripture speaks so much, and indeed which he proved so truly? But, nevertheless, it is written for our wisdom, for our learning, for our warning, that we should beware of slipping in the very thing which God signalizes. There is no strength in wisdom or in aught else. Our strength is only in the Lord, and the only way to make it good is in dependence upon Him. It was not so with Solomon. He rested in the fruits that God had given him. He yielded to the enjoyment of what came from God, but what was turned aside from the living source. All was ruined, and so Jehovah, as we are told, stirred up Hadad the Edomite. He was one that when David was in Edom, and Joab was there, had been concealed and kept.

"Jehovah stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom. For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after

he had smitten every male in Edom (for six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom), that Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad being yet a little child" (vers. 14-17). Now he comes forward. God is wise, and that young prince was kept to be a sting to king Solomon. But this is a little comfort to us, and indeed, I may say, almost the only comfort that we have in the history that is given us of king Solomon — that God chastised him. He chastised him, not merely allowed the fruit of his evil, the results of his folly, to appear in his family, but chastised himself in his own lifetime. This is His way with His own people, and indeed in some cases it is almost the only hope that you have that a person is a child of God, namely, that God does not allow the evil to pass, but deals with it now in this world. Those that God passes over in spite of evil are persons who are evidently waiting to be condemned with the world, but those who, being guilty, are dealt with now are objects of God's fatherly care. He is dealing with them, rebuking them, judging them, but after all, they are chastened that they should not be condemned with the world. Solomon, at any rate, most clearly comes under the chastening of the Lord. As the Lord had said to his father and implied to Solomon himself, He would not take His mercy from him, but He should chastise him with stripes, and this He does. But it is Solomon. It is not merely the house generally, the family generally, or their offspring, but Solomon himself.

Hadad then is one means of putting the wise king to great uneasiness. God made him a source of trouble to Solomon, for when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers he comes forward. But now it is

particularly mentioned. God does not say a word about that until Solomon's failure. Then Hadad comes forward in a most decided and distinct way to be a scourge for the guilty king. But he was not the only one. "God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah: and he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah: and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria."

I do not mean that the mischievousness of either Hadad or of Rezon was only when Solomon became an idolater, but I do draw attention to the fact that the Holy Ghost reserves the account of the vexation they caused the king till then. It is put by the Spirit Himself as a direct chastening of his idolatry. And these were, not the only ones. They were external. Solomon might say, "Well, we cannot expect anything better. They have private grudges, or national grudges, against our family." But "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite," was no foreigner, nor was it a question of avenging the supposed wrongs that were done to his family or his race. Not so; he was "Solomon's servant whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king; Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam

went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they, two were alone in the field; And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces; and he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee."

What an announcement — ten out of the twelve tribes to Jeroboam, the servant. "But he shall have one tribe," for so God calls it, "for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel; because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand; but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there."

What mercy! "a light always." Reduced greatly — reduced in the extent and glory of the kingdom, but with this most marked difference, compared with the ten tribes — the much larger part that passed to the other — they would shift their loads from time to time, and after having continual changes in the family that governed

they had one after another rising up. If it was a rebellious servant that it began with, it would not end with him, but many a rebellious servant would rise up against the king of Israel, and so the dynasty would be changed over and over and over again. Not so with Judah. Even though reduced to what God calls but one tribe, in order to put in the strongest possible way this utter diminution of their glory, nevertheless there the light shall be always. Such was the merciful, but at the same time, most righteous dealing of the Jehovah God of Israel.

And soon, too, the word takes effect. Solomon dies. Rehoboam comes and is himself the witness of the truth of his father's word that the father might heap up riches without end to leave to a son, and who knows but what he will be a fool? And Rehoboam was a fool in the strictest sense of the word. I do not of course mean by that mere idiocy, for such are a matter of compassion; but there are many fools that are fools in a very much more culpable sense than idiots. They are those persons who have sense enough and ought to use it aright, but persons who pervert whatever they have, not only to their own mischief, but to the trouble of those who ought most of all to be the objects of their care; for there is no king that rightly governs unless he holds his kingdom from the Lord, and more particularly a king of Israel, who had to do with Jehovah's people.

And this was the thing that filled David's heart spite of many a fault in him. He felt that it was God's people that was entrusted to him, and this alone was at the bottom of his dependence upon God. For who was he? He needed God who was sufficient for such a thing. God alone could guide in the keeping of His people. But

Rehoboam was the foolish son of the wise father, but of a wise father whose last days were clouded with darkness and with guilt, and who now is to reap bitter results in his family and is only spared by the grace of God from utter destruction. Rehoboam then, it is said, reigned in his father's stead. "And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king." The very first word shows the state of the king and the state of the people. Why to Shechem? What brought them there? What business had they there? Why not come to Jerusalem? When David was coming to the throne the tribes of Israel came to Hebron because Hebron was where the king lived. It was the king's chief city, where he had reigned before he reigned in Jerusalem, and the people came, as became them, to the king. Rehoboam heard that the foundations were being loosened and about to be destroyed for the king goes to Shechem. It was there that the people chose to go, and there the king perforce follows. He was a fool; he did not understand how to reign; he did not own his place from God.

"He went to Shechem, for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king." That is the reason of it. It was not that God had made Shechem the centre or the right place for king or people, but evidently the people chose to go there, and Rehoboam followed them, and that was the way in which his reign began. It was an ominous beginning, but it was a beginning remarkably suited to the character of Rehoboam. Where Rehoboam ought to have been firm he was loose, and where he ought to have been yielding he was obstinate; and these two things unfit any man to govern, for the grand secret of governing well is always knowing when to be firm and

when to yield, and to do so in the fear of God with a perfect certainty of what is a divine principle, and there to be as firm as a rock; and to know, on the other hand, what is merely an indifferent thing, and there to be as yielding as possible.

Now it was not so with Rehoboam. “He went to Shechem, for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king.” There was not now an association of divine grace, or truth, or purpose, or any other thing at Shechem; it was merely that Israel went there and he followed; he went there too. “And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt), that they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous — “You see the rebellious spirit from the very beginning. It is now in their language, as it was in their act before. “Now therefore, make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed. And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.”

It was not the noblest ground it is true. It was not the ground that would have left him in both liberty and responsibility. That would be the true ground I need not

tell you, beloved brethren, and it ought to have been the ground if he would be a servant of Jehovah — if he would serve Jehovah in watching over the best interests of Jehovah's people. But said they according to their measure, "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever." It was prudence, it was good policy. I could not say there was faith in it but there was good policy in it, as far as that went. "But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, which stood before him. And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

His days were numbered — the days of the kingdom of Rehoboam. "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day." He was in the plot, he was the one that well knew what the prophecy was, and now there was an opportunity of taking advantage of it. This is not the only connection you will find of Rehoboam with Shechem. "And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; And spake to them after the counsel of the

young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from Jehovah, that he might perform his saying, which Jehovah spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat." Did that excuse Jeroboam? This is a very important principle that you will find constantly in the word of God. A prophecy is in no way a sanction of what is predicted. Prophecy takes in the most abominable acts that have ever been done by the proud, corrupt, or murderous, will of man.

Prophecy therefore is in no wise a sanction of what is predicted, but nevertheless to a crafty and ambitious man as Jeroboam was, it gave the hint, and it gave him confidence to go on according to what was in his own heart. He therefore soon gives the word. "So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them, Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute." But this only became the overt occasion for the rebellion to display itself. "And all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day." And that rebellion was never healed. Alas we shall find greater abominations than this, but thus the bitter fruits

of evil were beginning to show themselves; and he that had sown the wind must reap the whirlwind.

“And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.”

Rehoboam wants to fight. It was in vain. God had given away ten parts out of the kingdom and God would not sanction that the man who is himself guilty should fight even against the guilty. God had not given them a king of the house of David in order that they might fight against Israel. “Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They harkened therefore to the word of Jehovah and returned to depart, according to the word of Jehovah.”

And what does Jeroboam? In the 25th verse we are told that he built Shechem. That was the place that he made to be his central spot. “Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein: and went out from thence, and built Penuel.” But Jeroboam considers.

“Jeroboam said in heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.” He was afraid that if he allowed his subjects to go up to Jerusalem they would bethink themselves of their old king — bethink themselves of the grand purposes of God connected with Jerusalem What does he do then? He devises a religion

out of his own head. “Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

He put it upon the ground of bringing religion to their doors, of helping his people to a religion that would not be too costly or too difficult, in fact, was only seeking to make religion subserve his policy. Accordingly, he did this knowing well that it is impossible for a kingdom — more particularly Israel — God’s people — to be strong in the earth, where there is not the owning of God — where there is not the owning of God blended with the government so that there should not be two contrary authorities — or, possibly, contrary authorities in the kingdom. For in fact the stronger of the two for the conscience is religion and not civil obedience.

In order therefore to confirm the strength of his people, he makes the religion to be the religion of the kingdom. That is, he makes both the polity and the religion to flow from the same head — the same will and for the same great ends of consolidating his authority. Hence therefore he thinks of religion. And what does he go to? Not the blotting out of Jehovah: that was not the form that it took; but the incorporating of the most ancient religious associations which he could think of and which would suit his purpose. And he goes to a very great antiquity — not the antiquity, it is true, of that which God had given, but an antiquity that immediately followed; not the antiquity of the tables of stone, or the statutes and judgments of Israel either, but the antiquity of the golden calves. This is what he bethought himself of. “And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in

Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi."

The reason of Dan being the one that was chiefly cultivated was this: it was at the greatest distance from Jerusalem. Bethel was rather too near. A dozen miles or so might have exposed them no doubt, as he would have thought, to the temptation of Jerusalem, so Dan was the one. Although there were the two, Dan was the one that was chiefly courted. But he was not satisfied with this. He made a house of high places in imitation of the temple, and he made priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi.

But further, "Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made; and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar." For why not, Jeroboam? Solomon had done so. "So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el, the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which," as Scripture says so graphically, "he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel; and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense" (1 Kings 12:32, 33).

But God was not wanting to give a testimony even to this wicked king (1 Kings 13). "And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of Jehovah unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of

Jehovah, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" — the grand vindication of God against the wicked religion of Jeroboam! "And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which Jehovah hath spoken." That prophecy might await its accomplishment in due time, but there is a present sign given, as God constantly does — a present pledge of a future accomplishment. "Behold the altar shall be rent and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out." The moment Jeroboam hears this he wants the man arrested. He puts forth his hand from the altar, saying, "Lay hold of him," but the power of God was with the word of God. "And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of Jehovah. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of Jehovah thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again."

Thus it is not only that we find the chastening of God's people for their good, but the punishment of the wicked, at any rate, for their warning to break down their proud will; and so it was with Jeroboam. "The man of God besought Jehovah and the king's hand was restored to him again, and became as it was before"; but it left the king as he was before. There was no bending of his heart to the Lord. Nevertheless the king could not but be civil, and so he says to the man of God, "Come home

with me and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward."

This brings out a principle of the deepest moment for you and for me, beloved friends. "And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest." And no wonder. Here was Jehovah slighted. Where? Among the Gentiles? That were no wonder. Among His own people — direct apostasy from the Lord God of Israel. Here was a man that went forth in the strength of the word of the Lord. Absolute separation was therefore enjoined, and eating and drinking in all ages have been most justly regarded as the sign of fellowship. It may be as in the most solemn way fellowship between God's people and the Lord Himself at His own table; but even in other lesser ways eating and drinking are not so slight as man supposes. "With such an one no not to eat." Who? A man that is called a brother. If an unbeliever bid you, even supposing the unbeliever might be the worst man in the world, you are free to go, provided you believe that God has a mission for you — an object. Supposing it was the man's soul — nothing more important in its way — you are free to go to the very worst on the face of the earth if you can serve God by going. You had better be sure of that first. But there is another thing, and that is, suppose a man that is called a brother is living in wickedness, "with such an one no not to eat." This does not mean the Lord's table; it means the common ordinary table. It means that there is not to be a sign of such fellowship as

this — fellowship in ordinary life — because one of the most important means of dealing with the conscience of one that is called a brother is not merely separation from him at the table of the Lord, but it is intended to govern all one's ordinary social life with him. Not with the world; there is no greater folly than putting the world under discipline; but there is nothing more important in the church of God than walking in holy discipline, not merely at the table of the Lord, but at all other times.

I know that the world makes light of this, and counts it extremely uncharitable; and I am aware, too, that it has been so abominably perverted by popery that one can understand why most Protestants are rather alarmed at anything that is so close and trenchant; but nevertheless it does not become those that value the word of the Lord to shrink from the danger, and I think that there cannot be a doubt that what I am saying is correct as to the 5th of the 1st Corinthians. I know that some apply it to the Lord's table. I will just give one or two reasons that are decisive. First, there would be no sense in speaking of a man that is called a brother only; no sense in saying that he is not a man of the world because there could not be a question about eating the Lord's Supper with him. The question might arise with a brother, no doubt. But in speaking of an erring Christian "no not to eat" means that fellowship is not to take place in so little a thing as to eat. "Not so much as to eat," meaning that it was a very small thing, and so it is a small thing to take an ordinary meal. Who could suppose the Holy Ghost treating the Lord's Supper as a very little thing? Why there is nothing of more importance on earth, so that I am perfectly persuaded "no not to eat" means so small a

thing as to eat, which at once shows that the meaning is in no way the Lord's Supper. The Spirit of God never could treat that as a small matter. No, it means an ordinary meal.

I am not now speaking of relatives, because that modifies the thing. Supposing, for instance, a Christian person had a heathen father or mother. Well he is bound to show them reverence, even though they were heathens; and so with other relationships in life. Take, for instance, the wife of a man who perhaps was a despiser of the name of the Lord. She must behave properly as a wife. She is not absolved from that relationship. She is in it. Now that she is in it she is bound to glorify God in it. But where the scripture speaks so peremptorily as I have been now describing, it is where there is freedom. This is jealousy for the Lord that we should not err in an act that might seem open to us, because it was a slight one. It is jealousy that we might not forget the glory of the Lord in seeking also to arouse the conscience of him who evidently has fallen into such grievous sin.

So, then, the man of God was put upon this as the point of honour for a man of faith. He was not to eat bread or drink water, or even to go the way he came. He was evidently to pass through the land, not to be as one that was even repeating his footprints in the path which he had trodden before, but he was to go through it as one that had a mission to perform, and to have done with it. This was God's purpose in it. It was a most marked and solemn token, too, because it was meant to be a testimony, and therefore he was not to repeat it merely to the same persons who had seen it, but it was that others should see it too. This man of God was to pass

through the land that was now apostate. And this, beloved friends, is of very great moment to us to bear in mind, as we have to do now with a most guilty state of Christendom. A very large part of Christendom is in a state of idolatry. Perhaps we do not see so much of it in these lands, yet it is increasing habitually, and it takes the shape of apostasy more particularly where there are Protestants; where those that came out of idolatry are going back to it in any form. It may begin in very trifling matters; it may show itself in little ornaments about the person, but what Satan means is not ornament but idolatry, and what Satan will accomplish by it is idolatry, and it is a very small thing which scripture shows most clearly that both the Jews, who are, apparently, the greatest enemies of idolatry in the world, and Christendom, who ought to have been altogether above idolatry, will go straight back into downright idolatry. Scripture is perfectly plain as to this, so the Lord told the Jews that the unclean spirit should return. That means the spirit of idolatry; and to return not as he formerly was — alone — but return with seven other spirits worse than himself. Antichristianism — the worship of a man as God — will accompany the idolatry of the last days, and this in Israel. And neither more nor less than this is what is taught in the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians as to Christendom. For what is the meaning of apostasy, and what is the meaning of the man of sin that is to set himself up, and that is to be worshipped? Not so is it with the revelation which strongly speaks of their worshipping gods of gold and silver and brass that could not see and hear and so on. This is not the Jews only, but Gentiles also, and Gentiles that once bore the name of Christ and are so much the worse for that.

But although these are the extremer things, there are other things now, for this is what we are called upon as Christians. The world itself will see when things come out so plainly, though there will be no power to resist, for all the motives of man and all the prosperity of men and all the countenance of the world will depend upon persons acquiescing, and men will not endure the dissent from it, and those that give a testimony will be intolerable. And, therefore, beloved friends, it is now our place to judge these things (that will be) in their principles — not merely in the open result that will be by and bye. But there is the working now of what will lead to that, and the only security is Christ, and the way in which Christ practically works is in the obedience to the word of God.

This was what the man of God, then, was called to — the most decided separation from the apostate people, and this because being the people of God they were now idolaters. But “there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel” — ah! these old prophets are dangerous people. “Now there dwelt an old prophet in Beth-el; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Beth-el: the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass, and he rode thereon, and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak.”

He was not told to sit under an oak. There was the beginning of it. There was his first failure, and there is no failure — there is no ruin — that takes place at one

step. There is always a departure from the word of the Lord which exposes us to the power of the devil, and it is not first, I repeat, Satan's power. It is first our own failure, our own sin, our own disobedience. He was sitting, then. He had been told that he was not to return by the same way that he came. He was evidently to get away as fast as possible. A man that is forbidden to eat and drink was not intended to sit under a tree. But this old prophet found him sitting under an oak, "and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah?" Nothing could be apparently a more thorough recognition of his mission and of his work from God. He was a servant of the most high God that had, no doubt, come to show them the right way. There was great respect. "And he said, I am. Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place. For it was said to me by the word of Jehovah, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest."

He does not now come in the same power. When he came it was not merely so. It is a stronger expression. But, however, I will not dwell upon that now. "Thou shalt eat no bread," he repeats as before, "nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest." "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of Jehovah saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water." And there his testimony was broken — his sword utterly broken in his hand — for it

was not merely a word that he was called to, but to deeds, and men will care little for your word if you do not show them by deed that you feel that word which you would fain press upon them. There is nothing that men will not bear you to say if you do not act it out; for this it is that always troubles, not only the world, but still more the old prophets — for they are the people that feel. The old prophet could not bear the fact, for if this was the case with the man of God where was the old prophet? And it is not said that he was a false prophet; and the issue of the story would rather seem to show the contrary. But the old prophet was determined to try the man of God and see whether he could not make him as unfaithful as himself, for that is what would have been a miserable salve to a bad conscience. There is nothing that so troubles Christians that are not walking with God as when there are any that do; and there is nothing so important as not merely the testimony, but the living testimony, the walking in what you say.

Accordingly, this was the point that he assailed. “Can I not get him to eat bread and drink water?” So he pretends that he has a fresh message from God. What was the man of God about? Does God say and unsay? If it were so we should have no standard whatever, no certainty, and what would become of the poor children if there were such a thing. I know that unbelief constantly says it, and tries to make the Bible contradict itself, but then those who do so are guilty; and so the old prophet was guilty of lying — “he lied unto him.” Nevertheless, the man of God listened. He had sat under the oak and was found by the old prophet there. He listened to the old prophet, and parleyed with him. The mischief takes effect. The man of God returns, breaking the word of the

Lord in his own person, but not without the hand of God stretched out against him. If the man of God was false to God, God would be true to the man of God and true in a most painful way; and mark, beloved friends, most righteously; but it is a righteousness according to God, for we in our folly would have thought, “Surely the old prophet is the man that is going to die for this.” Not so, but the man of God. For it is those who ought to know best, if they fail, that God chastises most. Do not wonder if the same things are done elsewhere and pass, apparently, without a chastening from God, or without any very direct exposure. These things cannot be done where the word of the Lord is the rule.

The man of God, accordingly, hears now the word, and this word was given him by the old prophet. “And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of Jehovah, and hast not kept the commandment which Jehovah thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of the which Jehovah did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.” It is not that his spirit did not go to the Lord. We are sure it did, but, nevertheless, his body did not come to the sepulchre of his fathers. The Lord did deal with him, and dealt with the body that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.

“And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and

his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase."

What a testimony! It is not so that the lions usually behave. It was in itself a wonder. The body of the man of God lay there, the ass beside it, the lion on the other side, all perfectly peaceful. The work was done. God was just in it, and accomplished what He pleased, but the lion had no mission to do more, and there in the face of all men it was evident that the hand of God was there according to the word of God. "And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God." He knew right well whose carcase was there. "It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of Jehovah: therefore Jehovah hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of Jehovah, which he spake unto him."

And so the prophet goes and finds the ass and the lion standing by the carcase. "The lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn and to bury him. And he laid his carcase in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, Alas, my brother!"

What a history! How true and how full of instruction, but how, solemn — solemn to think of the man of God, but, oh! what can we say of the old prophet? What can we say of those that tempt the men that are of God and that have been faithful in their mission, to depart from the word of the Lord, and draw a miserable consolation to themselves for the moment to countenance their own

living in habitual disobedience, in habitual ease where the man of God was forbidden to eat of the bread or drink of the water? There is nothing that so hardens the heart, and there is nothing that so destroys the conscience, as habitual disobedience to the word of the Lord — not in gross sins, but in religious indifference. That was what marked the old prophet. He consoled himself that he had respect for the Lord — respect for the man of God. He was put to the proof. He was Satan's instrument, and he brought out, no doubt, the weakness of the very vessel that God had made so strong against king Jeroboam. He knew he was utterly weak before the seductions of the old prophet. Oh, beware of such! Beware of those who use their age or their position, or anything else, to weaken the children of God in their obedience to the word of the Lord.

This, then, is the deeply interesting and instructive history of the true path of saints of God in the midst of that which is departed from scripture — departed from the Lord.

Another thing that we learn, too, is that after this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way. He could entreat the prophet, the man of God, and the man of God could entreat Jehovah, and not without an answer, but it had taken no effect upon his conscience. There is no good done unless conscience is reached in the presence of God. "He made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever, would he consecrated." It was not only Jeroboam's will that was at work, but anybody's will, everybody's will. "Whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin

unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth."

In the next chapter (1 Kings 14), accordingly, we find the hand of God stretched out against the house of Jeroboam. Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick, and Jeroboam well knew that there was reality in this man of God, so he bethinks himself of another — Ahijah the prophet. He tells his wife to go to Shiloh and to see Ahijah. "And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people." She was to bring an honorary gift in her hand to present to the prophet, and Jeroboam's wife did so; and it is written for our instruction.

Ahijah could not see for his eyes were set; they were fixed by reason of his age, but God gave him to hear and gave him to see, too, what was unseen. "And Jehovah said unto Ahijah, Behold the wife of Jeroboam cometh." What was the folly of men! There was a man that could trust the prophet to tell him the future, and not to see through the disguise of his wife. How great is the folly of the wise, for Jeroboam was a wise man after this world. But the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, even as God's wisdom is foolishness in their eyes. "And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came in at the door that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another?" What a humiliation! "For I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and

rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; but hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam."

Abijah — he was not to recover. She was to get back to her husband and to her house. "And when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward Jehovah God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam." What grace of God — to produce some good thing toward Jehovah God of Israel in the house of the man that had wrought such things against Jehovah, and to show His mercy in taking him away from the evil to come! "And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin." And that was not all. "And who made Israel to sin." And so it was. Jeroboam died and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.

"And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Jehovah did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Judah did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under

every green tree. And there were also sodomites in the land; and they did according to all the abominations of the nations." And, accordingly, God let loose the king of Egypt against Rehoboam, He came up "and he took away the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all; and he took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made," so that Rehoboam was driven at last to shields of brass.

"Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead."

On what follows I make a very few remarks in concluding this lecture. We have here a signal turning point in the history of Israel. In 1 Kings 15 we have a long and deep course of evil and of the Lord's righteous ways in the house of Jeroboam. But first of all as to Abijam. "He walked," it is said, "in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless for David's sake did Jehovah his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: because David did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah." And God forgets it never. "And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there

was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. And Abijam slept with his fathers."

And Asa succeeds, who reigns a long while in Jerusalem, and he does what was right in the eyes of Jehovah as did David his father. He took away the sodomites out of the land. "Asa's heart was perfect," or, undivided, "with Jehovah all his days. And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of Jehovah, silver, and gold, and vessels." We find the war continued, and Baasha king of Israel builds Ramah that he might not suffer any one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. But it was in vain. Benhadad, the king of Syria, hearkens to king Asa. A sad descent in his latter days — that the king of Judah finds his refuge in the king of Israel instead of in the Lord. Nevertheless, all goes, apparently, well for the moment, for God does not judge all at once. "It came to pass when Baasha heard thereof that he left off building." The house of Asa is concluded here. "In the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. And Asa slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father."

Nadab comes to his end, and Baasha conspires against him and "smote him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines: for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead. And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of Jehovah which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his

provocation wherewith he provoked Jehovah God of Israel to anger. Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel."

So then in this very next chapter (1 Kings 16) we find what I have already referred to — the judgment following. The sovereignty passes out of the hand of Jeroboam. Zimri his captain rises up against him. Omri kills Zimri. Thus family after family takes possession of Israel, but God left Himself not without warning. It was in that very time that a great and solemn act was done according to the word of the Lord. A man dared to despise the word of Joshua, who had pronounced a curse upon him that would raise Jericho once more. It was not that Jericho was not inhabited, but to raise its walls as a city — to give it the character of a city — was despising God. The judgment was long stayed. A long time had intervened, but God had forgotten nothing. In these wicked days if he raises up one part the judgment is in the death of his eldest son, and if he raises up another part it is in the death of his youngest. His family paid the penalty of despising the word of the Lord. Oh, what a thing it is to us, beloved friends, to see how God maintained His word not only with the man of God, on the one hand, but with the open despiser and blasphemer, on the other. The Lord give us more and more to delight in the word of the Lord, and give us to cultivate a deepening acquaintance with every part of the word. Amen.

1 Kings 17 - 22.

The days were very dark in Israel. Not only rebellion. And rebellion, always serious, was peculiarly so in

Israel, for there it was insubordination in a direct manner against not only God's providence, but God's government. That government, as no other, was the direct action through the family that God Himself had chosen to govern His people, and therefore the very fact of their being the people of God made their insubordination to be so much the more grievous. For there cannot be a more false maxim than to bring in the question of whether people are God's children — to apply it to present circumstances — in order to mitigate the judgment of any evil thing that is done by them. In fact, the very thought is a pollution, and shows that souls must have departed from God, whenever the fact of the grace of God towards any person could be used in order to mitigate the gravity of their guilt against God. It is evident that if sin be always sin, the aggravation of the sin is the favour that God has shown the person that is guilty of it, and the nearer the relationship of the person that is guilty the greater the sin. Hence, even in Israel, God did not require the same sacrifice from one of the common people that He did from the ruler, nor did He look for that from a ruler which He did from the congregation as a whole; and the high priest, although he was only one man — the high priest's guilt as being that of (in early days at any rate) the representative of Jehovah on the earth in Israel as king, became Israel's guilt. The high priest's sin had precisely this same effect, that is, it damaged the communion of the whole people, just as the whole people's guilt would have interfered with, or affected, him. But now we see the very darkness and evil of the people of God — for here we have to do not with a family, not with His children in the true and Christian sense of the word; but we have to do with a people under the government of Jehovah — in

having now set up, not the fullest form of apostasy from God, but that which was verging towards it — the first great departure from God, religiously as well as politically.

In the setting up of the calves of gold — founded upon antiquity, no doubt, but an ancient sin — having gone back as men will, not to ancient purity, but to ancient sin, so it was a divided allegiance, nominally to Jehovah. They had not yet cast Him off entirely, but really there was the worship of the golden calves. But dark as this day was, it only furnished the occasion for God to cause a new light to shine — the light of prophecy. It always gives a grand testimony for God, and if that light be always alight, when would it shine most? When the darkness was greatest. So then we find it coming out now in a very conspicuous manner, even in a richer and fuller form, as we know it afterwards did when not merely the ten tribes of Judah were departing from God. Then we have the grand burst of prophecy in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and all the rest, not to speak of the Minor Prophets. But here we have a peculiar form — prophecy not merely in word but in deed — the blending of miracle. For these are miraculous signs, as well as wonders. Indeed, this is a very common thing in the miracles that God causes to be done by His servants, that is, even what was done teaches. The facts speak out the mind of God, and so it was in the case of Elijah. He is introduced most abruptly. The occasion required it. It was high time for God to interfere. There is no preparation of the way. It was a question of God, and God accordingly works by His servant.

But this remarkable planting of prophecy on miracle is found, not in Judah, but in Israel. The reason is manifest.

Judah maintained still, however guiltily, the word of the Lord. Israel had virtually cast it off. Accordingly, therefore, having sunk into the place of the faithless they would have signs offered to them, as the apostle Paul shows that miracles are for the unbelieving. Prophecy, in the Christian sense of the word, no doubt as such when compared and contrasted with miracles — prophecy is for the church. Thus you see we find that the double character remarkably suits the case. On the one hand it was Israel, and, consequently, there is prophecy; on the other hand it was Israel faithless or unbelieving, and consequently there were miracles, that is, there were signs to unbelievers at the same time that there was prophecy planted with them. So that the perfect wisdom and harmony of the dealings of God with the grand principles of truth that are found throughout the word of God, I think, must be apparent to any person who will consider what has been just brought before him.

Elijah, then, gives to Ahab a most solemn warning of the first great miracle which was itself a prophecy. He says, “There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” He does not say merely, “According to Jehovah’s word.” Had it been simply according to Jehovah’s word it would have been simply a prophecy; but “according to my word” made it miraculous as well as prophetical. He was in the secret of Jehovah; he was an announcer of Jehovah’s mind, but more than that, he was the executor of Jehovah’s purpose; that is, there was prophecy in deed as well as in word, and this we have seen to be most suitable to the circumstance of the case.

The word of Jehovah, then, bids him flee. He has been bold in telling the king — the guilty king. But now that his testimony has been rendered, and that the fearful calamity — that the restraint of dew or rain for years must be particularly in the east — that this was about to fall upon the people and to be connected indeed in a measure with the prophetic, and not merely with God, would have at once exposed him to the resentment of a wicked people and their king. God therefore bids His servant — for it must not be a mere resource, still less a question of timidity, but according to the word of Jehovah — to flee and hide himself by the brook Cherith. Yet even in this hiding-place he brings out the illustrious power of God, and His care for His servant, for God had many ways of watching over him. He chose one that suited His own glory. He says, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” — birds which, as we all know, are remarkable for their voracity. These were the birds that were ordered to feed the prophet. “So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord, for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.”

Undoubtedly, it was a solemn sign to Israel when it came to be known by them — that is, that the unclean should be rather the instruments of the action of God, the medium of caring for His prophet. It was, I say, a witness to them that they were even below what God had commanded to feed His prophet. It was not to be some particular person. Yet at this very time we know that there was one that God employed. But no, God would prove before all Israel how little His sympathies were with the people — how completely He was

independent of all such action. He would care for His prophet Himself, and in a way suitable to His own glory. So after a season the brook dries up, but not before God had another purpose in hand. He sends him now to a place outside the land, to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon. And how important this is, our Lord Himself teaches us, for in Luke 4 the Saviour particularly selects this fact, as well as another that will come before us in the Second Book of Kings, as the witness of grace to the Gentile when the Jew had accounted himself unworthy of the government of Jehovah. Grace must work somewhere or other if the chosen people cast it out from them and will have none of it. God will not permit that brook to dry up, for the waters shall only flow in a fuller volume for the refreshment of weary souls elsewhere. And thus it is that God is always above the evil of man, and that the deeper the evil, God's goodness only shines the more.

So the widow of Zarephath, or Sarepta, as it is called in the New Testament, becomes the favoured one. She is met in great desolation. She is reduced to the lowest state. The prophet makes no small demands upon her pity, he puts her faith thoroughly to the test, and says what, if he had not been a prophet, and if it had not been a trial of faith, would have been a most cruel and selfish word, for with what face could a man, as a man, have asked her out of her little — her last meal — to provide first for him and then for herself and her son? But this was exactly the trial of it. God, when He gives a trial of faith, does not pare it down so as to spoil the very force of His blessing; but contrariwise. The greater the faith the more He tries, and if any one makes up his mind for slighting the practical cross in this world — the

sense of what it is to have the dying of the Lord Jesus — that man will be tried in that very way. So this poor woman. She was in circumstances next door to death, and it is evident that God was far from giving her by the prophet, as He could easily have done, a barrel of meal to encourage her and the cruse to begin marvelously supplying oil. This would have spoiled the whole teaching of the Lord. Not so. Everything adds to the difficulty. This stranger-prophet that she never saw, never heard of before, is entirely unnoticed, and indeed, I think, we are warranted rather to gather that it was her first sight, and it may be, the first sound even of the prophet Elijah.

But still there is that, as in the word of God, so also in the prophet of God — in a man of God — that gives confidence where there is faith. Very likely it will shock and provoke the flesh; very likely it will give ground for unbelief there, for you will find this to be most true that the very same things which are a support to faith are the stumbling-block to unbelief; but however that may be, God in no wise softened the trial, but brought it out to her in all its apparent harshness and difficulty. But He strengthens the heart to meet the trial, and we must never leave out this, which does not appear, and it is one of the beautiful features of the Old Testament.

Here we get the facts. The New Testament shows us the key that is behind. The New Testament lets us see every now and then, as, for instance, in this very case. There was the electing grace of God that wrought in this widow just as in the case of Naaman the Syrian. There were many widows in Israel; God chose this one outside Israel. There were many lepers; it was not there that the grace of God was running, but it was towards the Syrian

— towards the great captain of their great enemy, for Syria was, at this time, perhaps their greatest foe. But if grace works God will prove that it is grace. He will show that there is no ground for acceptancy which indeed would deprive it of its character of grace — if there was any ground to look for it. Well then, the widow acts upon the word of the prophet, and not without a solemn word which he received. “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.”

But there was a greater trial still, for all this was either the sustenance of the prophet or the sustenance of those who were dying, as it were, from the famine, along with the prophet. But now comes another thing — death. And it is evident that there are no discharges for man in that war. There a man is utterly foiled. There, at least, he must feel the vanity of his pretensions. And so it came to pass that God would give a witness of that. It was manifestly above man, for soon the only son of the widow fell sick and died; and this searches the woman’s conscience, and she thinks of her sins and she spreads it out before the prophet — the lamentable, irreparable loss, as she supposed, of her son. But he asked for the dead body and he cries to Jehovah, and he stretches himself upon the child three times — a most unmeaning thing without the Lord. But the Lord would give the sign of interest, of tender interest, and the use of means even to any other, but not so with Him. We know still that He is pleased to use according to His own power, and I must make a little remark upon this.

There is a common idea that prevails, even among Christians, that miracles mean the setting aside of the natural laws of God. They mean nothing of the sort. The natural laws of God — the laws that He has been pleased to stamp upon creation — are not altered by a miracle. They go on all the same. Men are brought into the world; men die. There is not an alteration of that. That goes on. What a miracle is, is not the reversal of what are called these natural laws, but the introduction of the power of God to withdraw from the operation of them in a particular case. The laws remain precisely the same as before. The laws are not altered, but an individual is withdrawn from the operation of those laws. That is another thing altogether, and this is the true and only true application of the thought. This alone is the truth as to a miracle. So in this present case there was no question at all about setting aside the ordinary operation of death. God acted according to His own sovereign will, but the same sovereign will that orders the creation and deals with each soul in it was pleased to withdraw a particular person for His own glory. This does not interfere, I repeat, with the ordinary course of nature, except in that one particular case or those cases where God has been pleased to do it. And in this instance Jehovah heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived, and Elijah takes him and gives him to his mother, who at once owns the God of Israel.

In the next chapter (1 Kings 18), however, we have Elijah called to show himself to Ahab, and now comes the great testimony to the guilt of the people. The restraint of all that would refresh the earth from the heavens had passed over the people — a most solemn

sign, for it was not merely water turned into blood, or various blows which fell upon the earth, but the very heavens were withdrawn from all the kindness of which they are the medium — from all the refreshment that God is pleased to give this earth. This was a far more solemn thing than anything that had been done in previous days, even with a stranger-people — with an enemy. But now the time was come for God to terminate this chastisement, and Elijah comes to show himself to the king.

“And there was a sore famine in Samaria, and Ahab called Obadiah which was the governor of his house” — who, singular to say, “feared Jehovah” — feared Him “greatly.” So wondrous are the ways of the Lord, and so little are we prepared; for the last place in this world where we would have looked for a servant of the Lord would have been the house of Ahab. Yet so it was. Do we not well to enlarge our thoughts? We should take in the wondrous ways of God’s wisdom, as well as of His goodness. God had a purpose there, for this comes out. “It was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of Jehovah, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” And why I make the remark, beloved friends, is this, that as there was a failure of Elijah, it is apt to be our failure. We are constantly in danger of forgetting what is not before our eyes. We are in danger of failing to identify ourselves with that which God is doing outside of what, I have no doubt, is the more honourable path; for it was a poor place for a servant of Jehovah to be in the house of Ahab, though it was a great honour, for God gave him to feed these prophets by fifty in a cave even in the face of Jezebel.

But Ahab now says to Obadiah, “Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks.” This gives occasion to Obadiah’s meeting Elijah. Elijah bids him go and tell the king that he was there. Obadiah declined. “What have I sinned?” said he, for indeed it troubled him to appear to disobey a prophet — “What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab to slay me? As Jehovah thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee.” We can understand therefore why Elijah was fed by ravens. “And when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I, thy servant, fear Jehovah from my youth.” And so he tells of what he had done to the prophets. Elijah, however, says: “As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him today.”

So Obadiah, with this pledge of the, prophet, goes and tells his master; and Ahab meets Elijah. He meets him as wicked men do. He throws the blame of all the trouble not upon the sinner, but upon the denouncer of the sin; not upon himself, the most guilty man in Israel, but upon the servant of Jehovah. And Elijah answers, “I have not troubled Israel” — answers the king of Israel who taxes him with it “but thou” — for this was the truth — “but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four

hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." It was a challenge given — a fair and open challenge by the prophet. It was to be a question between God and Baal, and this was to be decided by Elijah on the one hand and these prophets on the other. So Ahab sends to all, and all gather together. "And Elijah came unto all the people and said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

And so it was done. Elijah tells the prophets to choose the bullock, and dress it first; and so they do. "And they called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of

the offering of the evening sacrifice" — for Elijah would make them feel their folly and their wickedness — "that there was neither voice nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of Jehovah that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones," for there must be the testimony always of the full people of God. No surer mark will you find throughout the whole of the Old Testament of the line and direction which the Spirit of God gives of what is according to Himself than this, that even though it were a man isolated as no man ever more felt himself to be than Elijah, nevertheless, that man's heart was with the whole people of God. Therefore it was not merely ten stones to represent the actual number of the tribes that he was immediately concerned with, but twelve. That is, his soul took in the people of God in their whole twelve-tribe nationality as God's people, for faith never can do less than that. Never can it content itself with a part; it must have all God's people for God. This is what, at any rate, his soul desired, and this is what his faith contemplated, and on this the judgment was to take its course.

"And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob unto whom the word of Jehovah came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of Jehovah; and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood." There must be the fullest proof here that, if on the one hand, in trying

the poor Gentile widow there was no weakening of the trial, so still less where God's own honour was concerned, and the disproof of Baal's pretensions. Therefore it was not anything that would feed the fire, but rather put it out if it were fire from man. "Fill four barrels with water and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time." There was therefore the fullest witness on his part.

"And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near "not merely the people to him, but the prophet to the Lord. He drew near to that which was to be the witness of His power, of His testimony, of His own name and glory — "and said, Jehovah God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." How blessed! It was a secret between God and His prophet, but it was a secret divulged now before there was any answer — that all the profit of the answer might belong to the people and that the word of the Lord might be enhanced and glorified in their eyes.

"Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that thou art Jehovah God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them,

Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there." For we must remember, and it is an important thing in looking at all these operations of the ancient testimonies of God to understand it, that a prophet had his warrant for what he did from God — that not only the word of the Lord, but the power of God that accompanied it, was his warrant. Therefore we do not find God and the prophet at all acting according to the mere letter of the law. It was not that the law was set aside any more than, as I said before, the natural laws of creation are set aside in the case of a miracle. Prophecy did not set aside the law of the Lord, but prophecy was the special intervention of the law of the Lord and the ways of the Lord without any setting aside of the law. The law had its course where the law was owned, but these prophets who were acting thus were where the law was not owned, and, accordingly, there God acted according to His sovereignty. It was therefore no infraction of the law. The law had its own place according to its own proper sphere, but where it was disowned and where there was idolatry set up instead, there God acted according to His own sovereignty.

Accordingly, it was no question of going up to the temple at Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice. It was no question of calling in the priests or anything of that kind; it was enough that God warranted, and the power of God that accompanied was the sanction of His warrant to this prophet. And what could have been more so than the fire of Jehovah coming down even to the altar, licking up all the water in the trench? And it is the more remarkable, too, that this very character of miracle is what Satan will

imitate in the latter day. The same power that God used, either in the days of Elijah when it was a question of Jehovah, or in the days of the Lord Jesus, when it was a question of Messiah, will be imitated by the devil, and will deceive the world, for fire is to come down from heaven in the sight of men in the latter day. It is not said, really, but, “in the sight of men.” As far as men can see it will be the fire of Jehovah. It will not be really so. But this will completely ensnare men, who will then, more than ever, be on the watch for material proofs and present instances of the power of God. The whole story of evidences will have been exploded as a fable, and men will no longer attach any importance to the record of what they consider the myths of Scripture! Indeed, they have come to that already. These very facts that carry the stamp of divine truth upon their face are now treated as the mythology of Israel, just as the miracles of the New Testament are treated as the mythology of Christianity. And the one effort of learning on the part of men of the world, now is, in general, to account for it — to trace their connection with the fables of the heathen in one form or another. Clearly all this is dissolving, as much as possible, confidence in the word. And then will come something positive, not merely a negative destruction of the true testimony of God, but the positive appearance before their eyes of the very same power. Thus man between these two forces will fall a victim to his own folly and to the power of Satan.

But there is more than this. Elijah now says to Ahab, “Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.” Yes, but no ear of man on earth heard that sound but Elijah’s. “The secret of Jehovah is with them that fear him.” And Elijah goes up, as well as

the king, and casts himself down upon the earth, puts his face between his knees and sends his servant to look. He had heard the sound, but he wanted to get the testimony of the sight from his servant. His servant goes, and looks, but sees nothing. “And he said, Go again, seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time” — patience must have its perfect work in every case — “that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand.” It was enough. Elijah said, “Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of Jehovah was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”

Now that the judgment had taken its course, he was willing and ready to be a servant of the king. But if Elijah was willing to serve the king, and did so as no man could have served him without the power of God strengthening him — running and keeping up with his chariot at full speed — Ahab was not prepared to serve the Lord one wit the more. “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had, done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there” (1 Kings 19).

What! Elijah? Elijah? What is man? What is he to be accounted of? Elijah quails not at the message of the

Lord. There was no quailing there, but there is at this message of Jezebel's! And thus it is that the greatest triumphs of faith often precede the greatest failure; for, beloved friends, it is not triumph that, keeps a man, it is dependence. There is nothing that has preservative power but self-emptiness, which looks to God and His resources. And this, we see, Elijah did not now, for though he was a wondrous man he was a man, and here the point is not his wonders but that he was a man, and a man that listens to Jezebel instead of looking to God. What was she to be accounted of? What was he now to be accounted of? No, there is not one of us that is worthy of one single thing apart from the Lord Jesus, and it is only just so far as we can, because of our confidence in Jesus and in His grace, afford to be nothing, that we are rich, and then we are rich indeed. If content to be so poor as to be only dependent upon the Lord we are truly rich. Elijah trembles for himself. There was the secret of it. He could not tremble for God, and he was not thinking of God, but of Elijah. No wonder therefore he shows what Elijah was — what Elijah was without God.

He went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree, and he requested for himself that he might die. It is not but what we see the man of God, but still the man who was tired of life. That was not a feeling of faith. There is very often much more faith in being willing to live than in wishing to die. Wishing to die is not the proof of faith at all. I grant you that no man that knows what death is, that knows what judgment is, that knows what sin is, that knows what God is, could wish to die unless he knew the Saviour. But having known the Saviour we may wince under the trial

to which we are exposed in this world. Elijah did, and he wished to die, wished to get out of the trial — certainly a most unbelieving wish. The Lord never did. And there was the perfection of it. If the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane had wished to die it would have been the same failure. It could not be, and God forbid such a thought, but on the contrary the perfection of the Lord Jesus was that He did not wish to die — “Not my will, but thine be done.” On the contrary, He felt death, and He felt the gravity. I grant you, there was all the difference between the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and that of any other. In any other case death is a gain. Death to a believer is gain, but still we ought not to wish to gain till the Lord’s time comes for it. We ought to wish to do His will, the only right wish for a saint. He said, “It is enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life.” He was impatient. “Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.” Yet he was running away from Jezebel. He was vexed; he was unhappy. He now fails after his testimony. He, was miserable now, but after all he wanted not to die when Jezebel wanted to take his life, and now that he is here he wants to die.

So “as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of Jehovah came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights.” There are those that would try to throw a question upon this one transaction on the

ground of its similarity to Moses, and even to the blessed Lord; but I meet all that in the face and say they are not similar — not one of them. They are each of them different. They are each exactly constituted to the particular case, and if we lost one we should have a positive gap in the scheme of divine truth. And what is the difference? Why in Moses' case there was no eating at all; no eating and drinking. It was the presence of Jehovah — the enjoyed and applied presence and power of Jehovah that proved its power of sustaining, even if the people must learn that it was not with bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Surely God's own presence had not less power to sustain the man that was in it in the way that the children of Israel were not, than the manna that came down from Him.

But more than that. In the Lord Jesus Christ's case there was this difference. There we get perfection. It was not in the presence of Jehovah — in the presence of His Father — here it was in the presence of Satan,. and there He was kept, because He and He alone was found in the power of dependence upon God by faith. Where there was not the visible display of His presence and His glory there is nothing like the sustaining power of dependence and faith. And the Lord Jesus showed us that in its full perfection in the presence of the enemy. Thus you see the cases are all different. Elijah's was decidedly the lowest one of the three, for there there was the gift of that which miraculously sustained. It was not the power of the Lord alone without, anything, but it was what God gave power to sustain. It was therefore more what was conferred. In Moses' case it was what, was enjoyed, not conferred. It was not things or

creature-things used to give him power, but it was the Creator Himself that was enjoyed. And in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ it was the Creator Himself in the most perfect self-abnegation, and dependence upon His Father.

Well, the prophet now goes forth to a cave, or the cave, for it seems to be some special one, and lodged there. “Behold the word of Jehovah [came] to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah God of hosts.” The presence of God always brings out our true state — invariably. So we find in the case of the companions of our Lord Jesus Christ. Directly they get near enough to the glory they go to sleep. It does not matter whether it is glory or whether it is sorrow. There is no power in flesh, even in a saint of God — nor in a prophet. There was no power to enter in either instance. The men that sleep upon the mount — sleep at Gethsemane. There was One that slept not; there was only one.

And now Elijah’s trial comes, and, “What doest thou here?” brings out the state of his heart. “I have been very jealous.” “I have been very jealous.” There was the point. It was Elijah. Elijah was full of Elijah. “I have been very jealous for the Jehovah God of hosts — for the children of Israel” — that was his first thought. It was not that God was not in his thoughts. He was a true saint, and I trust that no soul will admit such a thought as that I wish to lower him. But I do wish to exalt the Lord; and I do wish to draw out the profit and the blessing of the word of the Lord; and I say, beloved friends, rather than that He should not have His glory, let every man be a liar. “I have been very jealous for Jehovah God of hosts; for the children of Israel have,

forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with. the sword, and I, even I, only am left." It was not true. It was not "I, even I, only." He was wrong. It was not that what he said was the smallest approach to deceit. There was no deceit about Elijah — none. But it was the blinding power of self even in a most true saint of God, for self always blinds, and the one and only thing that gives us to see clearly is when self is judged. "When thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light." Now singleness of eye means that — instead of having self as the centre which is occupied with every object around, or, at any rate, with such objects as engage me for the moment — one object fills me. The eye is single then, and then only.

That was not the case with Elijah. God was not his first thought. Self was possessing his mind as well as God. It was not what God was for Elijah, but what Elijah was for God. After he was grieved and wounded this is what it came to — "I, even I, only." "And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before Jehovah. And behold Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but Jehovah was not in the earthquake." The Lord was not there either. "And after the earthquake a fire, but Jehovah was not in the fire." He was not in any of these exertions of judicial power. The time will come for wind, and earthquake, and fire, but not yet. It was the due testimony. It was the testimony for the prophet to bring in God, for that is the very business of the prophet — to bring in God, as we see in 1 Cor. 14 — that where there is prophecy, the man, if he were an unbeliever, is smitten in his

conscience and falls down and says, “God is in you of a truth.” That is the effect of it — the sense of the presence of God being there, not merely in the person that prophesies. It is not that God is in the prophet, but God is in you, the people of God — in the assembly of God — a much more important thing than even in the prophet.

And so now, God was in none of these exertions of judicial power — all most truly of God, but still they were of God and not God. Where was He? And how? “After the fire a still small voice.” Who would have thought of finding God there? None. None, perhaps, save those that have seen Jesus. Elijah learns, but he never would have thought of it. He learns it. He never could have anticipated it. He could follow, and does follow. He had to be taught. He needed it. “And it was so when Elijah heard it” — for he was a true man of God — “that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?” Was he brought down to the true point yet? Not quite yet. He said, “I have been very jealous.” There he is again. “I have been very jealous.” There it is again. “I have been... the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I, only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away. And Jehovah said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha” — solemn word that for Elijah! — “Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.”

Elijah's work — Elijah's proper work — was closed. It was not that he died yet — for indeed he was not to die, but to be translated — nor was it that he did not yet wonderful deeds. It was not that there was not a lingering. But he was sentenced. He was sentenced to die, as it were. His proper work was closed, and this, too, because, as far as he was concerned, as far as the ability went, as far as he had failed to answer according to the grace of God towards His people — he had failed just as another before him had failed, and there is a singular resemblance between the two. Moses had failed at a most critical point before. Moses had not sanctified Jehovah when the great trial came, for when Jehovah was full of grace towards the people, Moses, smitten by the people's dishonour that they had put upon him and his brother, resented it, and Moses would have brought out something judicial. Moses would have liked the wind or the earthquake, or the fire, just as Elijah would. He would have liked to have burnt up Jezebel and all the rest of them. No doubt they deserved it, no doubt of it. But where was God in it? Where was God? Was this what God had called him to? Elijah failed the Lord at this most serious crisis in the dealing with His people. Instead of sanctifying Him he had, on the contrary, isolated himself, and here separated himself from the twelve tribes. He no longer, as it were, reared the twelve stones for an altar for all Israel before the Lord God: He found the Lord true to His name, but Elijah now was filled with the thought of his own injured honour — his own slighted place — his own power before Jezebel. Elijah accordingly was in a complaining, murmuring spirit. Even though a most true man of God, there was no real representation of the Lord God of Israel in such a state, and the consequence is Elijah not only must call forth

others for whatever God gave them in His providence to do, but he must hand over his prophetic gift to another man in his room. It was a solemn word from God for Elijah.

And mark, too, how completely God shows the connection of this. “Yet I have left me,” says He, “after all you have been saying as to ‘I, and I only’ — yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” A sorrowful tale that it should be so — that out of all the thousands of Israel there should be but seven thousand; but still there were seven thousand, instead of Elijah, and Elijah alone, left. Elijah was wrong, and he was wrong most of all because he had not known this from the Lord. He ought to have known it, for I am persuaded of this, that where our heart is with the Lord, where we look for God, the shall see God. No doubt if people are always on the hunt for evil they will always find evil enough in such a world as this, and there is no great spirituality in seeing and pronouncing upon evil. The great thing is whether we are able to bring down the goodness of Christ to meet the evil and the difficulty. This is where faith really shows itself, not in finding fault only, and finding this or that that is not correct — that is easy enough and requires no power at all, but the other does, and it requires what is greater than power — grace — willingness and delight of heart for that which is good.

Now Elijah failed there, and failing there he failed God, for certainly these were very precious to God, and Elijah had not seen one of them, did not know one of them, did not suspect the existence of one. If Elijah had not thought so much about himself he would have seen

some of these seven thousand before, and so too, with ourselves; for I am quite persuaded that while the Lord has given us a most special place, and a place of communion with His own mind in the present ruined state of the church of God, still we must not forget the seven thousand. We must not forget that there are those that we do not see — that we do not meet with — that we are not in the habit of having to do with, but we must leave room for them in our hearts, in our faith. We must bear them on our soul before God. If not, the Lord has a controversy with every one who does not, as He had with Elijah then. And be assured of this, beloved friends, it is of the very greatest importance for our own souls, as well as for God's glory, that He has these, and the only question is whether we give credit for it and whether our souls take it in, not as a mere thing that we believe, but as that which acts upon our hearts, which draws us out in prayer, in intercession, in care, and in desire for every one of these seven thousand — every one of the lips that have not kissed Baal.

Well, the next thing is that he finds Elisha, for that comes first, though mentioned last. He finds Elisha. "And Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah," for he understood the act, "and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose."

You see there was at once the free action of prophetic power. Had he not had the mantle of Elijah he would not

have been authorized to act as he did. Who is he to sacrifice thus? He understood it; he understood it well, and you observe it was not merely the return to his parents. It was not that God was not in his thoughts. He sacrificed the oxen. It was not only the thought of natural relationships. “Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him.” Now the Lord does not rebuke that. Where He is concerned He rebuked it, but Elijah was not the Lord, and there was just the difference between them. Elijah had not that all-absorbing claim that was to supersede a father and a mother; but the Lord Jesus had, and therefore it was a sign of want of perception, want of faith, for the man mentioned in the New Testament to wish to go back even though it were to bury his father. That might be a great deal more, surely, than kissing father or mother as a farewell — to bury him. Surely it was impossible for nature to stand out against that, but this is the very thing — the Lord God of heaven and earth was there, and the very first point of faith is that His claim should be paramount; he was not even to go and first bury his father. Christ first, and not even the burial of one’s father!

In the next chapter (1 Kings 20) — and on this I shall not dwell long — we are in the presence, for the most part, of the national place of Israel with their enemies, but yet we have the singular fact that even when judgment was approaching on the people, still when evil was judged, when the Lord was owned, He owns His people, a thing which people often wonder at. Look, for instance, at the religious world now. Well, does any one of us who understands the nature of the church of God doubt what God thinks of that which is going on under the name of

the Lord Jesus there? Does any one of us doubt how horrible is the system of clergy? I am not speaking of any particular body, but of all, for to me it makes no difference whether it is clergy of Rome or clergy of anything else. It is all the same principle, for it is the direct dishonour of the Holy Ghost, and yet, beloved friends, does not God own the preaching of His word and of His gospel there? I am never surprised if there should be, apparently, ten times more effect produced in that which is flagrantly contrary to God than in that which is according to Him, and I will tell you why. If you are come out to see wonders wrought and to see great things done you have made a great mistake; and if you are caught by such things you will fall into a serious error, and you will lose the place of blessing to which you are called. Do not be deceived; we are come out to the word of the Lord. We are come out to that Person that was sent down from heaven to represent the Lord Jesus Christ here, and it is no question of what results; it is no question of great things done. On the contrary, wherever anything on our part becomes great, or becomes an object, or becomes something for us, depend upon it there is something human in it undiscovered; there is something of nature that is unjudged — infallibly so. We are called to the despised One, we are called to the rejected One, and it is not merely so, but we are called out of what is broken or ruined, and anything that would gainsay the breach and the ruin is not true in the sight of God; and if so I say that unless our souls are prepared to cleave to the Spirit of God and the word of God, apart from all appearances, we are unworthy of the place that God has given us.

And therefore, shall one be jealous of the mighty grace of God working? I rejoice in it. Why, there are persons that get their thousands where we get our tens, and shall I not rejoice in these thousands that go to hear, even though it may be a most imperfect testimony — though it may be mixed with a great deal that is fleshly and contrary to God? Shall we not rejoice that God awakens souls and that souls are brought to Him; that there were hundreds converted, if there were hundreds, or that there were thousands converted, if there were thousands? Certainly, let God do it. We love to hear of it. So we find in this very case, because, after all, it is a great mercy in the midst of the ritualism and infidelity of the day, that there are persons, although they are hand in glove with ritualists and rationalists, yet who, for all that, are preaching Christ. Most miserable that they are obliged to own, perhaps, a rationalistic bishop, or a ritualistic one! But yet for all that, they are godly men, and they preach the gospel as far as they know the gospel, and are blest — often largely: I do not say deeply. You will never find the man in that state who has got, what I should call, solid peace. At least I have never seen one, and I have seen many; but I do say that, although you will not find a deep work in that state, you will find an extensive one, and that is exactly what I bless God for, because if it seemed to be deep it would not be true. You cannot have what is deep where things are false, but you may have a wide scattering of the seed and a great extent, apparently, of result from it, and you may have that which looks very fair, because there is nothing that keeps up weakness so much as great appearances. Well, that is the case there. And accordingly one can rejoice, and the more so because judgment is coming; and therefore that God should

gather out of what is going to be judged is what one delights in.

So it was here. The Lord had partially dealt with the evil in Israel. He had smitten down, and Ahab was there and had seen it, and these prophets had been destroyed by the mere prophet of God, Elijah himself, and God was free therefore to give an apparent blessing and a real blessing, as far as it went.

A most remarkable change takes place. Benhadad besieges Samaria, and God, by the direction of a prophet, sends out even the feeble part of the army, because there must be honour put upon that which is known — not the warriors, but the armour-bearers — and the Syrians are demolished, and they learn not that God was against them. No, it was "the god of the hills." They knew very well that Samaria was a hill, and Jerusalem was a hill, and they thought that the Jehovah God of Israel was only a god of the hills. Well, the next time they would go into the valleys and they would see whether the God of Israel was able to meet, them there; but the God of Israel was the God of the hills and of the valleys as much as of the hills; and there they are beaten more disastrously on the second occasion than on the first, for there was a challenge given by them and God answers, and they were overwhelmed.

Well, one might have thought to look at the outside, "What a good state Ahab was in now," or, "The children of Israel." Not at all. They are going to be thoroughly judged, but inasmuch as there was a measure of the outward holding of the true God — a measure of truth and of honesty — so far the king was a party. He was in the presence of the slaughter of the prophets of Baal.

God did, so far, grant this outward mercy from His hand. The enemies of Israel were utterly put to nought, and yet, for all that, there was no soundness in the king. And this became apparent from another circumstance deeply to be considered by us. When Ben-hadad now fled, a man that had been so bold and vaunting, his servants said unto him, “Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother. Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities which my father took from thy father I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.”

But God had seen and God had heard. “And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of Jehovah, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of Jehovah, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee.” And so it was. He found another man. He said the same. The man smote him and wounded

him. Now he could be a sign — a sign to king Ahab — and he goes. “And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.”

Mercy is not always of God. There are times when God’s honour is concerned, when mercy is a curse, when mercy is purely human and purely according to self-will, and the more deceitful because it seems so fair. There are times when to spare the enemy of the Lord is to fail entirely in meeting the Lord’s will and the Lord’s glory. And so it was now, and we too have to do with the very same principle; and let us look to it, beloved friends, that whenever the time comes to stand firm, though it may seem to be showing an unkindness though it may seem to be a rejecting those that would gladly avail themselves of mercy — on the contrary we are bound to be firm against that which overthrows the glory of the Lord. God only can show us when mercy is right, and when it is fatal. Ahab entirely failed the Lord, and this becomes most apparent in the next chapter, on which I

will not dwell in this lecture. The vineyard of Naboth becomes an object, and Ahab cowers before the difficulty even of that which he coveted. But the wife had none. Possessed of not one link of feeling with the people of God, an enemy, although the wife of the king of Israel — it was nothing to her to rob an Israelite. It was nothing to her to shed the blood of the guiltless. It was nothing to her to fly in the face of the Lord Jehovah, and what her weak and guilty husband shrank from she stimulates him to. Jezebel has therefore an undying, but a most miserable memory in the word of God, and the last book of Scripture does not fail still to bring before us the sad character and way of Jezebel for our instruction.

So Naboth perishes, but his blood was watched by the Lord, and the word comes forth, too, in consequence, through Elijah. “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of Jehovah. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every man child, and him that is shut up and left in, Israel, and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And

of Jezebel also spake Jehovah, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat" (1 Kings 21:18-24).

Nevertheless, Ahab humbled himself, and in consequence the judgment lingers, and the word of the Lord meets his trembling heart as he humbled himself and walked softly. The blow was only to fall in the days of his sons. Ahab reigns; his next son reigns too. On Jehoram it falls. The word of the Lord never fails. But for all that we find in the very next chapter that this same man is led away by false spirits, by evil prophets, and that he is slain according to the word of a true prophet of Jehovah, and the dogs do lick up his blood, and his son succeeds him. And then Jehoshaphat reigns, but the chapter does not end before we have another, and a most sorrowful, picture, for the pious king of Judah seeks an alliance with the guilty, idolatrous king of Israel. Oh, what a solemn warning this is for us, for it was not merely that the guilty man sought him, but he sought the guilty king of Israel. And what was the consequence? He becomes the servant of Israel's wicked purposes. Never does the king of Israel join in what was of God. You never can, by an alliance with what is unfaithful, raise or recover the unfaithful. The faithful man sinks to the level of the unfaithful, instead of lifting the unfaithful out of his infidelity.

I need not say more now. I commit the whole details of it as most profitable for every soul that respects and loves the word of the Lord.