Notes on 2 Kings

William Kelly

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2 Kings

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2 Kings 1, 2.

It has been already remarked that the mission, or, at any rate, the proper ministry of Elijah closed with his own complaint against the children of Israel. God took him at his word. He pleaded against, instead of for, Israel. Now he was called to a ministry of a judicial character, but it ought to have been in communion with all that were of God and for His name, and there was, so far, a want of entrance into the mind of God. There was the full, complete remnant of the people according to the election of grace. They were as nothing to Elijah, but they were very much to God. It is evident, therefore, that God and His servant were totally at issue, and, therefore, if such was the condition of the servant, he was virtually resigning his office. So God, from that very moment, taking him at his own word, appoints Elisha to succeed him. Yet, nevertheless, God did not take him away in anger. Far from it. On the contrary, though it was the lack of grace on behalf of the people of God which was surely offensive to the Lord in His servant the prophet, there was no lack of grace on God’s part. Elijah therefore remains, though by no means as before. There was a certain transition of position, before the Lord took him. But when he did take him it was with the highest honour that could be put upon man here upon earth — he was caught up to heaven without even passing through death.

The opening chapter then of this Second Book of Kings presents in a very striking manner the acting, if not the ministry, of the prophet — the proof that the power of God was still with him. For when the wicked king, now himself sick, sent to the power of evil to learn about himself, God answers him — not the enemy — God gives him a more speedy answer than he had looked for. To Elijah God communicates the fact, orders him to stop the messengers and to give that most solemn intelligence to the king that he was then lying on his death-bed, and should therefore by no means recover. It was not that the king was ignorant of Elijah, but he followed in the evil of his father, and, as his father was the open enemy of Elijah, he therefore counted him as his enemy. So the son in the very same footsteps walks after his father. Nevertheless, for this very reason, just as it was when God employed the daring of Pharaoh to manifest His glory, so it was now in Israel where it was come to this, that a large part — the greater part indeed — of the people of God was a sphere for the display of Jehovah's glory just because of their total departure from, and opposition to, His will. Consequently it bears this judicial character, for God was still dealing with His servant Elijah.

The messengers, then, arrested by the prophet, bring back the word of his coming death to the king, who soon finds out that it is none other than Elijah the Tishbite. He thereupon sends an officer with his company to take him. This was more easily said than done, and, in fact, brought an immediate judgment upon the heads of those that obeyed the king. We can understand that there are some who wonder at this. But it must never be forgotten that not even in Judah was it a mere monarchy, still less

in Israel, now that they were divided. The government of the kingdom of Israel was a theocracy. No doubt the king was the representative of God's power, but still it was a throne of Jehovah. When, therefore, a king set himself in defiance of Jehovah he must take the consequences. No person, for instance, bearing the Queen's commission, is entitled to order his men against the Queen, and the Queen is perfectly entitled to punish them. Their pleading the order of the officer has nothing to do with the matter. The officer has no commission against the Queen. If the men choose to follow their officer's command against the Queen's authority they need not be surprised at what must be the issue.

And so in fact the king of Israel was in direct rebellion against God. I make this remark of a general kind, because it is the key to what otherwise must seem a little surprising, and of which infidelity constantly makes a difficulty, that is, the summary judgment executed every now and then in Israel. The constitution in Israel was strictly the law, and the law knows nothing but death for rebellion against the authority of God. This necessarily belongs to the law, and it is simply man who denies the title of God to put man under law. Such a thought is worthy of an atheist, for grant the Being of God, the reality of God, and God's authority is clearly entitled to act thus, if He think fit for His own glory. But then when once this is allowed, it is seen that the kingdom of Israel differs from all other kingdoms, inasmuch as if these kingdoms pretend to be theocratic it is merely a delusion and a falsehood, whereas in Israel it is the fact. And all the effort of Satan was to make the Israelites and their king forget that it was a theocracy — forget the peculiarity of their place and of their calling.

In all other cases the pretension was a mere spurious thing, the cover of downright hypocrisy and tyranny; in Israel it was the simple truth. Now this clears away heaps of difficulty in Scripture, because then God's dealing, even in a manner so terrible as the prompting His servant to ask for fire from heaven to consume a captain and his men, because of the daring defiance against God, the God of Israel, is simply a necessary consequence of the position of Israel. Instead of being a difficulty, it is what must be, what ought to be. God would be giving up His own authority otherwise.

Just as no parent ought to allow his children to deny his authority in his own house, and no master ought to allow it in his servants, so it would be the greatest absurdity if God were to permit defiance of His own authority in those that took the place of being His people. The king, therefore, sending out word was nothing to the purpose, because the king of Israel was the servant of Jehovah. He was merely the highest servant then. No doubt he was the expression of the visible authority, but then that authority could not be used against God. There is a limit necessary to all authority, "until he come whose right it is" to reign. And there indeed is what gives the true meaning of the place of the king of Israel, and it just ends when one comes who is not only man but God, and who will reign not only as man but as God. There will be one Jehovah, and His name one, and He will reign over all the earth.

This then clears away, I trust, any difficulty to a believer, that can be found in the scene before us. And indeed I have made the remarks more general in order to take in many other difficulties, for after all we must remember, even if we come to the general principle of it, that God is

acting not in a close rigid way, but He is acting on the broad thought of His own plan with every man, woman, and child in the whole world. Because what is death if it be not an act of God's judging sin? And those who quarrel therefore with God's dealing with fifty men at a time forget that He is dealing with every person, and themselves among the rest, as objectors. I merely make this remark because people overlook the plainest facts before their eyes.

Another thing to which I would call your attention is this. Had there been compunction of heart and activity of conscience in the captains of these fifties, not one of them would have perished. We see that most clearly from the last captain and his company. He humbles himself, and the mercy of God flows out at once. We may be perfectly certain therefore that in the case of the others there was hardness of conscience and indifference. For there was not one of the captains — and I doubt not, not one of the fifties — that did not know the prophet Elijah, that had not the fullest testimony to his heart and conscience that that man was the most faithful representative of God's will and glory and power. If therefore men chose to bear the risk (and the object was great, the design was the injury, if not the death, of that very servant of God, and this, too, when God was acting on the grounds of righteousness and of law), they must take the consequences. It is plain that government by theocracy would be impossible if God did not reserve to Himself the right to punish, to impress upon others the necessity of obedience. In this scene, therefore, we have clearly that God still puts honour upon His servant. His proper ministry was closed, but in this there is no sign of one disgraced or one upon whom

God is heaping dishonour — not the slightest. And there cannot be a greater proof than this very fact in these closing scenes of Elijah, that when the leader of the last troop humbles himself before the prophet, the prophet goes down by the word of the Lord, for he at least, a servant, abides in obedience to God. He goes before the king and gives, to the king's face, what he little desired to hear — "On that bed thou must die!" "So he died, according to the word of Jehovah which Elijah had spoken."

But the next chapter (1 Kings 2) shows us the closing and final scene of Elijah. "And it came to pass when Jehovah would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah bath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said, As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, Knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As Jehovah liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha and said unto him, Knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on."

Elijah then tests the faith of Elisha. We find this constantly in Scripture. An easier path is presented. You may spare yourself the trouble. But where there is faith to see that it is but a test, the soul is prepared to go forward — understands the mind of God about it. It is impossible for any person to lay down rules as to such a matter. It was not by a rule that the cleansed Samaritan knew the mind of the Lord. Outwardly, the nine were following more literally what the Saviour said, but the cleansed Samaritan knew better. The letter, even of Scripture, is insufficient to guide the child of God. We need the Holy Ghost to give the word of God power "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." I grant you that the natural mind of man, taking up such a principle, would make terrible havoc of the word of God, but there is just the difference. The Spirit of God wielding the word makes it to be the sword of God; the mind of man dabbling with the word of God only reflects itself. Now in the present case it was clearly the test of Elisha's faith. If he was not prepared to go on with the prophet, he need not take so much trouble. His heart was thoroughly willing; he was about to gain a good degree, as it is said, in the faith in a little, for he that is faithful in little is faithful in much, and he that not merely was called and knew that the prophet's mantle was cast around him, and understood by that significant token that he was to succeed Elijah here below — that same prophet looks for more and he receives more.

"According to thy faith be it done unto thee." He waits. He well understood that the time was not come to fulfil his office. He looks for more. The sons of the prophets gave no intelligence; they were indeed but intruders. They would have liked him to occupy his mind with their

information. Elisha told them to hold their peace. His heart was elsewhere — it was with Elijah, and these great things that were in store for him that day. Nothing would suffer from the prophet. So Elijah said to him, “Tarry I pray thee here.” He bade him remain in Bethel, and Bethel was a place of great note in Israel. And Jericho was a place, I will not say of note, but marked with a curse, and God would not allow His curse to slumber any more than His blessing. But Elisha would go on with Elijah.

Now they come to Jordan. “As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. And fifty men, the sons of the prophets, went and stood afar off.” They did not go on; they were arrested by the difficulties; but “they two,” the two that were as one, so to speak, stood by Jordan. “And Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee.” They had gone down through the great and well-known sign of death — not now passing through death to enter into the land, but passing through death for one of them at least. And this becomes an epoch that gives its proper character to the prophet. He was right. Not merely his own mind, but a spiritual instinct of the Holy Ghost gave him to look for a higher degree still. He goes on, and now he is on the very eve of it. Elijah puts the question, “Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” Not a double portion as compared with Elijah’s, but a double portion as

compared with any other as a successor of Elijah. A double portion was the firstborn's portion. He asked for this, for the firstborn's portion. "And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing, nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."

Now came the moment to decide whether faith in this case was to have her commensurate blessing. "And it came to pass as they still went on, and talked, that behold there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Elijah was in fact a man with a heart and tongue of fire, if I may say so, and all his ministry was of this character — consuming and judicial, of all men most unsparing. But if Elisha was given to see him caught up in a chariot of fire, with horses of fire, and with a whirlwind mounting up to heaven, this new starting-point of Elisha's becomes of importance. For heaven is not the place of fire. There may be exceptionally the bursting out of consuming judgments of God, but heaven, I repeat, normally is not the place of fire, but rather of love, of peace, of divine glory, of rest and peace, unbroken by sin. And Elisha accordingly was to have his ministry characterized by these very qualities.

We shall find him, therefore, instead of being a mere repetition of his fiery predecessor, a most suited successor, and one, in divine wisdom, given to meet the exigencies of God's glory in Israel. But Elisha has another character, for although righteousness be of God, righteousness is not all that is in God. And indeed if we look at God's attributes, righteousness is not the highest, although it is that which God can never

sacrifice. But, nevertheless, if we are to speak of attributes, grace is surely of a higher character, and as the heavens are higher than the earth, so surely is the earth the place where righteousness must govern, and heaven is the place where grace must govern. And Elisha therefore becomes not merely what he began, but he became also the witness of grace; and it is not therefore merely as Elijah, for he starts just like the apostles themselves, who received once their commission in the land of Israel, and then went forth bearing the solemn message and wiping the dust from off their feet against those who rejected them as witnesses. But those apostles received another appointment of a higher ministry which that same Lord Jesus that sent them through the earth sent them from the heavens — Himself ascending up there.

So it was with this beautiful witness to the truth of God, and almost, I must add, to the grace of God. “Elijah saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.” The double portion would be most surely his. “And he saw him no more; and he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces.” But it is added, and most strikingly, “He took up also the mantle of Elijah” — not merely flung it across his shoulders. Now it was his own, now it was perfectly his own, now there was the fullest confirmation of his place; and I repeat again, not merely as of a judging prophet on earth, but of a raptured prophet that had gone up to heaven. “He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan.” and now came the test, whether in truth the double portion did rest upon Elisha. “And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters

and said, Where is Jehovah God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters they parted hither and thither; and Elisha went over."

Elisha was the true and God-given successor of Elijah, but not after the same sort; for God does not repeat Himself. The God with whom we have to do is a living God, and the God that sent Elijah was now sending Elisha for another work and of a different character, and this it will be my object to open a little tonight — to show how the Spirit of God brings out this new ministry. For now Elisha has been waiting, just as Elijah himself had waited. There was this pause, and we can see the great purpose. For undoubtedly had Elisha gone forward before, we have no reason to believe that there would have been any such character to his ministry. He waited, and he waited to prove that it is not always those that are the quickest to go forward in a work of the Lord that have, and bear, and produce, the best fruits. By no means. But those who know what it is to wait a little while that the Lord may deal with them before they are competent to deal with others, and also at the particular season.

And here we find how truly his waiting upon the Lord had this result. "And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho saw him they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master." Were these the men that could give information to Elisha? These same men now propose, and this proves how poor even the son of a prophet may be when he no longer speaks the word of

the Lord, that they should seek Elijah, “Lest peradventure the Spirit of Jehovah hath taken him up and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send.” That is, he first deals with them according to wisdom. In the next place, if they will be foolish, let them prove their folly. “They sent, therefore, fifty men, and they sought three days but found him not. And when they came again to him (for he tarried at Jericho), he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not.”

But now we begin to see in the next instance recorded the peculiar action of the prophet Elisha. “And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground is barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruise and put salt therein.” When God brought out the place of our Lord above, He brought out further all that was suitable to a new creation. When souls know that which is the truth of God and our Lord Jesus, and consciously look up to Him, we know that they belong to Him. When God was dealing by the law it was always the old creation. When the Lord Jesus took His place on high after the accomplishment of redemption, the new creation surely came in. And this we see most completely in the doctrine of the apostle Paul. Here we have as far as a sign or a token can be, the new cruise, as just the sign of this new creation in the mind of God. And the application of this is the place of a curse. Now if there was a spot in the Holy Land that was under a curse, it was Jericho. Every one knows that who reads his Bible. Jericho accordingly is the spot to

which the prophet directs this new cruise with salt put in to be brought.

“And he went forth unto the spring of the waters” — and so was dealing with the fountainhead — “and cast the salt in there and said, Thus saith Jehovah, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more dearth or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.’’ “Can anything more distinctly show that here we have to do with a new character of action. There is no longer the death-bed judgment of Jehovah, administered according to the word of the prophet. Here we have the power of sin and the power of evil, and according to the purpose of God, the new creation, for undoubtedly this new cruise with the salt therein is the type of it. Jericho is a sample of that which will be done universally by the Lord Jesus Christ in the day of His appearing. He means to reconcile all things unto Himself. It might be but a little here, but it is the sample of a very great result. “So the waters were healed according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.”

And thence he goes up, not to the place which was under the curse, and where he brings in a divine power of blessing and healing, but, to Bethel. Bethel was not under the curse, but it was under the burden of corruption. It is the place where God had caused the pledge and promise of His faithful care to be given to one that needed it, to one that was under circumstances of the greatest possible distress — forlorn, obliged to flee from the house of his father and mother, with a deadly burning hatred of his brother against him. There it was that Jacob has a vision of God, and there it was that God plighted His word for ever. There it was that

there was the house of God, that there was the gate of heaven opened to the slumbering Jacob, and there it was too that God made good, in after days, the purpose that was to be broken alas! by the unfaithfulness of man. But there Satan had so gained over the hearts of Israel that they had lifted up their calf-god and there they had insulted the God of Israel to His face. It was here that the prophet came, not to challenge, not to make of it another Gomorrah, not to bring down the calf worshippers and slay them, but here Elisha came, for it is Elisha with a heavenly vision. And yet for all that, it is remarkable — it is one of the great exceptions of the prophet, that although he had this heavenly vision, woe be to the man that slights him; for the returning Lord Jesus Christ is the moral judge upon the earth — His severest judgments will be from heaven.

That which will deal with the last mockers is given here in a little way, if I may so speak. Here there were those that insulted the prophet. It might be only little children, but little children often let out what their parents mean. How often you may know what goes wrong at home by that which little children say. And so it was with these little ones that mocked Elisha, and said, “Go up, thou bald head! Go up, thou bald head!” Now it was mockery that filled the land; there is no question of it. Elijah had gone up, and it was as good as telling him that he had better follow; — that Elisha had better take the same route as Elijah. No doubt it would have been a relief to the carnal and the worldly and the idolatrous and the wicked generally in the land of Israel were there no Elijahs and no Elishas. It was therefore the taunt of unbelief, for if men had seriously realized that Elijah had gone up to heaven, and that Elisha was one that was

here upon earth doing the will of God, neither the little children nor their parents would have so uttered their evil thoughts and feelings against the Lord. And so it was. And here again we have the same solemn thing, only in an exceptional way, with Elisha — we have judgment accompanying the heavenly testimony.

The very same thing we find in St. Paul. It is not only that Peter tells of the day of the Lord, but there is judgment, and necessarily judgment executed by the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth. These little ones then who so spake “he cursed in the name of Jehovah. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.” Heaven is by no means the ordinary place from which judgment comes. Throughout the millennial reign heaven will be the source of countless comforts and blessings in a richer measure than the world has ever tasted before. So we find in Elisha a further illustration.

2 Kings 3 - 9.

However, the next chapter (2 Kings 3) brings us at once into earthly circumstances. “Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah.” There was no doubt a painful state of things most offensive to God. Not that the king of Judah was not pious, but that his testimony was ruined by his alliance with the kingdom of Israel. Accordingly, then, we find there is great weakness here, though God deals in nothing but tender mercy and goodness. The king of Moab provokes a rebellion against the king of Israel, and Jehoram goes

to put it down. He calls upon Jehoshaphat to fulfil his treaty obligations, and, with the king of Edom, goes against the refractory king of Moab. But they come into difficulties. They are in danger of being themselves overthrown.

“Alas!” said the king of Moab, after they had been for some time without water and food for the cattle — “alas! that Jehovah hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.” Jehoshaphat knew better. “Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah,” says he, “that we may enquire of Jehovah by him?” And one of them tells him of Elisha. Jehoshaphat at once recognized him. He knows that the word of Jehovah is with him. So they go down to him; and Elisha says to the king of Israel, “What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay; for Jehovah hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab.” False confidence soon yields to real despair, but faith can be calm and wait upon God. “And Elisha said, As Jehovah liveth before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.”

There is no doubt in this a rebuke, and a stern one, but we shall find that the action of the prophet is full of grace. “But now bring me a minstrel.” He felt, as it were, that he was out of tune with his proper ministry. The presence of the wicked king had disturbed the heavenly tone of his soul. “Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Jehovah came upon him. And he said, Thus saith Jehovah, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith

Jehovah, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye and your cattle and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of Jehovah; he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." Thus an answer of mercy comes instead of judgment. "And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that behold there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." This very thing misleads the Moabites, for they fancy it is blood. "And they rose up early in the morning and the sun shone upon the waters, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood" — for God was pleased that so it should appear. "And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now therefore Moab to the spoil." They were caught in their own trap. "But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rode up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them; but they went forward smiting the Moabites even in their country. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kirharaseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about and smote it. And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom; but they could not." The defeat not only was immediate but hopeless, so much so that the king was guilty of an act that filled the people of Edom with indignation against Israel. "For he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel, and they departed

from him.” This then was another signal manifestation of the mercy that God had caused to shine through Elisha.

But we find further in the next chapter (2 Kings 4), and in a very beautiful way — not in these outward events that the world calls great, but in that which in my judgment is a still more blessed pledge, a witness of the real greatness of God. The greatness of God is far more shown in His care for souls, for individuals and in his ability to think of the least want and of the least necessity of His people. “Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear Jehovah; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons as bondmen.” Elisha asked her what she wished him to do, and what she had in the house. “And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.” Now it is according to what we can receive that God loves to bless us. “Go, borrow thee,” says he, “vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.” It is only so that the blessing stays. There never can be a stay to the blessing as long as there is a heart ready to receive it. What a remarkable illustration! “Then she came and told

the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt."

But this is not all. There is no doubt the rich supply of that which is the well-known type too, of what is essential — of the Spirit. But further, "It fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman" — that is, a person of consequence — "and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread" — for Elisha was not as Elijah. Elijah was more after the pattern of John the Baptist — who repelled the advances of men; who rebuked, if he came across those who were in exalted station but living to dishonour God. Elisha, on the contrary, was a witness of grace, and he therefore does not turn away from the habitations of men into the desert, but could, as we see, pass in to eat bread with this Shunammite. "And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

So on one day that he was there, he bethought him of a return of love for the love that was shown to him. And he called the Shunammite, and when she stood before him, he said unto her, "Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care — what is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host?" We can hardly conceive such an enquiry from Elijah; it was perfectly in keeping with Elisha; and I am anxious to bring out strongly the contrast between this twofold ministry. "And she answered, I dwell among

mine own people”; she was right, she was content; and godliness with contentment is great gain. “He said to Gehazi, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid” — but so it was according to the word of the prophet.

Yet in this world, even the mercies and the gifts of God are not without deep trial, and so it was that the Shunammite’s son — for the more that he was loved and valued as the gift of God, most especially by his mother, sorrow was her portion — was taken sick, comes home to his mother and dies. “And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door upon him and went out. And she called unto her husband and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God and come again.” The husband little knowing what was the matter, wonders, but the point is yielded, and she sets out and comes in full haste to mount Carmel. And the man of God seeing her afar off, remarks upon it to his servant Gehazi. And when she came to him she caught him by the feet, so that the servant wished to repel her. But the prophet knew right well that there was some worthy cause for an action so peculiar. “Her soul is vexed within her,” said he most surely, “and Jehovah hath hid it from me” — even the one that was the witness of grace none the less. “Then she said, Did I desire a son, O my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?”

He understands. He says to Gehazi, “Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand and go thy way.” He was to go peremptorily, heeding no one, saluting no one. He had his mission to lay the prophet’s staff upon the face of the child. This would not satisfy the faith of the mother. The staff would not do. The prophet, and nothing else than the prophet, must go. She said, “As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose and followed her.”

So here again was another test of faith, and she was right. “And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the, child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Yes, she was right. “Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto Jehovah. And he went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.”

All the world might have done it in vain. God was pleased so to draw out the mind and heart of the prophet. It was not merely to be a cold request or even an earnest one. It showed in the most vivid manner that God had an interest in the prophet and answers faith. “Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up and stretched himself upon him; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in

and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out."

Here then was not merely the gracious reply of what was good, but the power that was superior to evil, in its form most terrible to man upon the earth, superior to death. And this too in perfect grace. It was not that the Shunammite had asked him for the blessing, for it was he who had sought to give the blessing. But at the same time God wrought in her heart to expect another, and she was not disappointed.

Yet it was not merely in this way; for now we find a dearth in the land. And the sons of the prophets were there. "And as they were seething pottage, one of them put in some wild gourds, which were poisonous. So they poured out for the men to eat, and it came to pass as they were eating of the pottage that they cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot." It is the same character of gracious power.

Further, another thing — it was unselfishly gracious; for when the prophet was presented with twenty loaves of barley and full ears of corn in the husks thereof, he says again, "Give unto the people that they may eat." We remember the remarkable difference in the case of Elijah, who tested the faith of the poor widow by asking first for himself. Not but what he knew the power that would meet her need, but still he tested her after so severe a sort. But in this case, thoroughly characteristic of Elisha's ministry, what is sent to him, he gives to others. And his servant, astonished, asked him, "What,

should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat, for thus saith Jehovah, They shall eat and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat and left thereof, according to the word of Jehovah." There is no stinting with God. But it is not merely in the midst of the distressed, and the mourning, and the needy, and the dying, or dead, of God's people. The grace of God, when once it begins to flow, breaks over all boundaries.

And this is what we learn in the chapter that now follows (2 Kings 5) and that we have authority from God to interpret it so, can be easily shown. Our Lord Himself shows that the very essence of the teaching of this chapter is the grace that went out sovereignly to visit the Gentiles. There were many lepers in Israel, but it was not there that grace worked. If grace works it will prove its own character, it will prove its own sovereignty, it will prove its own wisdom. God was looking for the neediest where He could be least expected — where there was evidently no claim upon Him. Naaman the Syrian, commander in chief of the most powerful Gentile army opposed to Israel, was the one that God was pleased to visit with His mercy and in a manner altogether peculiar, and most encouraging. A little maid of Israel, a little captive maid, becomes the instrument of making it known. But the king of Israel's own powerlessness comes out, for he knew right well that it was not in man to cure leprosy; it was one of the things that God kept in His own power. However, here was exactly the opportunity of the prophet.

I have already referred to the fact, and it is even more remarkable in Elisha's case than in Elijah's, that it is more in deed than in word that we find these two

prophets manifesting God. Acts may be as prophetic as words, and their acts were so. We are entitled therefore to give them the fullest meaning they can bear — a meaning, of course, guided by scripture elsewhere; for we must bear in mind that symbolic language is just as precise as the ordinary language of every day, and I should say rather more so. It is not everyone that can understand it so easily, but when the heart gets accustomed to the language of the book of God, it is not found so very difficult. There must, of course, be the hearing ear and the attentive heart; but I say again that the symbols of scripture are as fixed in their meaning as the plain language of it.

Now, in this case, we have the Gentile coming to the prophet, and he comes as Gentiles will do, very full of their own thoughts and their own expectations. But the heart must prove its own utter ignorance and folly; it is only so that the full blessing may come. However, to Jordan he must go. His own rivers would not suit just because they were his own. The river of God — that is the river for the leper. And there he goes down into the waters of death, for such is the meaning of Jordan — not merely for the Jew to enter in, but for the Gentile by grace to receive the full blessing of God. And this, too, when Israel had utterly departed from the living God, and was under a cloud. This chapter puts it very strongly, for I have no doubt that guilty, covetous and unbelieving, is as rightly descriptive of the state of Israel now as then.

Naaman was of the Gentile race; but, alas! the Jew is accursed with the leprosy from which the Gentile is delivered. And such was the state, not merely without a blessing, but under a judicial curse from God. The

Gentile then is delivered, and we see the beautiful picture of a man not only set free, but with conscience active because he was set free. I do not say that he was all right; it is in vain to expect that all at once, but he was on the right road. And beautiful it is, beloved friends, to learn the lesson — I think we all need it sometimes — not to hurry souls, and not to be anxious to form them according to our own mould or our own measure.

Thus we see, though the prophet could have answered at once as to the difficulty that Naaman presented, he leaves him in the hands of God. He had done that which ought well to awaken and exercise the conscience of the Gentile. He would rather leave him than give him premature knowledge. There is nothing that often more stifles the divine life. When people want to use their little well they should be disciplined in the right use of the little they know already. This was the case then with Naaman. Gehazi, alas! Disappears: he has gone out from the presence of God as Israel is now, as it were, gone out from God's presence.

In the next scene (2 Kings 6) we have Elisha still in the same career of grace. The sons of the prophets find the place where they dwell is too strait for them, and they say, "Let us go to Jordan," and there they take beams, and so on, for the construction of their large dwellings. "But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water. And he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed."

Now here again we see the same thing. It is not reprimand. No doubt there was carelessness, but it is the grace that can meet every need, the little just as

much as the great. And I do not hesitate to say that true greatness shows itself in its capacity to take in the little. “And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim. Therefore, said he, Take it up to thee; and he put out his hand and took it.”

In what follows we have what is on a totally different scale, that is, the deliverance that appears from the enemy. Elisha’s servant was alarmed, but the prophet prays for him. The film is removed from his eyes, and he sees how true is the word that more were on their side than on that of their adversaries. Elisha’s prayer then is answered by the Lord and the mountain was seen to be full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. “And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto Jehovah and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness.” But then there is all the difference even between this act and Elijah’s. Where Elijah sends anything of the sort, he leaves them to it. When Elisha seems to depart for a season from grace, it is only to show the fuller grace in the end — just like our Lord, who, when appearing to be deaf to the Syro-Phenician’s request, only meant to send her away with a greater blessing, and a deeper sense of the Lord’s goodness.

So now, Elisha leads these very, blinded, men into Samaria, into the city which least of all they would have wished so to enter. They were helpless prisoners — so much so that the king of Israel wants to smite them; but the prophet stays his hand. “My father, shall I smite them?” “Thou shalt not smite them. Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them that

they may eat and drink and go to their master." And what was the effect? "The bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel. To have smitten them would have only provoked another campaign. To have smitten them with blindness and to have restored their sight, and then to have fed them with bread and water in the very heart of the enemy's land, brought the immediate surrounding of the power of God so impressively before their eyes that the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel. It was no doubt a most effectual blow, but it was a blow of mercy and not of judgment.

What next follows I may be brief upon. We are all more or less familiar, no doubt, with the great famine in Samaria, and how the Lord changed everything, and changed so surprisingly, and by such simple means. The distress was excessive. The king of Israel was most helpless, and all was in confusion. "And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If Jehovah do not help thee whence shall I help thee?" "And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son and did eat him; and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son that we may eat him, and she hath hid her son." No wonder that the king rent his clothes, and wore sackcloth; but there was no fear of God — on the contrary, there was a murderous intent against the prophet of God.

The blame was laid upon him. "But Elisha sat in his house and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him; but ere the messengers came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer" (for indeed he was) "hath sent to take away

mine head.” But there is no fire that comes down from heaven to consume him — quite the contrary. He said, “Behold this evil is of Jehovah; what should I wait for Jehovah any longer.” There was no fear of God before the king’s eyes. There was no confidence in God; and the fear of, and confidence in, God go together.

Now what does Elisha say? “Hear ye the word of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.” There was to be then the utmost abundance, and that, too, the very next day, where there was this most excessive famine even to the eating of poor little children. We can understand how that unbelieving lord should challenge the word of the prophet and say, “Behold, if Jehovah would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” He did not expect that God was listening, and that God was answering, for his prophet instantly replies, “Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.” And so it was.

Then we have details of the four lepers brought before us, and the fleeing away of the Syrians, and the abundance that was left behind, and the way in which they themselves had found the mercy of God meeting them in their distress. They became the heralds of it to others that were only less distressed than themselves. Thus was the word accomplished, and there was abundance of food for the people. The word was fulfilled to the letter, but not yet was the ministry of Elisha exhausted.

For in the next chapter (2 Kings 8) he goes and says to the woman whose son he had restored to life, “Arise, and

go thou and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn." What was he going to do? To inflict a famine upon the land? Nay. We do not hear that it was he that prayed for it, but we do hear that it was he that warned this Shunammite, so that she should be preserved from the bitter consequences of the famine. It was an intervention of grace and not an execution of judgment. The Shunammite woman is told to go where she can. "It shall come upon the land," says he, "for seven years. And the woman arose and did after the saying of the man of God. And she went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years." And when the full time of dearth was passed, this woman returned.

Can one doubt that as Gehazi represents Israel in their unbelief, and the solemn judgment of God upon them, because of it, and that too when the Gentile receives the blessing (for nothing more irritated Israel, as we see in the New Testament, than the Gentile receiving such a blessing of God), so here we find this woman is the sign of the return of Israel after the long period. The full term of famine has passed over the land once favoured of God, but now given up to the miserable curse. She returns again, then, out of the land of the Philistines, and she comes and cries to the king for her house and land. And the king was talking at that very moment with Gehazi (or what remained of this miserable man) of the wonders he had once seen, but no longer had an active personal interest in. And this is all that poor Israel can do. This is all that Gehazi does in the courts of the king.

So the Jew may talk of his traditional glory, but he has got none now. All that he can have now is to his shame. He is a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the

earth. No matter what he may be, such is an Israelite now. He is under the very badge of shame. He carries on his brow his sentence as a wanderer and a leper before God. But there are bright hopes for Israel, and to Israel they will surely come. Not to this generation — the generation that cast out the Lord and has continued in its unbelief — it will still come under the desperate judgments of God. But there is a generation to come. I believe therefore that as Gehazi is the type of this generation, the woman now returning after the seven years is the type of the generation to come. And she has all restored to her, and the fruits of the field. She not merely enters upon her land intact, but all that she should have had during the long seven years is all given back; for the Lord will repay with interest all that is due to Israel. And what will He not count due when He is pleased to take up the cause of His ancient people? Thus, then, we have Elisha still in the activity of grace.

And he comes to Damascus, and there he acts more strictly as a prophet than we have usually seen him, though I do not doubt that all was prophetic. All his actions were prophetic, as I have been endeavouring a little to show you here. And Elisha tells Hazael, in answer to the request of the king of Syria, that his master was to die, but that there was no necessity that he should die. Alas! he was to die by the treacherous hand of man; and the man was there. It was none other than this Hazael. Elisha said to him, “Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover; howbeit Jehovah hath showed me that he shall surely die.” This was a riddle. “And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed.” For deep thoughts passed in the prophet’s mind as he looked upon the face of the murderer — the

murderer in prospect. “And the man of God wept.” Well he might as he thought of such ways upon earth. “And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. And Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, Jehovah hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.” And so it came to pass. And the chapter pursues the public events of the kingdom, on which I need not dwell more than just to finish the story of Elisha.

But in 2 Kings 9, Elisha again is found. “He called one of the children of the prophets and said unto him, Gird up thy loins and take this box of oil in thine hand and go to Ramoth Gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi and go in and make him arise up from among his brethren.” And so it was done. The young man went and anointed him for his work. He gives him his terrible commission, and Jehu does not fail of accomplishing it — the commission of destroying, cutting off from Ahab every male. “And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel,” — the portion of sin, of covetousness and blood. But here I must close for the present.

2 Kings 9.

We now enter upon the solemn stroke of judgment which it pleased God to execute at this time; first, within Israel, and at the hands either of men raised up in their midst, or from without, until at last it pleased God to

sweep away the ten tribes from the land of their inheritance. An evil time may be one when God is pleased in His government to employ the rough instrument; and this is one principle of God's ways in His government that we do well to consider. God's employment of a man is by no means the seal of God's approval of his person. We see it in the case before us. Jehu was a man in whom God had no complacency, nor could He have. For there is one feature that belongs to the family of faith, without which there is no communion with God. This is shown from the very beginning of life in the soul, and that is, repentance toward God. And Jehu had not this. Whatever might be his zeal, and whatever, too, the righteousness, to a certain extent, of his action according to the sovereign will of God, he had no brokenness of spirit. He had never measured himself in the presence of God, and repentance is distinguished by this above all others, that whereas faith may be the perception of the truth, as no doubt it is, still it is not a mere mental one; for the door of all blessing to the soul is the conscience, and the Spirit of God awakening the conscience. Unless light enter by that door it cannot be trusted, and the way in which the entrance of the light acts is not merely to give the perception of God's character in a way in which it has never been seen before, but it always shows itself in dealing with the soul of him that sees God.

Hence, you never can separate real faith from real repentance; and as the one is the eye open to see God as revealed in His own Son in a way in which He was never seen before — I am speaking now, of course, of the full Christian knowledge of God; the principle is the same all through, but still I use it now as applicable to our own

souls — I say that as faith is the eye that is open by the Holy Ghost to see God revealing Himself in Christ, so, along with that, the eye sees, spiritually, what it cannot naturally. It sees within as well as without; it sees backward as well as forward. It sees, not only the object of faith which God has presented, but, along with that, it invariably sees ourselves; and this is very often the way in which you will detect a faith that is not of God, because it is quite within the capacity of the human spirit to take a great deal of truth, and a person may be zealous for the truth, too — orthodox after a sort — as the apostle Paul speaks in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans of the unrighteousness of them that hold the truth in unrighteousness. And the word is particularly emphatic. It is not merely those that hold the truth loosely; they may be very tenacious, they may be exceedingly keen for points of dogma. And this is supposed in that place. It is persons that hold firm and fast the truth, but what is the good of it if it is held in unrighteousness? Hence, therefore, they come under a more than ordinary judgment of God. Unrighteousness anywhere is evil, but specially where the truth is held ever so fast in unrighteousness is it abomination. And, sorrowful to say, so it is always where the testimony of God is found. It was so in Israel, for they had the truth in a way that the Gentiles had not; and Christendom now has the truth in a way in which Israel had not. Hence, therefore, the apostle brings in the word as a most solemn warning, not merely as descriptive of what was already a past thing, but a solemn hint of that which was coming to pass.

Now Jehu was one of those. He had a perception of the truth to a certain extent. He had a horror of Baal, but he

had no true care for God, and he proved it by this, that he had no brokenness of spirit, no conscience, therefore, towards God as to his own faith. Quick as lightning to see the failures of others and to judge them, particularly where their judgment would be for his own interest, Jehu drove furiously through all the Baal worship of Israel. This is the man that God was pleased to use for His execution of judgment in that day. Far different was the spirit of Elisha, but Elisha would accomplish the purposes of God, and therefore directs the young man, the prophet, to take the oil, for doubtless there might have been a hesitation. God gave spiritual judgment, if to any man, to His prophets, and there may well, therefore, have been hesitation both on the part of Elisha to send, and to the young man to be sent, upon such an errand. But there is one thing which answers all questions — the will of God. God does all things wisely, all things righteously; and there is a suitability, too, when we come to think of the matter, that so very unlovely an instrument should be employed for so unlovely a work. Jehu, at any rate, is singled out and has his bloody commission entrusted to him. He was to deal with the whole house of Ahab; he was to cut off every male, he was to make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. He was to deal even with Jezebel, so that the dogs should eat of her in Jezreel, and there should be none to bury her. We shall see how punctually all was fulfilled according to the word of God.

Jehu then comes forth, and the captains asked in astonishment what had he to do with that “mad fellow” (2 Kings 9:11) — a word we do well to consider — for so a prophet appeared! a true prophet of Jehovah! This was his appearance to the eye of the men of the

world — a mad fellow. The world was just the same in Israel that it was afterwards in the days of the apostles, who were set forth, as the apostle so touchingly says, alas, as the off-scouring of all men! So they were regarded then. And, beloved friends, bear with me if I remind every one that is here, so, more or less, the scorn and contempt of the world must be just in proportion to our entrance into the mind of God now. Be not deceived. I admit that there will be a change, but that change has not yet come. The world is the same unchanged world now — the circumstances, no doubt, varied. The texture, the colour of them may be changed a little, but the material is the same — the real condition and relation to God just the same as before. I speak not of outward privileges, they are incomparably greater; I speak of the inner heart of the world. It is no better; if possible, worse. No doubt there will be a change, but that bright day is reserved for Jesus. He that suffered must have the glory. Till then we must be content to suffer with Christ.

We see the spirit of it in this prophet; in the contemptuous expression “of these captains about a messenger of God. Jehu answers, “Ye know the man and his communication.” They were well known outwardly; how little inwardly! They said, “It is false; tell us now.” He tells it plainly out. Jehu was not a man to keep a secret. “Then they hasted, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king.” The very men that despised the prophet were well disposed to act upon the prophecy. Such is the spirit of man. The reason is evident: it suited their ambition, and, further, it made what even they could not but feel in conscience — for

man has a conscience whatever may be the wickedness of his life — and they were well aware that what was now going on, both in Judah and in Israel, was utterly contrary to God. Although they had no feeling for God's glory, they could have contempt for false appearances, and, also, their spirit rose against the unrighteousness which was now enthroned in the throne — doubly enthroned.

So then they at once proclaim Jehu king at the word even of him that they had just branded as "that mad fellow." And Jehu begins to act then against his master: he had now God's authority for it. The God that had raised up the king was perfectly entitled to cast him down. Jehu, therefore, was thoroughly right in acting upon the anointing of the prophet. And it is remarkable that Jehu is the only one of these many successors that, one after another, overturned the kingdom in Israel — the only one that was anointed. In Judah the anointing was sanctioned of the Lord, no doubt, and we have no reason to suppose that it was not always acted upon, but not so in Israel. In Jehu's case it was. Jehu required this extraordinary act of the prophet to enable him to go forward, and to give him confidence, as well as other people about him. God was pleased so to invest him.

So king Joram was now returning to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, and Jehu at once proposes to pay a visit to his master. "So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there." At this very time, sad to say, the king of Judah was there too, and here we find a very solemn fact in God's government — that if one who ought to be on the side of righteousness swerves from it into an unholy alliance with evil, he suffers according to the character

of the evil he joins, and not of the righteousness that he may have previously possessed. This seems very hard, and there are many that cannot understand that God could deal so with those that have a measure of righteousness; but the truth is, the more we examine the principle the more we see how just it is. A sin is a sin whoever commits it, but whose sin is the greatest? Surely sin in a christian is worse than sin in an ordinary man who has no Christianity. Sin is always measured by the privilege of him who commits it, and consequently in Israel God Himself showed these differences. The sin of the priest that was anointed had a totally different character from that of one of the people; and the sin of a ruler was not at all to be met in the same way as the sin of one of the common people. So God, in His own people, showed that there were these differences; but even when you leave the people of God it is just the same.

Now the king of Judah then, who ought to have been as the lamp of God in the darkness of that night — the king of Judah had chosen an evil association, for alas! the holy seed was polluted, and there was an alliance that boded evil that was now formed by the royal house. The king of Judah was in the company of the king of Israel. God permitted that they should be found together when the solemn moment came for judgment. The judgment must be shared by those who had sinned together. It was not only, therefore, Joram for whom, properly speaking, the blow was intended; it was not only upon him that it fell, but upon the king of Judah also.

The very same thing is true in the church of God. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. It is not merely that each particle requires to be leavened, but that that

which contains the leaven is pronounced upon by God. Doubtless, if the leaven is allowed to work its way it will actually corrupt the whole lump; but God acts, and so should Christians according to the principle of the thing, and not merely the bare fact which comes out before the world. So we find in the most serious matters. Take the lady, even, in the Second Epistle of John — she was responsible for the people she received. She might say that she was only a woman, and who was she to judge. Was it not a woman's place to be very unobtrusive? Yes, but it is a woman's place to be true, and, if she ought to be true to anybody, true to Christ above all. If she, therefore, received those who brought not the doctrine of Christ, her orthodoxy would be no shield. She is warned by the apostle that she became a partaker of their evil deeds. She may not have received the doctrine; it is not supposed that she had received the doctrine — in that case she would have shared their guilt. But she shared the punishment because she chose to identify the name of the Lord in her person with those that were His enemies. Thus you see this great principle is found true in every part of the word of God, though it comes out most stringently in the New Testament, and most of all where it is a question of Christ, and not merely an ordinary evil thing. Now this is most righteous, because of all evils none so bad as that which touches Christ — Christ, the spring of all that is good — the only means of deliverance. When His name is made a cover for evil, and for that which destroys, how great is that darkness!

Jehu then rides on, and as they come, a watchman spies them; and after a little while, although messenger after messenger is sent without returning, it seems evident that it must be Jehu. His driving betrayed him. So the

kings at last became disturbed, and Joram, wounded as he was, said, “Make ready,” and he “and Ahaziah, king of Judah, went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu?” He had his qualms. Well he might. “And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many? And Joram turned his hands and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sank down in his chariot.” But it did not end there, for while Jehu told his captain to take him up and cast him in the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, according to the word of Jehovah, judgment did not fail to overtake Ahaziah as he fled. Jehu followed after him and said, “Smite him also in his chariot,” and so he too dies at Megiddo. But this is not all. There remained a worse end for the one whose craft and violence had wrought such evil in Israel — Jezebel. She painted her face, she fled to her old artifices; but they were all vain to preserve her. The hour of her judgment was at hand. “And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace who slew his master?” But Jehu was not to be alarmed or turned away from the dread commission that God had given him. And he lifted up his face to the window and asked who was on his side, and when the eunuchs showed themselves he commanded them to throw her down, and her blood, as it is said, was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trod her under foot.

What is remarkable, too, is this. The will of man has but little to do with the accomplishment of the word of God, for Jehu, now in the fulness of his power, relents somewhat towards this wicked woman Jezebel; and although he does say, “Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king’s daughter” — well, what had God said? The prophet had said, “The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her.” Jehu had heard that word only a short time before, and he evidently showed that his intention was to fulfil his commission exactly; but how little man, good or bad, carries out the word of God. Now, apparently, the old sense of respect for one that was a queen — a king’s daughter — rises in his mind, and he says, “Bury her, for she is a king’s daughter.” But the word of God had spoken its own command before. And they went to bury her. Their purpose was to obey him. In vain. They found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again and told him, and he, convinced how mighty was the word of the Lord, said, “This is the word of Jehovah which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.” Thus had God accomplished it, and the blood of Naboth was avenged of the Lord most sternly. And the field was dearly bought, and wrested from the family. Had Naboth been slain? Had his sons failed to inherit? The king was slain too, and there is blood. So with the woman, the queen, who had stirred up her husband the king, and, further, the king’s son. In every part sin meets its punishment.

2 Kings 10.

But of this dreadful work all was not over, for Ahab had seventy sons (2 Kings 10). It seemed utterly beyond the scope of man's thought that such a family could fall — seventy sons. Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. Jehu has to deal with them, and he was just the man to do it without a feeling. So he sent to the elders of Samaria. Jezebel had written a letter to the elders on another errand — to dispossess Naboth of his inheritance. Most solemnly does God judge the deed now. Jehu writes a letter to the elders of Samaria that there might be a complete extermination of the seed of Ahab. "As soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your master's sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour, look even out the best and the meetest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house. But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand?" So he wrote a letter the second time, and now his full and true meaning became evident. "If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by tomorrow this time."

The deed was done. "It came to pass when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jezreel." And there they were found, and Jehu goes to vindicate the bloody deed. "It came to pass in the morning that he went out and stood, and said to all the people, Ye be righteous; behold, I conspired against my master and slew him, but who slew all these? Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of

the word of Jehovah which Jehovah spake concerning the house of Ahab; for Jehovah hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Thus the word of the Lord was most fully accomplished.

But Jehu was in the spirit of this unsparing vengeance, and as he goes there meets him the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah. They, too, were not a few. When he asked who they were, they answered, "We are the brethren of Ahaziah, and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen." How solemnly the hand of God was stretched out! Their father, brother of the king, had gone down with the king, and he had met his doom there. Now his brethren of the same seed royal had gone down to that house — evil communications corrupting good manners. They had "gone down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen. And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive and slew them at the pit of the shearing-house, even two and forty men." How plainly was the hand of God stretched out in judgment. "Neither left he any of them."

We see him next with Jehonadab, the son of Rechab. There was a certain measure of companionship between the two men, for Jehonadab was stern, according to his own principles, and Jehu, too, was carrying out in his way the work that he had been raised up of God for. But there was more than this in the mind of Jehu. It was not only the feeling of the need of judgment in the royal houses, but there was a worse evil against the name of Jehovah in Israel — the worship of Baal. To this, then, he

applies his skill. He proposes a grand feast of all the worshippers of Baal, gives himself out as if he were the patron of the worship, calls for all the worshippers and priests of Baal, and in the most careful manner looks that there shall be none of the worshippers of Jehovah among them. Accordingly all were gathered together into the same building, their hearts as elated as the hearts of those that clave to Jehovah must have fallen and sunk within them — that one so bloodthirsty and so determined was the apparent patron of Baal, and the enemy of Jehovah. But here, at least, Jehu could keep his own counsel. And Jehu brings into the house his soldiers, his captains, and men of war, and they smote them with the edge of the sword. “And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.”

So far although it might have seemed to be, and no doubt was, a most fearful evil — the utter dishonour of God — which Jehu had laid his hands upon, still we see how little the heart of the man was according to God. “Howbeit, from the sins which Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan.” There was a plague spot, and every unregenerate and unrenewed man manifests it. He that cares for the will of God will not care for this part of His will to the disparagement of that. And this is just exactly what the apostle James says so truly, that the man that fails in one point is guilty of all, because, if there were a conscience towards God, that one point would have its value. James is not speaking of a failure.

He is not speaking of a person who, desiring to do the will of God, breaks down through carelessness or levity. That alas! is the portion of every soul who is off his guard. What James speaks of is wilfulness and evil — wilfulness, though it may be only shown in one particular way. But such is not a soul that is born of God. No man that is born of God will give himself up deliberately and wilfully to sin, even though it may be in the least thing. He may have to mourn, he may have to be ashamed, he may have to judge himself and hate himself, but that very thing shows that it is not a thing done deliberately and systematically, and without conscience. On the contrary, where he fails he grieves over his failure before God.

Now James describes nothing of this kind, but the plain, positive and uncared-for infraction of the law of God. Here we see it in Jehu. Whatever might be the zeal of Jehu against the guilty king of Israel, the guilty king of Judah, and the worship of Baal, there was a reserve, there was an inner chamber of the heart that was not reached yet, and there was an idol there, and that idol was that old idolatry — the calves of gold. The reason is plain. Jehu cared for himself and not for God, and the golden calves were a political religion which it suited the policy of the ten tribes to maintain; for had the ten tribes had no calves of gold they had returned to the allegiance of Jehovah in Jerusalem. It was the grand means of having another centre, for had Jerusalem been the one centre for the ten tribes, as well as for the two, the twelve tribes of Israel had united, and had they united in worship of God they had united under the same king. But in order to make the breach, therefore, distinct and wide, and widening, between the two

kingdoms, Jeroboam, the founder of the kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, had devised this most crafty scheme. In order to make a kingdom he must make a religion, for if there be the dissolution of a common bond so important as religion, and if men's minds are divided in religion, you cannot count upon them in politics. That is just one of the great causes of political weakness in the present state of the world, for there is no such thing as cohesion, and consequently all political foundations are breaking in every land and tongue. So it was seen that it must be then. Jeroboam began this, and Jehu had no intention of giving it up. He dearly loved the kingdom; he dearly loved his place. He loved it better than God — the man not born of God. Hence, therefore, whatever might be his apparent zeal, it had its limits. Nay, further, it utterly failed, for the worship of the calves was still maintained by Jehu. Unbelief is never consistent. Faith may fail, but still faith desires consistency. Faith cannot be happy without consistency. Jehu had no conscience about it. Jehu took no care to walk in the law of the Jehovah God of Israel with all his heart, for he departed not from the sin of Jeroboam which made Israel to sin.

The consequence was that Jehovah pronounces upon him. His comparative fidelity would be met by God, and to the fourth generation there should sit upon the throne of Israel kings of Jehu's house. Israel had a short lived tenure given to it, but out of that tenure Jehu's house was to command for four generations. So God accomplished. But there was to be no real permanent line, for Jehu had shown no real conscience towards God. How different from David! David's heart was to build Jehovah a house, Jehovah must take the first place:

Jehovah would build David a house. He would give it to David's son to build Him a house. Thus it was then that God laid the foundation in that very thing of a permanent line of Judah not of Israel.

But we have here a remarkable instance of God's government. The fidelity of Jehu, as far as it went, brought him a measure of blessing in this world from God. Even a bad man, if faithful in certain things, may be owned by God, and God will never allow Himself to be the debtor of any man. Therefore if the faithfulness be only for the world, in the world the man will be paid. Jehu had no thought for eternity. In these days, then, Jehovah began to cut Israel short. It was plain that there could not be a blessing — a real true blessing. Jehu still pursuing the road of Jeroboam made it impossible; and this accordingly is the way in which his reign closes.

2 Kings 11 - 13.

But in the eleventh chapter we have another scene of deep import and interest. There is a wicked woman — and when a woman is wicked there is no wickedness like hers. "And when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose, and destroyed all the seed royal. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him (even him and his nurse) in the bed-chamber, from Athaliah, so that he was not slain" (2 Kings 11:1, 2).

We know what the love of a parent and of a grandparent is, but here in Athaliah was no right feeling. Her very blood was corrupted in her veins. And this wretched and selfish woman — this inheritress of the wickedness of

Jezebel, now, alas! in the line of Judah has the opportunity, as she thinks, to stamp out the royal line of Judah. Both the desire of dominion and the hatred of the purpose of God — wicked allies — strove together to accomplish this nefarious purpose. Had the line of Ahab been extinguished? Had Ahaziah and his brethren fallen? The guilty purpose rose in her heart to put an end to the seed-royal of Judah, as that of Israel had been already extinguished. What interest had she? How did she care for it? The word of God had distinctly assured them that the line of Judah should never go out — the only real line that has remained unbroken from the beginning, and will throughout eternity. I speak now for the earth — up to eternity at least, for even if we only look at the earth under the government of God, that line, and that line alone, so abides.

And yet there never was a line so slender: there never was a line that hung so often upon a single thread. Just contrast it with Israel. Think of seventy sons of one family! and, I will not say the promise, but the apparent moral certainty that that line must be perpetuated for ever! But no — it was put out in one day! Who could have thought of it beforehand? And this too in the royal city, and by the royal servants, Such is man; such is the world. The word of the Lord had said it. Oh! what foolishness is ours that could ever doubt a word of God! And what has God given us all this for, but that we may know that if that word stands in what is evil, how much more in what is good? If God accomplishes His threats to the letter, can His promises fail for an instant? I grant indeed that His promises continually seem to fail, just for the very purpose that our faith should not stand in appearances, but in the word of God. There would be no

faith about it if all seemed to be easy and flowing; but it is precisely the contrary. All appearance is against it, but God watches still. If it were only one feeble scion of that house, it was enough. It was a scion of that house, and that house stands for ever, because God has said it. And so we shall see in this chapter.

Athaliah then, Joash's own grandparent — the one that ought most of all, from her sense of her relationship, to have been the guardian of that one only descendant of herself, who had her own blood in his veins — this very Athaliah seeks to destroy the one last remaining scion of the house of David. Well, it seemed impossible! For think you that when she thought to kill the seed royal she forgot the little boy? Not she. She knew well about him. It is not for me to say how the thing was covered over — how it was that Jehosheba knew how to guard the child from the suspicions and the inquisition that would naturally follow for one that was rescued, for if there was a woman that was crafty in what was evil it was Athaliah. I suppose it is not too much to imagine that there may have been a little conspiracy upon this good Jehosheba's part, also on the other side. At any rate, I have no wish to say anything to her disparagement, but I do say that, whatever the means, God employed the purpose of her heart for the shelter of the child. He was hidden then, and hidden where none could have expected — in the temple. Such a state of things calls for no common screen for a royal child, and surely God was with the shelter that was given him. And although that temple was built for priests and not for a king in distress, still the grace of the Lord rises over all such merely ritual circumstances.

“And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guards, and brought them to him into the house of Jehovah, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of Jehovah.” Here again we see that mere ritualism cannot stand against what is moral — cannot stand against that which concerns the word of God in its accomplishment for him whom God had set over His people Israel. “He made a covenant with them and took an oath of them in the house of Jehovah, and showed them the king’s son.” The king’s son was but a little boy, but he was the lawful king of Israel — in fact only the king of Judah, but in title really of Israel. “And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing that ye shall do; a third part of you that enter in on the Sabbath shall even be keepers of the watch of the king’s house; and a third part shall be at the gate of Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard; so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down.”

All then is prepared. “And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the Sabbath, with them that should go out on the Sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David’s spears and shields, that were in the temple of Jehovah. And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, along by the altar and the temple. And he brought forth the king’s son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him

king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king."

Athaliah was not long without hearing the tumult. So she comes to the people and to the temple of Jehovah. A strange place for her, the hater of Jehovah and the patron of idolatry in its worst form! She comes, and looks, and behold, the king stood by a pillar. The king! And this was all that her murderous policy had led to and ended in. "The king stood by a pillar; as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets. And Athaliah rent her clothes and cried, Treason, treason;" The old voice — the voice of her mother, before her, and the voice too of her son after her, and now her own. But the truth was, it was she who was the traitor. It was she that had tried to blot out the king from the throne; and, accordingly, she meets with the just reward of a traitor, for "Jehoiada commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges; and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of Jehovah." There was no one to follow. She was alone, not alone in her evil, but now her evil had not one sympathizer. "So they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house; and there was she slain. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between Jehovah and the king and the people, that they should be Jehovah's people; between the king also and the people. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down." And thus the worship of Baal was dealt with in Judah, as it had been before in Israel.

“In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places” (2 Kings12). Nevertheless, as long as Jehoiada was there there was a measure of care outwardly for the things of God; and, as the priests had watched over Jehoash in his childhood, Jehoash now in his maturity watches over them and says to the priests, “All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of Jehovah, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man’s heart to bring into the house of Jehovah, let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance; and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house.” That is, instead of applying the contributions for the house of Jehovah they had applied them to themselves.

“Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? Now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house

of the Jehovah: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah." And so it was done: the work proceeded, Jehoiada watched over it, and the house of Jehovah was repaired.

But however this might be, the heart of Jehoash was not with the Lord, and the death of Jehoiada gave an occasion to display it. This, however, I need not dwell upon now. "In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days. And Jehoahaz besought Jehovah, and Jehovah hearkened unto him" (2 Kings 13). How gracious is the Lord! We see, alas! that the one who began so fair at last slips away from his original integrity. But we see that the man who hearkens and bows to the Lord is never without, at any rate, some measure of recognition on God's part. "And Jehovah gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as before-time. Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin."

But, after this, we find, "In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign," and he comes in contact with the prophet Elisha. This is a point that I wish to direct your attention

to for a moment. Joash comes down, and weeps over Elisha's face, and says, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" — the same words that Elisha himself had used when he saw the prophet going up to heaven — that is, he acknowledged him to be the strength of Israel. What makes it so touching is, that he was dying; all natural vigour was departing from him. But just as Elisha owned that the strength of Israel was not in horses or chariots, but that he was the one — that he was all their strength as far as God had employed him for that purpose — so here in the same way Joash the king of Israel owns the dying Elisha, and God owns the word. "And Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows; and he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow; and he put his hand upon it." But there was another and a mightier hand, although the hand of a dying man. "Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands," and God saw, and God gave the power, the needed power. "And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance." Truly dying Elisha was the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof; for God would show that the strength of his people does not lie in what man can see, but in the vigour that He himself imparts. "The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance," said he, "and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek till thou have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice and stayed."

Why did he stay? Did he not know what the prophet meant? Did he not apprehend the grace of God that was now at work? Why did he stay? Alas! a man never stays out the grace of God, even were it an Abraham who leaves off when he ought to go on! Yet the grace of God never fails of its purpose. Here, however, it was the judgment of God. The grace of God prevailed over the intercession of Abraham, for if Abraham dared not to ask for Sodom and Gomorrah to be spared for the sake of ten, and if God did better than simply spare the guilty cities for the sake of ten — if God delivered the one righteous man and delivered for the righteous man's sake more than one that were not righteous — if God's grace so abounded above the weakness of the interceding servant then, now in judgment God would hold strictly to the letter. Had he struck thrice to the ground with the arrows? Then thrice should the Syrians be smitten and no more. "And the man of God was wroth with him and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." Truly Elisha was the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.

2 Kings 13 - 17.

But not merely this. "Elisha died and they buried him" (2 Kings 13:20). Was not Elisha gone then? Not so. There was to be even a more glorious witness in his death than in his life. In his life, no doubt, he had witnessed; but — with what great toil and anxiety and pains! — stretching himself over the dead youth, he had breathed, and put his face upon the child's face; and so it was, laboriously and with effort in appearance, that God raised him up.

For God would show the magnitude of the deed that he was doing then, and although it was in no wise because of all the labour of the prophet, since God could have done it in an instant as truly at the beginning as at the end, yet still it was the way of God. But not so now. Even in death what a witness of the power of life, in Elisha, for, as we are told, “It came to pass as they were burying a man that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood upon his feet.” And so will Israel another day — not more truly that dead man then, than Israel by-and-by, when all seems forgotten and Israel as good as dead, and buried — in response to the prophets, in answer to that voice which will never be truly extinguished, though it may be forgotten or despised, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and the hand of the Lord had written it. And according to the prophets Israel will rise again.

They may be, as now they are politically, in the dust of the earth, but they will rise again. This is the portion of Israel. There are those who suppose that nations shall not rise. Alas! it is a common error. And there is no error more common in this day than the denying the resurrection of the body, but we know that the resurrection of the body is the most essential truth of God and the most sacred truth and the peculiar one of the gospel. For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not risen, and God’s testimony is denied, for God’s testimony is that He raised Christ from the dead which He has not done if the dead rise not. But contrariwise He raised Him up, and so the dead will be raised; and as the dead man here undoubtedly rises, so truly Israel will

rise again, and, in truth, it will be “life from the dead” for all the nations. Such is the clear voice of prophecy, and it will be accomplished.

But we find that Hazael still pursues his oppression. Such is the literal history; such is the fact, for the present; such it was then.

And then in the next chapter (2 Kings 14), whatever might be the measure of right, evil takes its way even in Judah. “And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hands, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father. But the children of the murderers he slew not; according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein Jehovah commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin. He slew of Edom, in the valley of salt, ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day.” Amaziah thus shows a measure of righteousness, but his heart becomes, at last, lifted up within him, and he challenges the king of Israel; and the solemn fact appears that God will never sanction the presumption of a righteous man, that God will rather take the part of the bad man who is challenged presumptuously than of the righteous man that challenges him presumptuously. It is a solemn thing when the folly of God’s people thus makes it necessary for God so to deal. It was so then, but the truth is, God will always be where righteousness is, and there is not a single failure in righteousness though it be in God’s own people, where God does not set His face against it.

Does this then prove that the one is not a righteous man? Not so. But even where the unrighteous man may be righteous, and where the righteous man may be unrighteous, God will appear to change sides. The truth is, that God holds to righteousness wherever it exists. This is what we find, and to my own mind it is a most wholesome principle, and one that counts for a great deal in practical life, because often one sees the sad spectacle in one truly to be loved and valued, but a mistake is made never without its consequences. An error that is made always bears its fruit. Am I therefore to forget my love and esteem for him who has done it? Nay, I am to judge according to God the particular thing; but to let the heart and its affections flow in their proper channel. God would not have us to abandon, any more than He does Himself, the one who trusts Him, for swerving for a moment. God would not have us to sanction an unrighteous man because in a particular instance he may be right; nor, on the other hand, are we to sanction an unrighteous act because done by a righteous man. Well, all this shows us the nice and jealous care in details — in details for righteousness. And this is to my mind the great moral of the dealings of God regarding Amaziah and Joash, and the reason why the comparatively righteous Amaziah was allowed to fall before the certainly unrighteous Joash.

Then we find another remarkable dealing of God in the case of Azariah in the fifteenth chapter. We are told there that he was found smitten of the Lord. “And Jehovah smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house.” The details of this are not given. He is called here Azariah. You must remember it is the same person who is called

Uzziah in the book of Chronicles. But further, at this time evil was coming in more and more with a flood, and we have the sad and humbling history of Samaria. What brought in this terrible day was Ahaz — so it is that the Spirit of God speaks of him — for Ahaz was the worst king that had ever reigned in Judah up to this point. He it was that first brought in the Assyrian as a helper. At this time the Assyrian had come in in another way. We are told of Azariah king of Judah that "In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land."

The solemn thing that appears in Ahaz that I have referred to was that the conspiracy of Israel with Syria led Judah to call in Assyria against Israel. That is the point. It is not merely the only course of enmity that the Assyrian would have against the land. This is the point of the fifteenth chapter; but in the sixteenth it is a still more solemn thing; it is the union of Judah with the Gentile against Israel. And, accordingly, God marks His deep displeasure of this terrible reign. Indeed in every point of view it was unboundedly evil. What did God do? What marked the way of God in that day? It was the time when God brought out prophecy with a greater brightness and distinctness than He had ever been pleased to give. This is of the greatest moment for our souls to consider.

Prophecy always comes in a time of ruin. When was the first prophecy? When man fell. When was the first continuous prophecy — prophecy not merely of a person

that was coming, but of the character of him that was coming, and what was to be done — that which most of all looks like a prophecy? It was Enoch's, when the world was full of corruption and violence, and the flood was about to be sent upon it. Thus if we look either at the prophecy of the Son, of man the woman's Seed, or look at the first form of prophecy, Enoch's, we see how clearly the time of ruin is the time when God gives prophecy. In the same way it is, when we come lower down the stream of time. The most magnificent burst of prophecy that God ever gave was through Isaiah, and Isaiah began his course under these very kings in the days of Azariah and Ahaz. It was continued, indeed, till the days of Hezekiah, but it was in these very times. And there was not Isaiah alone. We know there were other prophets, commonly called The Minor; but I refer to it now for the great moral principle. A time of evil is not necessarily a time of evil for the people of God. It is evil for those' that are false; it is evil for those that would take advantage. But a time of evil is a time when God particularly works for the blessing of those that may have failed. Therefore let no one find an excuse because things are in a condition of ruin.

Take the present time. No man can look upon the face of Christendom without feeling that it is out of joint — that it is altogether anomalous — that the state of things is inexplicable except to the man who reads it in the light of the word of God — that it is confusion, and that the worst confusion is where the highest profession of order is found, and that the truest order is found where people would tax them with disorder; for I believe in point of fact, it really is so. You must remember that in an evil day the external order is always with the enemies of

God; the true internal order is always found with those that have faith. Hence it is that now that which has the highest pretension to order is, as we know, the Eastern church — the Latin church; but of all the things under the sun in the form of religion, that which is most opposed to God is, surely, the Latin church. And therefore we see clearly how those who make the highest claim to order are precisely those that are most opposed to God's way, and the reason is plain because the great assumption, invariably, of those that stand to outward order is succession — a plain continued title from God!

But this is a thing which prophecy so rudely breaks — this dream of outward order which is a mere veil thrown over confusion, and every evil work. Hence the immense importance of prophecy in a time of ruin, and so it has been that since the ruin came into Christendom, prophecy has always been the grand support of those who have had faith; as, on the other hand, the Latin church has always been the deadly enemy of prophecy — always endeavoured to extinguish the study of it and to destroy all faith in it, and to make people believe that it is impossible to have real light from it — that it is an illusion, as indeed they would make you believe the word of God generally is.

Now, then, in this very place I call your attention, beloved friends, to this grand point. When this evil became insupportable, God granted this precious light of His own word — the light of prophecy, and I would press this strongly upon all here who love the word of the Lord. Use the same thing, not by any means to make it a kind of study — a kind of exclusive occupation, for nothing can be more drying up to spiritual affections

than making, what I may call, a hobby of prophecy or of anything else; but I do say that where Christ has the first place, where all the precious hopes of grace, where all our associations with the Lord have their true place and power, a most important part is filled up by the understanding of that light which God gives to judge the present by the future. This was the object of the prophecies of Isaiah, for it is a very important thing to remember that the object of prophecy is, and must be, moral — that it is not merely facts; and there is no greater mistake than to suppose that the prediction of events is what makes a prophet. Not so. I admit that prophets did predict events, but prophecy does not mean predicting. Prophecy is always bringing in God to deal with the conscience. If that is not done the grand object of prophecy has failed. And here you have a test, therefore, as to whether you understand and rightly use prophecy. Does it bring your conscience into the presence of God? Does it deal with what you are about? Does it judge the secrets of the heart? Does it shine upon your ways? Where this fails, God's object is not attained. I just draw attention, therefore, by the way, to this beautiful contrast to man's ways on the one hand — this flood of evil that was now rising to its height. Nevertheless God, astonishing to say, instead of meeting it by immediate judgment answers it by prophecy. The glorious light that He caused to shine through the prophet Isaiah was His answer. No doubt that made the wickedness of what was going on in the land more apparent, but it had another purpose; it bound up the hopes of every believing soul in Israel with the Messiah that was coming. That was God's great object. It dissociated them from present things, giving them a

sound judgment, and means to form an estimate of it, but it bound up their hearts with the Lord.

Therefore I need not say much about the enormous wickedness of Ahaz, which is brought before us in the sixteenth chapter, nor will I do more than just refer to the seventeenth chapter. There the Assyrian comes, but he comes now as an avenger; he comes as a scourge. He sweeps the land, and the ten tribes are carried away never to return till Jesus returns. The ten tribes from that day disappeared from the land of Israel. What took their place — what formed the kingdom of Samaria — was a mere mass of heathen that took up the forms of Israel that had been left behind, for God in a remarkable way visited the land. When the Assyrians were planted in the devastated cities of Israel they set up their old Assyrian religion, and the Lord sent lions among them. They understood it. Man has a conscience. They understood it; they knew that it was a voice from the God of Israel. It was the God of Israel that claimed that land. No doubt they thought to propitiate Him by renewing the old worship of Israel, and in their folly they sent for a priest of Israel from the captivity, and the old religion, accordingly, was brought in — a most strange medley of the nominal worship of Jehovah and real idolatry. But so it was. Thus began not the Samaritan kingdom but the Samaritan religion — the mixture of Judaism and idolatry carried on by heathen.

On this I do not now say more than just refer to it. It was a sad succession for a sad people. The ten tribes now dispersed in Assyria awaiting the day when the Saviour will awake them from the dust of the earth — when the Saviour will call them back to the land of their

inheritance. But we must look at other scriptures before we reach that blessed point.

2 Kings 18.

The kingdom of Israel, or Samaria, was now closed, not for ever, but for a season, and a season protracted long, even unto this day. There has been no restoration save in individuals. We know that Jehovah will set His hand a second time, and will recover them and bring them back with unexampled power and blessedness into their own land, for theirs was ever a sorrowful history. It was humiliating to think of them as the people of God from the very beginning of their separate existence unto its close. It began in self-will, and it ended in shame and sorrow. Truly, they; “lay down in sorrow.” It must ever be so when men endeavour to kindle a fire of their own sparks. But not only this. The peculiar state of things that followed Israel in that land which they had vacated is brought before us — the mongrel population that the king of Assyria brought from the east and established in Samaria — mere pretenders to the name of Israel, who served their own gods but incorporated nominal allegiance to the Jehovah of Israel. This we have seen, and the Spirit of God leaves the matter before us without comment.

But now the grace of God works remarkably in Judah, for it was a serious time that was at hand. The same power of Assyria that destroyed Israel threatened the last portion of the people of God, and Judah at this time was extremely low — never so low. They had been weakened by the kingdom of Israel; one king having slain no fewer than one hundred and twenty thousand men. The Moabites had gained great advantages. So in

Edom and in other ways, not to speak of internal dissolution, and all those influences which corrupt and destroy a nation's strength. For never does a nation fall by external power until it is undermined within. And so it was with Judah. But God, of His grace, saw fit in that dark and desolate day, to raise up a blessed man — not in the figure of David — neither so illustrious, on the one hand, nor stained with such sad spots of shame — one therefore of whom the Holy Ghost could say, "He trusted in Jehovah the God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings 18:5). I do not think that by that it was meant to compare Hezekiah, the one here spoken of, with David, although in a certain sense that might be true, taking the evil as well as the good into account; but you observe He says, "The kings of Judah," not "of Israel." The Holy Ghost is not comparing him, therefore, with the day when the kingdom was unbroken, but with the times when Judah had a separate existence from the ten tribes, and in that case we can readily see how perfectly and accurately true it is. And it is a good thing to accustom our minds to see the perfect accuracy of the word of God.

Hezekiah was remarkable not merely for his fidelity in this respect. Indeed he had a goodly place in the roll of the kings of Judah, for he removed the high places, he brake the images, he cut down the groves, he broke even the brazen serpent which up to this time had become an object of idolatry to the children of Israel; so shamefully degraded were the people of the Lord. And it is very humbling to find that this is only discovered now. Had there not been kings — pious, devoted, faithful? What had Jehoshaphat been about? What had Asa? The

truth is that there is nothing that more strikes us than the way in which we pass over either the good of scripture or the evil of practice. The children of God suddenly wake up to find that they have been doing something that will not bear the light of God. They have never seen it before. How dependent upon the word of God! Yet there it was; and when once the light is brought to bear upon it, it is indefensible nevertheless. God thus shows us that it is not only that we need the word, but we need God. We need Himself to apply and give force to His own word. As the apostle says, “Now I commend you” — not merely, “to the word of His grace” — “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace. “

So now Hezekiah proved. God had raised him up, and it was not only that he continued in the path of faithfulness as others before him, removing these unsightly abominations that were ever rising up afresh in Israel, and repeating themselves from generation to generation, so inveterate is the heart even among God’s people in what is bad; but further, the superior light of Hezekiah’s soul, granted by the Spirit of God, detected the offence in the idolatry that was paid to what was once a most signal sign of divine power and blessing. For we know well that there was in the wilderness no way in which God marked His healing power more gloriously than in this very serpent of brass — the type of Christ made sin. This is the reason why it was a serpent of brass. It was not only Christ a sacrifice, but it was Christ made sin, and therefore He is shown under this emblem of the power of evil, not that there was any evil in our blessed Lord, but that He must come under

all the consequences of it in judgment upon the cross, in order to deliver us from the effects of evil.

So this “piece of brass” — for so the pious king contemptuously calls it — must now be destroyed. Antiquity it had, but what was antiquity? The fact is that almost all the departures that we see around us now are far from novelties. They are ancient enough. The second century and the third saw most of the evil things that are now floating about in Christendom. They can therefore boast of antiquity; but what the Christian feasts on is apostolicity, not merely antiquity. Anything that is short of the apostles is too new for a Christian, and ought to be considered so. That is, we are built not merely upon the ancient church; we are built upon the foundation of Christ’s holy apostles and prophets, and there is no stable foundation since then. It is in vain therefore to tell me that such a thing came in since the apostles. That is the very reason why I will not hear of it. It would be a little more to the purpose to show me what was during the apostles, or rather, to show me what was sanctioned by the apostles, for I do not doubt that even when they were on earth there were evil things to be found, as indeed the New Testament largely shows.

Well, then, Hezekiah shows us this great principle — that we must go back to first principles, and that we must judge everything even if it can boast of the most hoary head of antiquity, by the light of God — by God’s word. So judged, the serpent of brass must perish! It might be ever so interesting as a relic, but Satan having turned it to an evil account, there must be no sparing. It is destroyed. “He brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made.” It was a bold act, and not more bold than faithful, and all this because “he trusted in the

Jehovah God of Israel." There is nothing that describes more accurately and powerfully the spiritual character of Hezekiah than trust in God. And trust in God is the root of all that is blessed, I may say, in a believing man. There may be other qualities. We shall find, if we look at Josiah, for instance, that there might be even greater energy against what was wrong, but nothing can make up for lack of trust, for trust is essentially what magnifies God and what keeps us in lowliness before God. It is the great expression of dependence, and for a man there is nothing more lovely than dependence upon God.

Hence, therefore, we find in Hezekiah the way in which this trust shows itself in all the practical details of his life. I shall note some of them as they come before us in the history that the Holy Ghost gives, but I now pursue the scripture before me. He was therefore more signalized by his trust in Jehovah than any of the kings of Judah either before or after. This was his distinguishing spiritual property. "For he clave to Jehovah and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments which Jehovah commanded Moses." This is a very important thing to observe, for it is not the commandments that produce trust, but it is trust that enables the man to keep the commandments. The only persons who ever did the law in Israel were those who had faith in God, who hung upon Him. It was not looking at the law, or merely deferring to it. Of course they did, but even unconverted persons may defer to the law and be afraid of the consequences. But what produces obedience is always trust. No doubt love does the same thing, only trust is rather that which produces love, because even supposing I do not yet know all God's love,

yet I can trust Him; I can confide in Him. As Job said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust” — a low condition it is true, a feeble apprehension of the great grace of God, but it was a very real and a holy one; a very holy one. That is, “At all costs I can trust Him.” But then as one learns Him more, so the trust grows, for we perceive His love more. And the result is this — unhesitating obedience to God’s word.

Hezekiah “smote the Philistines,” we are told. Also, “he prospered whithersoever he went forth; and he rebelled against the king of Assyria.” Not only did he smite the Philistines, but, as if there were not enough upon his hands with his kingdom attenuated to so small a degree — for, as I have said, Judah was very low — yet this. little kingdom, with its lowly, pious king, ventured to dispute the rights of the king of Assyria over him. He had been drawn into this position of subjection by his ungodly father. He had a deep sense that Judah ought not to be in subjection to Assyria. I do not pretend to say that he was quite right. There was a holy feeling at the bottom of it, but whether there was an intelligent perception of the chastening that God had put upon Judah is another thing. At any rate he came into no small trouble through his rebelling against the king of Assyria, though God showed Himself marvelously on his behalf, but not without great humiliation.

We shall see, therefore, that it had a mingled character, and I judge that it was mingled because the intervention of God, while it was real, was not without a permitted and a deep humiliation. And I think you will always find that where a soul is faithful, but where there is flesh mixed with it, God will honour that faithfulness, but He will rebuke the flesh. And this is too common a feature.

It is a rare thing, beloved brethren, where we are enabled both to be faithful and be lowly, but very often in the desire to be faithful we lose a little our balance, and the very energy of faith that goes forward is sometimes connected with a little forgetfulness of our own proper place. I think that there was this mixture in Hezekiah, because of the way of God's dealing with it. There are two ways of judging, first the looking at a person's conduct, and secondly observing how God deals with it; and both, in my judgment, answer to each other in this case. However that may be, we have now the connection of Assyria not simply with Judah — the conqueror of Israel comes up against Jerusalem. God had permitted Assyria to sweep away the ten tribes. Was there not enough wickedness in Judah for God to deal with now? We shall see how God acts. We shall see how God answers fidelity of heart and trust in Himself.

"So it came to pass in the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria, and besieged it. And at the end of three years they took it, even in the sixth year of Hezekiah (that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel) Samaria was taken." We have just a little connection with the destruction of the other kingdom before we find the attack upon Jerusalem. "And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel into Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: because they obeyed not the voice of Jehovah their God, but transgressed his covenant and all that Moses the servant of Jehovah commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them."

Well now, his son, or at any rate his successor Sennacherib, came up against the fenced cities of Judah

and took them. There was a permitted humiliation thus far. “Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended.” I judge, therefore, that we have his own confession to show that whatever might be the piety of the king, there was a mixture of offence along with it. I do not think that if Hezekiah had been thoroughly guided of God he would have said, “I have offended.” “I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear.” It looks like the sense that he had made a mistake, and that he had accepted his humiliation. “And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.” This was a very heavy tax; this was a war tax; this was a compensation for the trouble and expense to which the king of Judah had put him in compelling him to bring his army in order to reduce him to subjection. It was not the old tribute, but a great deal more. Such is the effect of an immature action even from a faithful man.

We never gain, beloved brethren, by hasty acts. We cannot deliver ourselves; we are not intended to do so. We have God to look to, and God will hold us to it. We need the guidance of God. Hezekiah, having acted before the Lord, that is, inopportunely, now meets with His rebuke and His chastening. “And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of Jehovah.” This was a sore trial to a pious man. It was not only that Hezekiah suffered, but God’s house suffered — a grievous thing in his eyes. The treasures of the king’s house were but small compared with Jehovah’s house, I am sure, to Hezekiah. “At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of Jehovah, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had

overlaid.” More hardly because it was he that had sought to bring them back to something like their pristine splendour, and now all was reversed.

Evidently, therefore, Hezekiah had acted in a measure without the Lord. The truest saint, then, the man most remarkable for trust, may fail in that very particular, and indeed it is precisely in whatever God gives us grace to be remarkable for, that we have to watch, for Satan has a spite against us, and will endeavour to break us down in the very thing in which God has given us grace. Take, for instance, a remarkably truthful person. Well, I am not altogether surprised when I hear that there has been a little failure in that very respect, and for this simple reason, that the effect of a character for truthfulness is apt to make a person off his guard, and the truth is, that the power of it is not human character in a saint. For I care not how truthful a man may be naturally, this will not enable him to be truthful spiritually. There is a higher and a deeper measure, and then he needs the direct power of God to keep him truthful. God will break him down in the very point of his pride if he is proud of it, and it is a hard thing — in fact, we know impossible to the flesh — not to be. So with anything else. Take a man remarkable for humility. Take a person striking for his grace. Well, you must not be surprised if there be a failure in these very particulars.

So with David. Who would have expected that David would ever find himself in the army of the Philistines? Why there never was such a man for putting down the Philistines. It was the very thing that made him such a man. I may say, as far as the public knowledge of Israel was concerned, he was the choice champion of Jehovah against the vaunting Philistines, and yet that is the very

man who, if he began his career against the Philistines, afterwards finds himself through want of faith ranged with the Philistines, and it was only the Philistines' jealousy and distrust of David that hindered him from fighting against Israel instead of being their champion! Such was the painful reverse in the very point in which David was so conspicuous.

And the same thing you will find now if you take the New Testament. Was there one of the disciples more bold for confessing the Lord? Who was it that said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"? And who was it that was afraid of a servant girl, and stood to it, and swore to it, that he did not know the man? Such is man — such is even a saint — when he ceases to be dependent.

Returning, however, to the chapter before us, we find the king of Assyria was not to be put off. He liked his three hundred talents of silver and his thirty talents of gold well enough, and he saw that the stripping of the temple, too, was only an encouragement to make greater demands. He therefore pushes his advantages. He found lowliness, for there never was a man that told his faults out so plainly as Hezekiah. "I have offended." It was a sort of encouragement for him to see whether he would not bear a little more pressure. "That which thou puttest on me will I bear." And so he determines to try. "And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rab-shakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host"; not now against the fenced cities, but against Jerusalem. "And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fullers' field. And when they had called to

the king there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah." Rab-shakeh tells him to speak to the king. "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest (but they are but vain words), I have counsel and strength for the war."

How little does the natural man understand the ground of the trust of faith! "And have counsel and strength for the war." Nothing of the sort. It was God that had counsel; it was God that had strength for the Assyrian. "Now on whom dost thou trust?" says this proud servant of a proud king, "that thou rebellest against me. Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean it will go into his hand and pierce it; so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him." There is a great deal of truth in the world's talk. So far Rab-shakeh was very right. The king of Egypt was but a reed; and the Assyrian could see very well the vanity of trusting to Egypt, but the Assyrian could not see the wisdom of trusting in Jehovah. "But if ye say unto me, We trust in Jehovah our God" — now you see how the world's wisdom is folly whenever it draws near to God. Wise enough about Egypt: that was plain. But the moment that he thinks of God — foolishness.

"Is not that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?" Rab-shakeh could not distinguish between the idols and Jehovah. Jehovah to him was only an idol — one out of many idols, and inasmuch as Hezekiah had broken down all the idols, he fancied that they were

different forms of Jehovah's worship, because that was the heathen idea of God — the philosophic idea — the idea of the higher classes. The lower classes, perhaps, regarded them as so many gods, but there were men a little above that who thought that it was God displaying himself in his various attributes. That was the philosophy of heathenism any way. And Rab-shakeh seems to have been a bit of a philosopher, and so he taunts the ministers of king Hezekiah with having destroyed the worship of Jehovah. "Now, therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?"

Now he takes another ground. He takes first the folly of trusting in Egypt, and there he was right; and secondly, the fact that they had only to look for Jehovah's vengeance inasmuch as they had been destroying Jehovah's altars; thirdly, that he was come up as a servant of Jehovah to accomplish His will and to avenge Himself upon Jerusalem. "Am I now come up without Jehovah against this place to destroy it? Jehovah said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it." But it was not merely Eliakim and Shebna and Joah that heard; it was Jehovah. Little did Rab-shakeh believe that the Lord God was listening, and that the Lord God would speedily answer, for now he had dared to use that name for deliberate blasphemy. He had dared the authority of Jehovah where it was known. He had dared God! and God, as He dealt most severely with this in His church,

so now He would deal with this boastful servant of the Assyrian.

It is true the servants of Hezekiah were rather feeble. Nothing was to be won by deprecating the enemies of the Lord. It is always well to remember that they are enemies. Ask no favours of them, and expect none. But these three men were alarmed; they were afraid of the effect upon the Jewish people, and therefore they begged him not to talk in the Jews' language in the ears of the people. And what could that do but call out from Rab-shakeh a more vehement appeal and more vaunting than ever. "But Rab-shakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words?" His object was to excite rebellion among the people of Jerusalem and Judah. "Then Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you." It suggested an idea. It exactly gave him a new weapon, a new argument, a new ground of appealing to the people, which he might not have thought of if the fears of Hezekiah's servants had not put it into his head. The very thing which they feared and asked him not to do gave him the idea of doing it. At all events he acts upon it at once. "For he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not to Hezekiah." And so he asked him to come out and surrender to the king, and the king would give them a good land like their own, and then he spreads before them all the

destruction of other cities and people greater than they, and how powerless their gods were against Assyria.

But now at last we find wisdom. If the ministers of the king were foolish, the people at least were wise, and the people were wise because the king was wise. The people held their peace. It was very provoking: it was exactly the time when nature would have led them to cry out for the king, and to answer the insults of Rab-shakeh with the strongest and the most vehement protestations of their loyalty to Jehovah and to Hezekiah. But no, “the people held their peace, and answered him not a word, for the king’s commandment was, saying, Answer him not.” They then come to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and tell him the words of Rab-shakeh, and Hezekiah bows as a man that trusts in Jehovah. He heard it, and he rent his clothes, not because of the loss of his three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold, not because even of the stripping of the house of Jehovah; but now that Jehovah was insulted, now that there Were the appeals to the people in the Jews’ tongue to weaken their confidence in Jehovah — this touches his heart and he rent his clothes and he went as a sorrowful suppliant before the Lord.

2 Kings 19, 20.

“And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz” (2 Kings 19). He goes to Jehovah; they are sent to Jehovah’s servant. This was right. He looks in prayer to God himself, and he expects an answer through His servant. “And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and

blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be Jehovah thy God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which Jehovah thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah." And the answer is immediate. "Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith Jehovah, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. "

What a humiliation, and yet how simple! First a rumour in his own land after the blast that Jehovah would send in His land, and last of all himself reserved for a fate incomparably more humiliating in presence of his own subjects in his own land. "So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah" — a second, and, if possible, more insulting word. Hezekiah takes the letter and still goes to God. He "went up into the house of Jehovah and spread it before Jehovah. And Hezekiah prayed before Jehovah, and said, O Jehovah God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. O Jehovah, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, O Jehovah, thine eyes, and see: and hear

the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God."

And so the whole trial is cast into the bosom of Jehovah. Isaiah gives the answer: as before, so now. "Thus saith the Jehovah God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard." Trust in Jehovah is never in vain. Impossible to trust Him over much. "This is the word that Jehovah hath spoken concerning him: The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee." How blessed and yet what an extraordinary word it was for these trembling Jews to hear. "The virgin, the daughter of Zion." Was there not then fear? Was there not anguish of heart? How could it be truthfully said? Because God speaks according to His own thoughts. God looks at Zion as that which the Assyrian's foot had never defiled. It was a virgin daughter of Zion, and God never meant that the Assyrian should tread there. He had allowed him to ravage elsewhere, but Zion, even if Zion were ever so faithless, Zion was not reserved for the hand of the Assyrian. Zion might fall even under wars, but the Assyrian must fall himself.

Such was the decree of God, for even in the case of the enemies God is just as peremptory, and as thoroughly governs as among His friends. It is not man that governs in any case, but God. God is sovereign, and therefore does according to His own will. It is not a question of the party that has the most strength or the most wisdom. It is never so in the world, for God acts according to His own sovereignty. It was not because of their superior power that Babylon, or Persia, or Greece, or Rome achieved the empire of the world. Small beginnings in most of them. And in those too who made the longest

and the most permanent conquest of the world, it was in no way a question of their own strength, but God was pleased so to work in His sovereignty. So here in this case this diminutive and reduced kingdom of Judah God meant to put honour upon, and now we may say Jerusalem scarcely had anything left. The fenced cities of Judah were taken, and here was Jerusalem, and it seemed as if a shovel of earth, so to speak, would be sufficient to bury Jerusalem in those days. But not so. The very fact that the Assyrian came full of his proud confidence was that which drew out the arm of Jehovah in defence of His despised city; but when He speaks by the prophet because of the Assyrian despising Zion, it is Zion that despises the Assyrian. For, as we have already observed, God speaks according to His thoughts.

"That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that Jehovah hath spoken concerning him: The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." We know right well that the Assyrian shook his hand at Zion, and quite expected to have an easy conquest. But God retorts now for His despised city. "The daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even again the Holy One of Israel." The Assyrian little knew that. I do not doubt that there was a certain uneasiness. There always is: I care not how simple the Christian may be; I care not how great the man of the world may be; you will never find a man of the world, let him be ever so bold, or ever so great in the presence of a genuine trial of God without a

certain anxiety, a certain uneasiness. He may despise; he may see things that draw out his scorn and contempt; but he is conscious, in spite of his will, of something strange, something that baffles him, something that he cannot understand. I have no doubt then that so it was with this great Assyrian, in presence of this contemptible city which stood out against him in a manner so unexampled. And so the Lord appears, and the prophet brings out, in the most grand and sublime terms, the manner in which He would deal with this haughty conqueror; and as he closes, he says, “For I will defend this city.” Jehovah would take it upon Himself: “I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.” He must return by the way he came. “And he shall not come into this city, saith Jehovah.”

Nor was the answer of God long delayed. “It came to pass that night, that the angel of Jehovah went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.” The consequence was that the king retreats in dismay — returns and dwells in Nineveh — but as Jehovah had sent a blast upon him in Palestine, so now he must fall in his own land. “And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.” Thus every word of Jehovah was accomplished.

But now (2 Kings 20) we have the dealings of God, not with the Assyrian in defence of Jerusalem, but with Hezekiah. “In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death.

And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live." So, as his manner was, he bows; he turns his face to the wall. What had he now to do with anything outside? "He turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto Jehovah, saying, I beseech, O Jehovah, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." Up to this time it could not be said that death was conquered, for indeed it was not. Even to a believer death was not without its terrors. Now it is stripped of its terrors, and death is no longer the king of terrors to a Christian, and for this simple reason, that death is now compelled to be the servant of the Christian, compelled to usher the departing Christian into the presence of the Lord. This is not loss, but gain. Who would weep sore at a great gain? Indeed, there might be some, but certainly they are souls who do not understand their privileges. However, it was not so then, and this is one of the great changes now effected by the mighty work of redemption. Hezekiah then wept sore.

"And it came to pass afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of Jehovah came to him saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer." There again it was not long; it was immediate. If in the previous instance, it was that same night there came the destroying angel, so now I may say, that same minute came the prophet, or at any rate the word of Jehovah to the prophet. The answer was immediate. "I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears" — for God did not despise them. "Behold, I will

heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of Jehovah. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." And so a certain sign was given him — a sign that Hezekiah takes in remarkable contrast with his father. When the same prophet asked Ahaz to search for a sign in heaven or earth, Ahaz pretended that he could not do such a thing — that it was not for him to ask a sign. But there would have been far more real subjection of heart if he had asked. When God bids us ask; it is a serious thing to refuse. We ought to be bold in faith, and Hezekiah was; for whereas there was a double sign, either the dial going forward or going backward, he chooses the more difficult of the two. To advance the dial would be only, in a certain measure, natural, though it might be an extraordinary act of God, but to make the dial go back was a far more striking proof of the interference of Jehovah, and, accordingly, Hezekiah does ask; and Hezekiah was right. Hezekiah answers, "It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees." And so it was.

Immediately after this we find the Babylonian (ver. 12) "Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah; for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick." We know from elsewhere that it was not merely the sickness, but it was this very returning of the shadow ten degrees upon the dial that struck the Babylonians. They were great watchers of the heavens — watchers of such a sign as this — and they were quite right. It was traced to king

Hezekiah; it was traced to a comparatively small kingdom and king, and this drew out the interest, more particularly as that king, it was well known, had resisted the proud king of Assyria, and in fact so effectually that he returned to his own land utterly frustrated in his purposes. Now, as the Babylonian wished to shake off the fetters of the king of Assyria, and in point of fact did — did destroy the kingdom of Assyria by a junction with the Medes or Persians in early days, so we find that now this embassy comes to the king.

And it would be a great mistake to suppose that all these circumstances have only an historical aspect. This very part of the book is strongly typical. Anyone who is familiar with the prophets is aware that these two kingdoms which were then about to contend for the sovereignty of the world, will have their representatives in the last days. The Assyrian, strange as it may sound, will reappear. Not only will there be an Assyrian in the last days, but he is the last national enemy of the Jewish people. When God shall have accomplished His whole work in mount Zion and Jerusalem, He is to deal with the Assyrian. And Babylon too will have also its representative in the last days quite distinct. And it is of very great importance to distinguish; for Babylon was the beginning of the great imperial system. The Assyrian was the last leader of the national system. These are two distinct systems which we find in the word of God. As long as Israel was owned as a nation for God, the Assyrian had power. When Israel received its first great humiliation and Judah was about to be destroyed, Babylon was allowed to come into supremacy on the fall of Assyria. The Assyrian therefore was the last holder of the great national power of the Gentiles. The Babylonian

was the first that was allowed to become the sovereign of the world — to acquire an imperial authority. In the last days there will be the counterpart of these two powers, but in an inverse order. The Assyrian was before Babylon, viewed now in the manner which I have been describing. In the last days what answers to Babylon will be before the Assyrian. The reason is manifest. Babylon has to do with Judah, Assyrian with Israel. Now, in point of fact, Israel will only be brought back after God has dealt with Judah. It is the enemy of Judah that comes first in the last days, and the enemy of Israel will come up afterwards. That is the reason of the inverse order in the last days.

What then is the typical aspect of Hezekiah's sickness? And I answer, The great secret is that here we have, in type, the true Son of David, the One on whom depend the deliverance of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Assyrian. Who that will be in the last days I need not tell you. You know right well it is no mere king of man, but the true King, the great King, that is, the Lord Jesus; that it is the Messiah, that it is the true and ever-living Son of David — not one that weeps sore to escape from death, but one who goes down into death and rises up again in power and glory, and that thus, and thus only, He will be the crusher of the Assyrian power after Babylon has been destroyed; for He, and He alone, will be the destroyer of what is represented by Babylon, as well as the destroyer of the Assyrian. It is the Lord Jesus, and His very first act when He comes from heaven, or in coming from heaven, is, He destroys antichrist. He has not come to the earth: it is a mere flash, so to speak, of lightning, and antichrist is destroyed — cast into the lake of fire.

When dealing with the Assyrian it is different. He puts himself at the head of Israel. He is pleased to use them as his battleaxe. He comes as the head of the armies of Israel — not as a mere human king, but nevertheless He is pleased to put honour upon them, and so He will fight for His people. So it is described in the fourteenth of Zechariah. There it is not the antichrist or the beast that is destroyed. It is not the Babylonish power, or the last holder of the Babylonish power. It is the Assyrian. The Assyrian is destroyed when the Lord is with Israel. The one that answers to Babylon is destroyed when the Lord is coming from heaven, before He is joined to His people Israel. It is then the inverse order. In the actual history the Assyrian was swept away first; but it will not be so when the Lord comes. The last holder of the image power of Babylon — and that is the reason why I call it Babylon — will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus coming from heaven; and then will remain the great Assyrian, the head of the nations who will make a conspiracy of the nations to destroy Israel, and the Lord will overthrow him for ever. Such is the order of events in the future, so that the dead and risen Son of David has a most important place in the last days as the instrument of the deliverance from both the power of Babylon and also from the power of Assyria.

2 Kings 21 - 25.

Well, then, in the next portion of our book (2 Kings 21) we see how truly a pious father may be followed by an impious son. Manasseh, young as he was, did not only begin to reign, but “did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah after the abominations of the heathen, whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. For he

built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of Jehovah, which Jehovah said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah. And he made his son pass through the fire." Burnt them to Moloch. Cruel king! "And observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of Jehovah to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which Jehovah said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. But they hearkened not."

The consequence was that Manasseh not only did evil, but "seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom Jehovah destroyed." How was it possible then for Judah to abide in the land of Jehovah? It became a moral impossibility. Hence therefore the message which Jehovah sends by His servants the prophets. After Manasseh, reigned Amon; and Amon follows in the steps of his wicked father, not of his pious grandfather. "He walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them, and he forsook the Jehovah God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of Jehovah."

But after him comes a truly godly prince — Josiah — younger, too, than either (2 Kings 22). He was not too young to serve the Lord. “He was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. And he did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left. And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of Jehovah, saying, Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of Jehovah, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: and let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of Jehovah: and let them give it to the doers of the work;” and so on. But when we are in the path of duty we are in the place of blessing. And Hilkiah gives the glad message to Shaphan, “I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah.” How strange! found the book of the law of Jehovah. So it was, and people wonder how that in Christendom men have so long departed, and so long forgotten the word of God.

According to the analogy of Israel, we ought rather to expect it. Here was a people still more bound by letter than we, still more dependent therefore upon a law, if possible, than we could be upon any outward observances. For the law was essentially outward, and the law was a thing that was not so dependent upon inner life and the Spirit of God as outward statutes and observances and ordinances of every kind. Yet even here the law had been lost all this time, and it was a great

discovery to find it. God was faithful, and he that had a heart to observe the word of Jehovah found the law through His servant Hilkiah, the high priest. “And it came to pass when the king had heard the words, of the book of the law, he rent his clothes.” He had a tender conscience. There is nothing more important in its place; for what is the good of knowledge if there is not a conscience? It appears to me that to grow in knowledge of the truth, if there be not simplicity in following it out, turns the knowledge into a curse, not a blessing. The one value of the truth of God — of the word of God — being better known is that we may be more faithful towards the Lord, and also in our relationships one with another in doing His will in this poor world. But the moment that you divorce the truth from conscience, it appears to me that the state of the soul is even worse. Far better to be simple in using aright the little that we know than to grow in knowledge where there is no corresponding fidelity. The king, however, was very different. When he heard the words, he rent his clothes, and the consequence was that there was a mighty work of real revival, in the true sense of the word; because I need not tell you that it is a great misapplication of the term “revival” to use it for the conversion of souls. Revival is rather a process of raising up the people of God to a better state or condition, so as most truly to follow what the Lord looks for among them where they have slipped into a lower, slumbering, condition. This is the true sense of it, and this is exactly the meaning of it here, So the king gave an impulse to the people and they gathered to him, as we are told in the next chapter.

“The king went up into the house of Jehovah, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with

him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Jehovah. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant" (2 Kings 23). And we find, accordingly, the practical fruits at once, public and private, national and personal, for at this time you must remember it was not the church: it was a nation, and it is the greatest confusion of things that differ to confound an elect nation with the church of God. The church is a gathering out of all nations. The congregation of Israel was merely an assemblage of that nation. To talk, therefore, about the Jewish church is really nonsense. It is a common phrase, but there is no truth in it. It is only allowing ourselves phraseology that is altogether foreign to the word of God.

The account then of the great reformation that was wrought is fully gone into in the rest of the chapter, but I shall only add that although the king had been thus faithful, he slips out of the path of the Lord in opposing Pharaoh-nechoh. God had not called him to it, and if the Lord always blesses fidelity, and loves to bless wherever He can, on the other hand the Lord is righteous in His government; and if therefore the righteous man slips out of the path of fidelity he bears the consequences. What we sow to the flesh, we must reap in corruption. It matters not who. Converted or unconverted, it is always true. So with Josiah. There might be grace on the Lord's

part to take him away from the evil to come, but I do not doubt it was a chastening upon his eagerness of spirit in opposing the king of Egypt without a word from the Lord.

However, the king of Egypt put Jehoahaz in bands. The people had made him king in Jerusalem in the stead of Josiah, and he made Eliakim his brother king, changing his name to Jehoiakim. And Jehoiakim, we are told, was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. But all this was only one sorrowful event after another.

In the next chapter (2 Kings 24) we have the mighty king of Babylon, who first comes before us — Nebuchadnezzar, the destined beginner of the great imperial system with which we have not done yet; for the world is yet to see the last phase of the imperial power that began at this very time, or shortly after. This gives deep interest to what we are now looking at. I am aware that men are not expecting it. This does not at all hinder its truth as the word of God, and His word alone can decide such questions. The first then who acquires the empire of the world — Nebuchadnezzar — comes up, and Jehoiakim, became his servant three years. Afterwards he rebels. The Lord puts him down, and Jehoiachin his son reigns in his stead, and the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land, because he was put down by Nebuchadnezzar. These are the steps by which he arrives at the throne of the world, according to the sovereign gift of Jehovah. And Jehoiachin does evil; and at that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar came up when he rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar himself too besieges the city and carries away the treasures of the house as well as the

princes and mighty men. Not only the king, but as we know also a man afterwards most distinguished, and of such deep interest to us — Daniel, the prophet. Then follows another sorrowful state. Zedekiah having been made king provisionally in the land over a small remnant, he too is guilty of breaking the oath of Jehovah, and Nebuchadnezzar comes against him. Here we find the last phase of Jerusalem's sorrowful history of the last batch of the Jews that was carried down into captivity. And this is pursued to the end of the twenty-fifth chapter, and this closes the book.

Thus we have completed these two Books of the Kings — cursorily, I admit, but still I trust so as to give at any rate a general picture of this wonderful history of the Old Testament; the end being the great imperial power under which will take place the return of a little remnant of the Jews to find themselves in Jerusalem once more to set up a king who will be Satan's great instrument for deceiving men under the shelter of the last holder of the power that began with Babylon. But I enter no farther. This would take me out of history into prophecy.