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a *Grace Notes* course

## Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

### History 516

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*Grace Notes*

Web Site: <http://www.gracenotes.info>

E-mail: [wdoud@gracenotes.info](mailto:wdoud@gracenotes.info)

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# Old Testament History

## by Alfred Edersheim

History 516

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**VI\_06 - JEHOSEPHAT, (FOURTH) KING OF JUDAH. The Reproof and Prophecy of Jehu - Resumption of the Reformation in Judah - Institution of Judges and of a Supreme Court in Jerusalem - Incursion of the Moabites and their Confederates - National Fast and the Prayer of the King - Prophecy of Victory - The March to Tekoa - Destruction of the Enemy - The Valley of Berakhah - Return to Jerusalem.**

**2 Chronicles 19, 20:1-34**

BEFORE continuing the history of Israel, we turn aside to complete that of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. It will be remembered that he had succeeded his father Asa in the fourth year of King Ahab's reign.

At that time Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old; and as his reign lasted for twenty-five years (1 Kings 22:42; 2 Chronicles 20:31), it follows that he died at the age of sixty, which, when we consider the annals of the royal houses of Judah and Israel, must be considered a protracted life. A few other particulars are given us connected with Jehoshaphat's accession. Thus we learn that his mother's name was Azubhah, the daughter of Shilchi. Again, we gather how energetically he took in hand at the beginning of his reign the religious reformation commenced by his father Asa.

But the want of true sympathy on the part of his subjects prevented the full success of his measures. The idol-groves and heights, dedicated to Baal and Astarte, were indeed destroyed (2 Chronicles 17:6), but it was found impossible to abolish the corrupt worship of Jehovah celebrated on "the high places" (1 Kings 22:43; 2 Chronicles 20:33). Beyond these brief notices, the narrative in the Book of Kings only indicates that at that period there was no king in Edom, but that the country was ruled by a governor. This is manifestly stated in order to explain how the maritime expedition to Ophir could have been undertaken without provoking resistance on the part of Edom, in whose territory Ezion-Geber was situate. But the sacred text affords no information to account for this state of matters in Edom.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Keil and Ewald suggest that the Edomites had taken part in the expedition of Ammon and Moab against Judah (2

The scanty details about the reign of Jehoshaphat furnished in the Book of Kings - which deals mainly with the history of the northern kingdom - are supplemented in the Book of Chronicles. The compilers of the latter had evidently before them, amongst other sources of information, a prophetic history of that reign: "The Chronicles [or, the words] of Jehu, the son of Hanani, which are inserted in the book of the Kings of Israel" <sup>2</sup> (2 Chronicles 20:34, comp. 1 Kings 22:45).

It was this Jehu, who, on the return of Jehoshaphat from the expedition against Ramoth-Gilead, announced to the king the Divine displeasure. Better than any other would he be acquainted with the spiritual declension in the northern kingdom, since it was he who had been sent to pronounce on Baasha, king of Israel, the judgment that should overtake him and his people for their apostasy (1 Kings 16:1, etc.). And who so fit to speak fearlessly to Jehoshaphat as the son of him who had formerly suffered imprisonment at the hands of Asa, the father of Jehoshaphat, for faithfully delivering his commission from God (2 Chronicles 16:7-10)? The message which he now brought was intended to point out the incongruity of Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab.

The punishment which the prophet announced as its sequence, came when the king experienced the effects of that other unholy alliance, in which Ammon and Moab combined against Judah (2 Chronicles 20). Again had Jehoshaphat to learn in the destruction of his fleet at Ezion-Geber (2 Chronicles 20:37) that undertakings, however well-planned and apparently unattended by outward danger, can only end in disappointment

Chronicles 20); Thenius supposes that the reigning family of Edom had died out, and that Jehoshaphat had taken advantage of the disputes for the succession, to re-assert the supremacy of Judah. But all these are mere conjectures.

<sup>2</sup> Thus correctly, and not as in our A.V. There seems to have been "a book" or "chronicles" "of the kings of Judah and Israel," which is frequently referred to either by that name (2 Chronicles 16:11; 25:26; 28:26), or as "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (2 Chronicles 27:7; 35:27; 36:8), or as "the book of the kings of Israel" (2 Chronicles 20:34) or "the words ["acts"?] of the kings of Israel" (2 Chronicles 33:18) The term Israel in the last two cases is taken in the wider sense as embracing Judah and Israel. All these names represent one work, into which, among others, "the words" or "chronicles" of Jehu, the son of Hanani, were incorporated.

and failure, when they who are the children of God combine with those who walk in the ways of sin.

But in Jehoshaphat the warning of the prophet wrought that godly repentance which has not to be repented of Jehu had declared how God, in His condescension, acknowledged that "nevertheless there are good things found in thee" - and this, not merely as regarded his public acts in the abolition of open idolatry in his country, but also that personal piety which showed itself in preparing his own heart to seek after God. And now the sense of his late inconsistency led him all the more earnestly to show that he did not regard the religious condition of his late allies as a light matter. Once again he took in hand the religious reformation begun at the commencement of his reign. (2 Chronicles 17:7-10)

The account of the present movement is the more interesting that it furnishes proof of the existence of the Book of Deuteronomy at that time, long before the memoirs were written on which the Books of Chronicles are based. For, as we shall presently see, there are here constant references to the legislation in the Book of Deuteronomy, and that not pointedly and with a show of emphasis - such as we would have expected if Deuteronomy had been only lately invented or introduced - but in a manner which indicates a long admitted authority, so that its legislation had permeated the people, and its principles required only to be alluded to as something universally acknowledged, - not vindicated as something recently introduced. This line of argument, bringing out the undesigned evidences of the antiquity of the Mosaic legislation, seems to us to possess far more convincing force than much of the specious reasoning on the other side, which has of late been so confidently advanced. And while on this ground the reader should be warned against hastily adopting conclusions inconsistent with the assured truth of the Divine Word, he should also be encouraged to mark, in careful study, the many passages containing undesigned references, which are only intelligible on the supposition, not only of the existence, but of the long and generally acknowledged authority of the Mosaic legislation.

The reformation initiated by Jehoshaphat was carried out by him personally. For this purpose he

traversed the country from its southern boundary (Beer-Sheba) to its northern (Mount Ephraim). His main object was to "bring back" the people "to Jehovah, the God of their fathers." Partly in attainment of this, and partly to render the reformation permanent, he revised the judicial arrangements of the country, in strict accordance with the Deuteronomic Law. For, according to the Divine appointment, the judges in Israel were not only intended to pronounce sentences and to decide cases, but to guide and direct the people on all questions, civil and religious, and so to prevent the commission of sin or crime. The account given of the work of Jehoshaphat embraces these three points: the appointment of Judges; the principle underlying their authority; and the rule for its exercise.

As regards the first of these, we remember that the appointment of judges had been first proposed by Jethro (Exodus 18:21, 22), and then carried out by Moses (Deuteronomy 1:13, etc.) Such judges were now appointed foreverly "fenced city." This, not only because these places were the most important in the land, but in order to protect the administration of justice,<sup>3</sup> and in accordance with the fundamental law in Deuteronomy 16:18.

As regards the principle on which their authority rested, the judges were to bear in mind that they were the representatives of the Great Judge, Whose aid was accordingly promised them (2 Chronicles 19:6) - and this also in accordance with the Deuteronomic statement: "for the judgment is God's" (Deuteronomy 1:17). From this it follows, as the practical rule, that in the administration of justice they were to be influenced by the fear of Jehovah, and not by fear of, nor favor for, man. And here we mark once more the implied reference to Deuteronomy 1:16, 17; 16:18-20.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Rabbinic Law has always made a distinction between these "walled cities" - dating, it was supposed, from the original occupation of the land - and other towns.

<sup>4</sup> There is nothing in any way inconsistent either with the Mosaic legislation or this later institution of Jehoshaphat in the appointment by David of Levites to be judges (1 Chronicles 23:4; 26:29). For it is not anywhere said that the Levites were the only judges.

Besides these provincial judges, Jehoshaphat appointed in Jerusalem a tribunal of appeal consisting of priests, Levites, and the chiefs of clans. With this mixed tribunal rested the final decision in all matters concerning religion and worship (2 Chronicles 19:8: "for the judgment of Jehovah;" and ver. 11: "in all matters of Jehovah"), as well as in civil and criminal cases (ver. 8: "in strifes; ver. 11: "all the king's matters"). Moreover, it was their duty to warn,<sup>5</sup> advise, and instruct in all doubtful cases, whether criminal, civil, or ecclesiastical, in which they were applied to either by the inferior judges or the people. As president of this mixed commission, Amariah, the high-priest,<sup>6</sup> was appointed for ecclesiastical, and Zebadiah, the chief of the tribe of Judah, for civil cases.

And now that came to pass which had been predicted by the prophet in punishment of the alliance with Ahab. Happily, it found the people prepared by the religious revival which had passed over the land. As we infer from the tenor of the whole narrative, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and "with them certain of the Meunites,"<sup>7</sup> made an unexpected raid "from beyond the Sea" - that is, the Dead Sea - "from Edom.

They could come swooping round the southern end of the Dead Sea, or passing over by the southern ford, just opposite Engedi, the ancient Hazazon-tamar - probably the oldest city in the world. The name Engedi, "the spring of the goat," is derived from the manner in which its fertilizing spring seems to leap in its descent. The older name, Hazazon-tamar - either "rows of palms," or "the cutting of the palm-trees" - originated from the palms which once grew there in great luxuriance. But the site is now desolate, and where

once palms flourished, and the most precious wine of Judaea was grown, only naked terraces shelve up the mountain-side. The plain or rather slope is described as extending about a mile and a half from north to south, being bounded on either side by a Wady with perennial water. Engedi touches the outrunners of the mountains of Judah.

Several hundred feet up the slope, about a mile and a half from the shore of the Dead Sea, the little streamlet which has given the place its name, dashes down in thin but high cataracts. Below these falls, and in the center of the plain, are the ruins which mark the site of the ancient city. As in the time of Abraham the Assyrian hordes (Genesis 14), so now these marauding invaders, had swarmed across - scarcely an army, rather a multitude of wild nomads. Along the plain, up the slope to the crest of the mountain, through the wadys, they crowded. It seemed a countless host, as their wild war-shouts resounded from hill-top and valley, or their dark forms covered the heights, whence they gazed across the wilderness towards the rich and coveted cities of Judah. So it seemed to the terrified fugitives, who brought exaggerated tidings of their numbers to Jehoshaphat. And only a distance of fifteen hours separated these plundering tribes from Jerusalem. Not a moment was to be lost. The first measure was to invoke the aid of the LORD. A fast was proclaimed throughout Judah - a day of humiliation for national sins and of prayer in the time of their great need (comp. Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; Joel 2:15). Jehoshaphat himself took his place in the most prominent part of the temple, "before the new court" - either one newly constructed, or else renovated, and probably intermediate between "the great" or outer court, and "the court of the priests" (comp. 2 Chronicles 4:9). If so, it probably represented what at a later period was known as "the court of the women," and Jehoshaphat stood on the height afterwards covered by the steps leading up to the court of the priests, where the Levites who conducted the musical part of the temple-services were stationed. There, within sight and hearing of all, like Solomon of old, and as a true king, he represented and guided his people in their act of national humiliation and prayer. Ordinarily prayer did not form part of the symbolical temple-services. The latter could only

<sup>5</sup> The expression here is peculiar, and recalls Exodus 18:20, where the word is rendered (in the A.V.) "teach."

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the same as he who is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:11.

<sup>7</sup> This is the correct reading, and not "the Ammonites," as in the A.V. nor yet, as has sometimes been suggested: "the Edomites." The Meunites were probably a tribe inhabiting Arabia Petraea; no doubt the same as those called Meunim in 1 Chronicles 4:41 (rendered in our A.V. by "habitations"). Comp. 2 Chronicles 26:7.

be performed by the God-appointed priesthood. This, even on the lower ground <sup>8</sup> that had others been allowed to intrude into these services, it would soon have led to the introduction of heathen rites. And of this there were only too many instances in the history of Israel. Never, except on such solemn occasions, was the voice of public prayer heard in the Temple, and the king did not intrude, but acted right kingly, when he now spake in name and on behalf of his people.

There could not have been a prayer of more earnest or realizing faith than that of Jehoshaphat. It began by the acknowledgment of Jehovah as the true and living God (v. 6), and as the Covenant-God, Who in fulfillment of His promises had given them the land (v. 7). In virtue of this twofold fact, Israel had reared the sanctuary (v. 8), and consecrated alike the Temple and themselves by solemnly placing themselves in the keeping of God, to the disowning of all other help or deliverance (v. 9). To this invocation at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 6:28-30) a visible response had been made when the fire came from heaven to consume the sacrifice, and the glory of Jehovah filled the house (2 Chronicles 7:1). On this threefold ground the prayer of Jehoshaphat now proceeded. A season of sore strait had now come, and they made their solemn appeal to God. Israel was in the right as against their enemies, who had neither pretext in the past for their attack, nor yet justification for it in the present. Nay, they had come against the possession of God which He had given to His people. It was His cause; they had no might of their own, but their eyes were upon the LORD (vers. 10-12).

When the Church, or individual members of it, can so believe and so pray, deliverance is at hand. But yet another act of faith was necessary. Theirs had been the faith of expectancy and of worship; it must now be that of work. As Israel stood in prayer before Jehovah, His Spirit came upon one of the ministering Levites, Jahaziel, a descendant of Mattaniah, perhaps the same as Nethaniah, a

<sup>8</sup> There were other and much deeper grounds for confining the sacrificial services to the Aaronic priesthood. But this lower consideration should also be noticed as of interest and importance.

son of Asaph (1 Chronicles 25:2, 12). The message which he delivered from the LORD corresponded to every part of the prayer which had been offered. It bade them dismiss all fears - not because there was not real danger, but because the battle was Jehovah's. On the morrow were they to go forth to meet the enemy. But "it is not for you [it is not yours=ye need not] to fight in this [battle]: place yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah with you" (vers. 15-17). And humbly, reverently, did king and people bend before the LORD in the worship of praise and believing expectancy.

Early next morning they prepared to obey the Divine direction. It was to be a battle such as had never been witnessed since Jericho had fallen at the blast of the trumpets of the LORD when His Ark compassed its walls. And they prepared for it in such manner as host going to battle had never done. In the morning, as Judah marched out of the gate of Jerusalem, the king addressed to his people only this one command: to have faith - faith in their God, and in the word sent by His prophets. Thus should they be established. Then "he advised the people," <sup>9</sup> and with one accord they appointed for their avant-guard the sacred Temple-singers, <sup>10</sup> robed in their "holy array," <sup>11</sup> who were to chant, as if marching in triumphal procession, the well-known words of worship: "Praise Jehovah, for His mercy endureth forever" (comp. 2 Chronicles 7:3, 6).

If never before an army had so marched to battle, never, even in the marvelous history of Israel, had such results been experienced. Above Engedi the chalk cliffs rise 2000 feet above the Dead Sea, although even that height is still 2000 feet below the watershed. We have now reached the barren

<sup>9</sup> Gave them counsel. The expression indicates a preponderance or lead on the part of the king. Compare the same expression in 2 Kings 6:8. This, rather than as in the A.V., or even the R.V. (ver. 21.)

<sup>10</sup> It seems to me most likely that these were the ordinary Levite-singers and priests, although a different inference has been drawn from the absence of the article before "singers."

<sup>11</sup> The expression, 2 Chronicles 20:21, rendered "beauty of holiness" in our A.V., means "holy array," and probably refers to the full Temple-dress of the priests and Levites.



and desolate wilderness, known as that of Judah, which stretches southward to the mountains of Hebron, and northward to Tekoa. Innumerable wadys and broad valleys stretch between mountain crests, often of fantastic shape. It is a pathless wilderness, seamed by rocky clefts and caves. There, just past the cave where David had been in hiding from Saul, up the cliff Hazziz - perhaps the modern El Husasah - had the foe swarmed, and then deployed through the broad wady which leads towards Tekoa. Here, "at the end of the gully," would Israel descry them, see their defeat, yet not have to do battle for the victory.

And as on that bright day the host of Israel looked towards the ascent from Engedi, they caught sight of the enemy. At that moment as by a preconcerted signal they began to sing and to praise the LORD. Then a strange scene ensued. It were an entire misunderstanding of what Scripture designates as the agency of God, to apply to angelic combatants the words: "Jehovah set liers in wait [ambushments] against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir."

For God Himself does that which happens in His all-overruling Providence, even though it come to pass in the orderly succession of natural events. There was no need of summoning angel-hosts. It is not only quite conceivable, but best explains the after-event, that a tribe of Edomites, kindred but hostile to that which had joined Ammon and Moab in their raid, should have lain in ambush in one of the wadys, waiting till the main body of the combatants had passed, to fall on the rear-guard, or probably on the camp followers, the women and children, and the baggage. They would calculate that long before the men in advance could turn upon them in those narrow defiles, they would have escaped beyond the reach of pursuit. And it is equally conceivable that when the attack was made the main body of the Ammonites and Moabites may have regarded it as a piece of treachery preconcerted between the clan of Edomites who were with them, and the kindred clan that lay in ambush. All this is quite in accordance with what might still take place among the Bedouins of those regions. But, in such circumstances, the Ammonites and Moabites would naturally turn to attack their treacherous allies, and thus the first

scene in the strange drama of this internecine battle would be enacted. Mutual distrust once awakened, and passions kindled, we can easily understand how "every one helped to destroy another" - the havoc being probably increased by the peculiar character of the country, which here abounds in steep precipices and sudden rocky heights and descents.

While this strange battle was proceeding, Judah had advanced, to the sound of hymns of praise, beyond Tekoa, far as the last watch-tower, where usually an outlook was kept over the wilderness, so that timely tidings might be brought of any sudden raid by the wild tribes of the East. As "they looked unto the multitude," which they had erst descried in the dim distance, there was "not an escaping," no hasty flight, as in such circumstances might have been expected, and it seemed as if only dead bodies were left strewing the ground. Possibly the Judaeans had, on reaching the height of Tekoa, caught sight of the host, and then lost it again when descending into the wady.  
<sup>12</sup>

When, on ascending once more, they stood at the watch-tower, they would see what formerly had been "a. multitude," now only dead bodies, nor could they, from the conformation of the district, discern any fugitives. It now only remained for Judah to seize the spoil <sup>13</sup> of the battle in which Jehovah had gained the victory.

For three days the removal of the spoil continued. On the fourth, the host of Judah gathered in a valley, to the north-west of Tekoa, which from the solemn thanksgiving there made received the name of "Berakhah," "blessing," in the sense of praise and thanksgiving. It is deeply interesting to find that after the lapse of so many centuries this

<sup>12</sup> The reader who will take the trouble of examining the interesting account of the district in Robinson's Biblical Researches, Vol. 1. pp. 486-508 (passim), will see how our suggestions are borne out by the description of the great American traveller.

<sup>13</sup> The word "dead bodies" has been supposed to be a misreading or miswriting for, "raiments." But I see no need for this hypothesis, and would propose translating: "accoutrement [substance, all belonging to an army - the Hebrew word as in Daniel 11:13], dead bodies [probably of animals], and precious vessels."

memorial of Jehovah's deliverance and of Jehoshaphat's and Judah's solemn thanksgiving still continues. Many masters have since held possession of the land: Assyrian, Roman, Moslem, Christian, and Turk: but the old name of the valley of blessing remains in the modern name Bereikut.

<sup>14</sup>

And from "the valley of blessing" Jehoshaphat and his people returned, as in procession, to the Temple, there again to praise the LORD, Who had, as ever, been faithful to His promise. And this gratitude of a believing people is one of the most true and beautiful results of the religious revival which Judah had experienced. It almost sounds like heaven's antiphon to Jerusalem's praise, when we read that "the terror of Elo-him" was upon all the kingdoms of the lands round about Judah, and that "his God" gave Jehoshaphat "rest round about." <sup>15</sup>

**VI\_07 - JEHOSEPHAT, (FOURTH) KING OF JUDAH, AHASIAH AND (JEHORAM) JORAM, (NINTH AND TENTH) KING OF ISRAEL The Joint Maritime Expedition to Ophir - Ahaziah's Reign and Illness - The proposed Inquiry of Baal-zebul - The Divine Message by Elijah -**

<sup>14</sup> It has been supposed by some (Thenius, Hitzig) that the valley of Berakhah was just outside the walls of Jerusalem, being, indeed, that part of the Kidron Valley known as the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2, 12), where in the future the judgment on the heathen enemies of God and of His Israel would take place. But the text does not admit of this identification (see vers. 27, 28). Accordingly, most critics have suggested that "the valley of Jehoshaphat" derived its name from the expectation that the future judgment would resemble in character the victory which God had given to Jehoshaphat. But may it not have been that Jehoshaphat had there addressed to the people, when going out to battle, the words recorded in verses 20 and 21, and that this gave its name to the valley?

<sup>15</sup> Zoekler has aptly noted a number of circumstances tending to confirm the historical accuracy of this narrative. Among these he reckons (1) that the dark sides in Jehoshaphat's character and reign are not withheld. (2) The mention of definite names, such as that of the high-priest Amariah, and of Zebadiah, the chief of the tribe of Judah (2 Chronicles 19:11). (3) The detailed references to localities such as to "the new court" in the Temple (20:5), or to circumstances, such as the inspiration of the Levite Jahaziel (ver. 14). (4) That the prophet Joel must have known and treated this account as historical when he spoke of "the valley of Jehoshaphat." (5) The reference to other historical documents (ver. 34). (6) Lastly, we must here include the evidence afforded by the so-called "Moabite Stone," to which further reference will be made in the sequel.

**Attempts to Capture the Prophet, and their Result - Elijah appears before the King - Death of Ahaziah - Accession of Joram - The Ascent of Elijah - Elisha takes up his Mantle**

**1 Kings 22:48-2 Kings 2:14; 2 Chronicles 20:35-27**

JEHOSEPHAT saw two sons of Ahab ascend the throne of Israel. Of these Ahaziah immediately succeeded Ahab. Of his brief reign, which lasted two years, only two events are known: the first connected probably with the beginning, the second with the close of it. We judge that the attempted maritime expedition in conjunction with Jehoshaphat took place at the beginning of Ahaziah's reign - first, because the fitting out and the destruction of that fleet, and then the proposal for another expedition must have occupied two summers, during which alone such undertakings could be attempted; secondly, because it seems unlikely that Jehoshaphat would have entered into any alliance with an Ahaziah, except at the beginning of his reign. There was that connected with the death of Ahab which might readily influence a weak character like Jehoshaphat to think with hopefulness of the son of his old ally, since his accession had been marked by such striking judgments. Even the circumstance that Jezebel no longer reigned might seem promising of good. And, in this respect, it is significant that, with the death of Ahab, the ministry of Elijah passed into a more public stage, and was followed by the even more prominent activity of Elisha.

We remember the notice (1 Kings 22:47) that "there was then no king in Edom." However we may account for this state of matters, it was favorable for the resumption of that maritime trade which had brought such wealth to Israel in the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 9:26-28). And there were not a few things in the time of Jehoshaphat that might recall to a Judaeans the early part of Solomon's reign. Perhaps such thoughts also contributed to the idea of a joint expedition on the part of Judah and Israel. But it was a mode of re-union as crude and ill-conceived as that which had led to the alliance by marriage between the two dynasties, the state visit of Jehoshaphat to Ahab, and its political outcome in the expedition against Ramoth-Gilead. The story is briefly told in the book of Kings (1 Kings 22:48,



49), and one part of it more circumstantially in the Second Book of Chronicles (20:35-37). In the Book of Kings two expeditions are spoken of - the one actually undertaken, the other only proposed. Accordingly, only the first of these is recorded in Chronicles. It consisted of so-called Tarshish ships,<sup>16</sup> which were to fetch gold from Ophir, setting sail from the harbor of Ezion-Geber, on the Red Sea, a port probably on the coast of South-eastern Arabia, although the exact locality is in dispute.<sup>17</sup>

The ill-success of such an alliance with the wicked son of Ahab was announced (2 Chronicles 20:37) by Eliezer, the son of Dodavah - a prophet not otherwise mentioned. His prediction was verified when the allied fleet either suffered shipwreck or was destroyed in a storm. Jehoshaphat took the warning. When Ahaziah invited him to undertake a second expedition, in which (as seems implied in 1 Kings 22:49) Israelitish mariners were to take a leading part - perhaps because the former failure

was ascribed in the north to the unskillfulness of the Judaeans - the proposal was declined.<sup>18</sup>

The brief and inglorious reign of Ahaziah, the son and successor of Ahab, is said to have begun in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and to have lasted two years (1 Kings 22:51). There is apparently here a slight chronological difficulty (comp. 2 Kings 3:1), which is, however, explained by the circumstance that, according to a well-known Jewish principle, the years of reign were reckoned from the month Nisan - the Passover-month, with which the ecclesiastical year began - so that a reign which extended beyond that month, for however brief a period, would be computed as one of two years. Thus we conclude that the reign of Ahaziah in reality lasted little more than one year. The one great political event of that period is very briefly indicated, although fraught with grave consequences. From the opening words of 2 Kings - which, as a book, should not have been separated from 1 Kings - we learn that the Moabites, who, since the time of David, had been tributary (2 Samuel 8:2), rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.

It was probably due to the ill-health of Ahaziah that an attempt was not made to reduce them to obedience. For the king of Israel had fallen through "the lattice," or between the grating, probably that which protected the opening of the window, in the upper chamber.<sup>19</sup>

In any case it seems unlikely that the fall was into the court beneath, but probably on to the covered gallery which ran round the court, like our modern verandahs. The consequences of the fall were most serious, although not immediately fatal. We cannot fail to recognize the paramount influence of the queen-mother Jezebel, when we find Ahaziah applying to the oracle of Baal-zebub in Ekron to know whether he would recover of his disease.

<sup>16</sup> Tarshish is, no doubt, the ancient Tartessus on the western coast of Spain, between the two mouths of the Guadalquivir. Its situation is indicated in Genesis 10:4, comp. Psalm 72:10; its commerce in Ezekiel 38:13; its export of silver, iron, tin, and lead in Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 27:12, 25. The Palestinian harbor for Tarshish was Joppa (Jonah 1:3; 4:2). All this shows that the expedition from Ezion-Geber could not have been to Tarshish. But it was in "Tarshish ships," - a name which also otherwise occurs for a class of large merchantmen (like our "East Indiaman," or "ocean liner"), see Isaiah 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9. We can only suggest that the origin of the name "Tarshish ships" for these large vessels may have been that the first expedition to Ophir - indeed, the first maritime expedition of the Jews - was undertaken under the direction of Hiram, king of Tyre. But we know both from Scripture (comp. also Isaiah 23:1, 6, 10) and from classical writers that the trade to Tarshish was wholly in the hands of Tyre. Hiram would probably construct for the expedition to Ophir the same class of ships as those that traded to Tarshish - "Tarshish ships;" - and from and after that solitary expedition in the time of Solomon, all large merchant vessels may have borne in Judaea that name. The writer of the Book of Chronicles - or else some copyist - evidently knew nothing of a Jewish or Phoenician trade to Ophir, but very much of that to Tarshish, and so finding in the source from which he drew a reference to Tarshish ships and Ophir, he omitted the latter, and spoke of ships going to Tarshish.

<sup>17</sup> The other sites suggested are a port in India, or else one on the eastern coast of Africa.

<sup>18</sup> A candid examination of 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 and of 1 Kings 22:49 conveys to my mind this conclusion. The two passages are supplementary, and not contradictory of each other.

<sup>19</sup> The Jewish interpreters think of a grating in the floor by which light was admitted into the apartments beneath, or else of a winding stair which he had fallen down (see Mikraoth gedol. on the passage).

Baal, "lord," was the common name given by the Canaanites, the Phoenicians, the Syrians (Aramaean), and Assyrians to their supreme deity. Markedly it is never applied to God in the Old Testament, or by believing Israelites. Among the Canaanites (in Palestine) and the Phoenicians the name was pronounced Ba'al (originally Ba'l);<sup>20</sup> in Aramaean it was Be'el; in Babylonian-Assyrian Bel (comp. Isaiah 46:1; Jeremiah 50:2).

The Baal-zebub, worshipped in Ekron<sup>21</sup> - the modern Akir - and the most north-eastern of the five cities of the Philistines, E.N.E. from Jerusalem, was the Fly God,<sup>22</sup> who was supposed to send or to avert the plague of flies.<sup>23</sup> Like the great Apollos, who similarly sent and removed diseases, he was also consulted as an oracle.

We should be greatly mistaken if we were to regard the proposed inquiry on the part of Ahaziah as only a personal, or even as an ordinary national sin. The whole course of this history has taught us that the reign of Ahab formed a decisive epoch in the development of Israel. The period between the murder of Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, and the accession of Omri, the father of Ahab, was merely intermediate and preparatory, the throne being occupied by a succession of adventurers, whose rule was only transitory. With Omri, or rather with his son Ahab, a new period of firm and stable government began, and politically it was characterized by reconciliation and alliance with the neighboring kingdom of Judah, and with such foreign enterprises as have been noticed in the course of this narrative. But even more important was the religious crisis which marked the reign of

<sup>20</sup> Hence the names Hanniba'l, "the favor of Baal," Esdruba'l, "the help of Baal," and others.

<sup>21</sup> The reader who wishes to study the history of Ekron is directed to the following passages, which refer either to its geographical situation, its history, or its future: Joshua 13:3; 15:11, 45, 46; 19:43; Judges 1:18; 1 Samuel 5:10; 6:1-18; 7:14; 17:52; Jeremiah 25:20; Amos 1:8; Zephaniah 2:4; but especially Zechariah 9:5, 7. For its later history see 1 Maccabees 10:89.

<sup>22</sup> It is a mistake to identify Baal-zebub with the Beel-zebul (for this is the correct reading) of Matthew 10:25. For the explanation of that term see Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. 1., p. 648.

<sup>23</sup> The same deity was worshipped by the Greeks as Zeus apomyios, and in Rome as Myiagros.

Ahab. Although Jeroboam had separated himself and his people from the Divinely ordered service of Jehovah, as practiced in Jerusalem, he had, at least in profession, not renounced the national religion, but only worshipped the God of Israel under the symbol of the golden calf, and in places where worship was not lawful. But Ahab had introduced the service of Baal and of Astarte as the religion of the State. True, this progress in apostasy was in reality only the logical sequence of the sin of Jeroboam, and hence is frequently mentioned in connection with it in the sacred narrative. Nevertheless, the difference between the two is marked, and with Ahab began that apostasy which led to the final destruction of the northern kingdom, and to the trackless dispersion of the ten tribes. In this light we can understand such exceptional mission and ministry as those of Elijah and Elisha, such a scene as the call to decision on Mount Carmel, and such an event as that about to be related.

Viewed in this manner, the royal embassy sent to Ekron to consult "the fly god," was really a challenge to Jehovah, whose prophet Elijah was in the land, and as such it must bring sharpest punishment to all involved in it. It was fitting, so to speak, that, in contrast to the messengers of the earthly king, Jehovah should commission His angel,<sup>24</sup> and through him bid His prophet defeat the object of Ahaziah's mission.

As directed, Elijah went to meet the king's messengers. His first words exposed - not for the sake of Ahaziah, but for that of Israel - the real character of the act. Was it because there was no God in Israel that they went to inquire of the "fly god" of Ekron? But the authority of Jehovah would be vindicated. Guilty messengers of an apostate king, they were to bring back to him Jehovah's sentence of death. Whether or not they recognized the stern prophet of Jehovah, the impression which his sudden, startling appearance and his words made on them was such that they at once returned to Samaria, and bore to the astonished king the message they had received.

<sup>24</sup> The word "messenger" in Hebrew is the same as that for "angel."

It is as difficult to believe that the king did not guess, as that his messengers had not recognized him who had spoken such words. The man with the (black) hairy garment, girt about with a leathern girdle, must have been a figure familiar to the memory, or at least to the imagination, of every one in Israel, although it may not have suited these messengers - true Orientals in this also - to name him to the king, just as by slightly altering the words of the prophet <sup>25</sup> they now sought to cast the whole responsibility of the mission on Ahaziah. But when in answer to the king's further inquiry, <sup>26</sup> they gave him the well-known description of the Tishbite, Ahaziah at once recognized the prophet, and prepared such measures as in his short-sightedness he supposed would meet what he regarded as the challenge of Elijah, or as would at least enable him to punish the daring prophet.

We repeat, it was to be a contest, and that a public one, between the power of Israel's king and the might of Jehovah. The first measure of the king was to send to Elijah "a captain of fifty with his fifty." There cannot be any reasonable doubt that this was with hostile intent. This appears not only from the words of the angel in verse 15, but from the simple facts of the case. For what other reason could Ahaziah have sent a military detachment of fifty under a captain, if not either to defeat some hostile force and constrain obedience, or else to execute some hostile act? The latter is indeed the most probable view, and it seems implied in the reassuring words which the angel afterwards spoke to Elijah (v. 15).

The military expedition had no difficulty in finding the prophet. He neither boastfully challenged, nor yet did he fearfully shrink from the approach of the armed men, but awaited them in his well-known place of abode on Mount Carmel. There is in one sense an almost ludicrous, and yet in another a most majestic contrast

between the fifty soldiers and their captain, and the one unarmed man whom they had come to capture. Presently this contrast was, so to speak, reversed when, in answer to the royal command to Elijah, as delivered by the captain, the prophet appealed to his King, and thus clearly stated the terms of the challenge between the two, whose commission the captain and he respectively bore. "And if a man of God I, <sup>27</sup> let fire come down from heaven."

Terrible as this answer was, we can perceive its suitableness, nay, its necessity, since it was to decide, and that publicly and by way of judgment (and no other decision would have been suitable in a contest between man and God), whose was the power and the kingdom - and this at the great critical epoch of Israel's history. It is not necessary here to emphasize the difference between the Old and the New Testament - although rather in mode of manifestation than in substance - as we recall the warning words of our LORD, when two of His disciples would have commanded fire from heaven to consume those Samaritans who would not receive them (Luke 9:54). The two cases are not in any sense parallel, as our previous remarks must have shown; nor can we suppose the possibility of any parallel case in a dispensation where "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20), "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

At the same time we must not overlook that the "captain and his fifty" <sup>28</sup> were not merely unsympathetic instruments to carry out their master's behest, but, as the language seems to imply, shared his spirit.

Perhaps we may conjecture that if Elijah had come with them, he would, if unyielding, never have reached Samaria alive (comp. ver. 15). This hostile

<sup>25</sup> "Thou sendest to inquire" (ver. 6), instead of Elijah's "ye go to inquire" (ver. 3).

<sup>26</sup> Literally "the judgment." If I mistake not, there is in our northern dialect also such an expression as "the right" of a man - in the sense of not only his bearing, but that which is behind it.

<sup>27</sup> The original has here some noteworthy peculiarities. First: the captain addresses Elijah as "man of the Elohim" (with the definite article) - that is, of the national Deity of Israel - not Jehovah. Secondly: Elijah in taking up the challenge does not use the term Jehovah - which would have been unfitting in this connection, but in repeating the words of the captain he omits the definite article before Elohim: "And if man of Elohim I."

<sup>28</sup> According to ancient arrangement the host was divided into companies of 1000, of 100, and of 50, each with its leader (comp. Numbers 31:14, 48; 1 Samuel 8:12).

and at the same time contemptuous spirit appears still more clearly when, after the destruction of the first captain and his fifty by fire from heaven, not only a second similar expedition was dispatched, but with language even more imperious: "Quickly come down!" It could not be otherwise than that the same fate would overtake the second as the first expedition. The significance, we had almost said the inward necessity, of the judgment consisted in this, that it was a public manifestation of Jehovah as the living and true God, even as the king's had been a public denial thereof. It seems not easy to understand how Ahaziah dispatched a third - nay, even how he had sent a second company.<sup>29</sup>

Some have seen in it the petulance of a sick man, or else of an Eastern despot, who would not brook being thwarted. Probably in some manner he imputed the failure to the bearing of the captains. And on the third occasion, the tone of the commander of the expedition was certainly different from that of his predecessors, although not in the direction which the king would have wished. It would almost seem as if the third captain had gone up alone - without his fifty (v. 13). In contrast to the imperious language of the other two, he approached the representative of God with lowliest gesture of a suppliant, while his words of entreaty that his life and that of his men should be spared indicated that, so far from attempting a conflict, he fully owned the power of Jehovah. Accordingly the prophet was directed to go with him, as he had nothing to fear from him. Arrived in the presence of the king, Elijah neither softened nor retracted anything in his former message. Ahaziah had appealed to the "fly-god" of Ekron, and he would experience, and all Israel would learn, the vanity and folly of such trust. "So he died according to the word of Jehovah which Elijah had spoken."

<sup>29</sup> It is surely a foolish as well as an idle question, how the king had learned the destruction of these companies. Is it supposed that Elijah was quite alone on Mount Carmel, without any disciples or followers - or that such expeditions would not attract sufficient notice to lead any one to inquire into the fate of those who went to Carmel, but never returned?

Ahaziah did not leave a son. He was succeeded by his brother Jehoram,<sup>30</sup> or Joram, as we shall prefer to call him, to distinguish him from the king of Judah of the same name. Before entering on the history of his reign we must consider, however briefly, the history of Elijah and of Elisha, which is so closely intertwined with that of Israel.<sup>31</sup>

The record opens with the narrative of Elijah's translation - and this not merely as introductory to Elisha's ministry, but as forming, especially at that crisis, an integral part of such a "prophetic" history of Israel as that before us. The circumstances attending the removal of Elijah are as unique as those connected with the first appearance and mission of the prophet. We mark in both the same suddenness, the same miraculousness, the same symbolic meaning. Evidently the event was intended to stand forth in the sky of Israel as a fiery sign not only for that period, but for all that were to follow. And that this history was so understood of old, appears even from this opening sentence in what we cannot help regarding as a very unspiritual, or at least inadequate, sketch of Elijah's ministry in the apocryphal book of Jesus the Son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 48:1): "Then stood up Elias the prophet as fire, and his word burned like a lamp." But while we feel that the circumstances attending his translation were in strict accordance with the symbolical aspect of all that is recorded in Scripture of his life and mission, we must beware of regarding these circumstances as representing merely symbols

<sup>30</sup> The expression (1:17): "in the second year of Jehoram" marks some corruption in the text, which we have not now the means of clearing up. The same corruption - or rather probably the attempt of the copyist to remove it - appears in the chronological notice of 1 Kings 22:51, as compared with 2 Kings 8:16. It has been sought to remove the difficulty by assuming a coregency of either five or two years of Jehoram, king of Judah, with his father Jehoshaphat, and this suggestion has been indicated in the chronological table appended to Vol. 5. of this History. But there really is no evidence of such coregency, and much against the assumption of it - while it would still leave some difficulties unremoved. Under these circumstances it is critically more honest and better to regard these notices as the outcome and sequence of some corruption in the text.

<sup>31</sup> Their history may be the more briefly treated in this volume, as a special book on "Elisha the Prophet," by the present writer, has been published by the Religious Tract Society



without outward reality in historic fact. Here the narrative will best speak for itself.

The rule of Ahaziah had closed with the judgment of the LORD pronounced through Elijah, and another reign not less wicked - that of Joram <sup>32</sup> - had begun when the summons to glory came to the prophet of fire.

This latter was known, not only to Elijah himself, and to Elisha, but even to "the sons of the prophets." We do not suppose that Elisha, or still less "the sons of the prophets," knew that "Jehovah would cause Elijah to ascend in a storm-wind to heaven" - nay, perhaps Elijah himself may not have been aware of the special circumstances that would attend his removal. But the text (vers. 3, 5, 9) clearly shows that the immediate departure of Elijah was expected, while the language also implies that some extraordinary phenomenon was to be connected with it. At the same time we are not warranted to infer, either that there had been a special Divine revelation to inform all of the impending removal of Elijah, nor, on the other hand, that Elijah had gone on that day to each of the places where "the sons of the prophets" dwelt in common, in order to inform and prepare them for what was to happen.

As Holy Scripture tells it, the day began by Elijah and Elisha leaving Gilgal - not the place of that name between the Jordan and Jericho, so sacred in Jewish history (Joshua 4:19; 5:10), but another previously referred to (Deuteronomy 11:30) as the great trysting-place for the final consecration of the tribes after their entrance into the land of promise. We remember that Saul had gathered Israel there before the great defeat of the Philistines, when by his rash presumption the king of Israel had shown his moral unfitness for the kingdom (1 Samuel 13:12-15).

<sup>32</sup>

Probably it was in the beginning of the reign of Joram. We repeat that we prefer calling him so for distinction from the contemporary king of Judah of the same name. The two names Joram and Jehoram are interchangeably used. In 2 Kings 1:17, and 2 Chronicles 22:6, alike the kings of Israel and of Judah are called Jehoram; in 2 Kings 9:15, 17, 21-24 (in the Hebrew text), the king of Israel is called Jehoram; in 2 Kings 8:21, 23, 24 the king of Judah is called Joram; while on comparing 2 Kings 8:16 with 29 we find that the two names are inverted.

The town lay in the mountains to the south-west of Shiloh, within the territory of Ephraim. The site is now occupied by the modern village Filjilieh. A walk of eight or nine miles due south would bring them "down" to the lower-lying Bethel, whither, as Elijah said, God had sent him. Alike Gilgal and Bethel were seats of the sons of the prophets, and the two are also conjoined as centers of idolatry in prophetic denunciation (Hosea 4:15; Amos 4:4; 5:5).

Perhaps on that very ground the two were chosen for the residence of the prophets. The motive which induced Elijah to ask Elisha to leave him has been variously explained. We cannot persuade ourselves that it was from humility, or else because he doubted whether the company of Elisha was in accordance with the will of God - since in either case he would not have yielded to the mere importunity of his disciple. As in analogous cases, we regard it rather (Ruth 1:8, 11, 12; Luke 9:57-62; John 21:15-17), as a means of testing fidelity. There are occasions when all seems to indicate that modest and obedient retirement from the scene of prominent action and witness, perhaps even from the dangers that may be connected with it, is our duty. But he who would do work for the LORD must not stand afar off, but be determined and bold in taking his place, nor must he be deterred from abiding at his post by what may seem cross-Providences. Again, we cannot help feeling that the visit of Elijah to the schools of the prophets at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, must have been intended as a test to them; while at the same time it was somehow connected with his approaching departure. This the sons of the prophets evidently perceived, in what manner we know not. But any formal leave-taking would seem entirely incongruous with Elijah's whole bearing - especially on that day; and it is inconsistent with the question to Elisha: "Knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head today?" The word "today" may, indeed, be taken in a more general sense, as equivalent to "at this time," <sup>33</sup> but even so the question would

<sup>33</sup>

So in 1 Samuel 12:17; 2 Kings 4:8; Job 1:6 - in the last two instances, rendered "a day" in our Authorised Version.



have had no meaning if Elijah had come to say "farewell."

At each of these places, when Elijah and Elisha left it in company - in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho - the testing suggestion that Elisha should tarry behind, was repeated; on each occasion it was answered by the determined assertion that he would not leave his master. On each occasion also Elisha was met by the same question of those whose morbid curiosity, rather than intelligent interest, had been stirred, and on each he answered <sup>34</sup> in manner to show how little inward sympathy there was between him and those who would have intruded themselves into the sanctuary of his soul. At last fifty of their number followed to view afar off - not to see how the two would cross the Jordan, but to observe what should happen. It need scarcely be added that, as in all similar attempts to see the Divine, they could not succeed in their purpose.

And now the two had gone down the bank of the Jordan, and stood by the edge of its waters. Elijah took off his loose upper garment, the symbol of his prophetic office, and wrapping it together as if to make it a staff (comp. Exodus 14:16), smote with it the waters. And lo, as when the Ark of God had preceded Israel (Joshua 4:23), the waters divided, and they passed over dry shod. Surely there could not have been more apt teaching for Elisha and for all future times, that the power of wonder-working rested not with the prophet individually, but was attached to his office, of which this rough raiment was the badge. The same truth was conveyed by what passed on the other side. There the reward - or, perhaps we should rather say, the result of his spiritual perseverance awaited Elisha. But although Elijah asked him to say what he should do for him before their parting, it was not his to grant the request. No one would imagine that Elisha's entreaty for a double measure of his master's spirit was prompted by the desire that his

ministry should greatly surpass that of Elijah, although even in that case it would not be warrantable to attribute such a wish to anything like ambition. "Earnestly covet the best gifts," is a sound and spiritual principle; and Elisha might, without any thought of himself, seek a double portion of his master's spirit, in view of the great work before him. But perhaps it may be safer, although we make no assertion on the point, to think here of the right of the firstborn, to whom the law assigned a twofold portion (Deuteronomy 21:17). In that case Elisha would, in asking a double portion of his spirit, have intended to entreat the right of succession. And with this the reply of Elijah accords. Elisha had asked a hard thing, which it was not in any man's power to grant. But Elijah could give him a sign by which to know whether God designated and would qualify him to be his successor. If he saw it all, when Elijah was taken from him, then - but only then - would it be as he had asked.

Viewing Elisha's request in that light, we can have no difficulty in understanding this reply. And in general, spiritual perception is ever the condition of spiritual work. We do not suppose that if all the fifty sons of the prophets, who had followed afar off, had gathered around, they would have perceived any of the circumstances attending the "taking away" of Elijah, any more than the prophet's servant at Dothan saw the heavenly hosts that surrounded and defended Elisha (2 Kings 6:14-17), till his eyes had been miraculously opened; or than the companions of St. Paul saw the Person or heard the words of Him Who arrested the apostle on the way to Damascus.

And as we think of it, there was special fitness in the sign given to Elisha. It is not stated anywhere in Holy Scripture that Elijah ascended in a fiery chariot to which fiery horses were attached - but that this miraculous manifestation parted between them two, as it were, enwrapping Elijah; and that the prophet went up in a storm-wind (2 Kings 2:11). The fiery chariot and the horses were the emblem of Jehovah of Hosts. <sup>35</sup> To behold this

<sup>34</sup> Bahr thinks that the question meant: "What shall become of us, but especially of thee when thy master is taken from thee?" and the reply of Elisha: "I know and consider it as well as you - only, submit to the will of God, and do not make my heart heavy." I cannot take this view of it, any more than that Elisha wished to enjoin silence because Elijah in his humility would not have his translation spoken of (Keil).

<sup>35</sup> The same symbolic presentation of the Lord in His manifestation appears in Psalm 104:3, 4; Isaiah 66:15; Habakkuk 3:8.

emblem was pledge of perceiving the manifestation of God, unseen by the world, and of being its herald and messenger, as Elijah had been. Beyond the fact that Elijah so went up to heaven,<sup>36</sup> and that the symbolic manifestation of Jehovah of Hosts was visible to Elisha - Holy Scripture does not tell us anything.

And it seems both wiser and more reverent not to speculate further on questions connected with the removal of Elijah, the place whither, and in what state he was "translated." If we put aside such inquiries, since we possess not the means of pursuing them to their conclusions - there is nothing in the simple Scriptural narrative, however miraculous, which transcends the general sphere of the miraculous, or that would mark this as so exceptional an instance that the ordinary principles for viewing the miracles of Scripture would not apply to it.

And Elisha saw it. As if to render doubt of its symbolic meaning impossible, the mantle, which was the prophet's badge, had fallen from Elijah,

<sup>36</sup> The Greek rendering of the LXX. is (...), "as it were," or "like" unto heaven. Whether this rendering was from an honest understanding of the text or due to rationalistic attempts, cannot now be decided. It must, however, be admitted that the Hebrew will bear the rendering: "towards heaven," as much as that of the A.V.: "into heaven" (comp. Judges 20:40; Psalm 107:26; Jeremiah 51:53). The Book of Sirach, though it says nothing about the ascent into heaven, seems to us to imply this view (Ecclesiasticus 48:9). On the other hand, Josephus sets forth that he disappeared like Enoch, and that nobody knew that they died (Antiq. 9. 2, 2). The ancient Rabbis mostly held that Elijah did not taste death, but went alive into heaven (Moed K. 26a; Ber. R. 21; Bemid R. 12), while according to others (perhaps by way of controversy against the Christian doctrine of the Ascension), Elijah did not at once ascend into heaven (Sukk. 5a, beginning - expressly, and Ber. R. 25 - as it seems to me by implication). Our remarks are certainly not intended to cast any doubt on the Scripture narrative, but to enforce the caution not to enter into speculation beyond its express statements.

and was left as an heirloom to his successor. His first impulse was to give way to his natural feelings, caused alike by his bereavement and by veneration for his departed master, "My father, my father!" His next, to realize the great lesson of faith, that, though the prophet had departed, the prophet's God forever remained: "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" We would suggest that the words, "And he saw him no more" (ver. 12), imply that he gave one upward look where Elijah had been parted from him, and where the fiery glow had now died out in the sky. Then, in token of mourning, he rent his clothes in two pieces, that is, completely, from above downwards. But while thus lamenting the loss of his loved master, he immediately entered on the mission to which he had succeeded, and that with an energy of faith, combined with a reverent acknowledgment of the work of his predecessor, which ought for all time to serve as a lesson to the Church. Bereavement and sorrow should not make us forget, rather recall to us, that Jehovah our God liveth; regret and a sense of loss should not dull, rather quicken us for work, in the name of God. Nor yet should the feeling that we have a call to work, dim our remembrance of those who have gone before us. We are all only servants successively taking up and continuing the task of those who have passed into glory; but he is our Master, Whose is the work, and Who liveth and reigneth forever.

And so Elisha took up the mantle that had fallen from Elijah. It was not a badge of distinction, but of work and of office. With this mantle he retraced his steps to the bank of Jordan. One upward glance: "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah - even He?"<sup>37</sup> spoken not in doubt nor hesitation,

<sup>37</sup> Let us first be quite clear that the words do not imply any doubt on the part of Elisha as to the result. Had he doubted, he would certainly have failed, then and ever afterwards. Next, let us dismiss, as worthy only of Rabbinic exegesis, the idea that the twofold mention of Elisha's smiting the waters implies a twofold smiting, of which the second alone was successful. But the wording of the Hebrew is not quite plain. The A.V. represents an attempt to reproduce the Massoretic punctuation which connects the closing words, "Even He," with the next clause, "and he smote the waters." The Massorah represents the traditional mode of vocalizing the Hebrew text, punctuating it, and fixing the proper readings. Its immense importance for the understanding of the text can scarcely be overstated.

but, on the contrary, in assurance of his own commission from heaven, with all that it implied - and, as he smote the waters with the mantle of Elijah, they once more parted, and Elisha went over.

So shall the waters of difficulty, nay, the cold flood of death itself, part, if we smite in faith with the heaven-given garment; so shall the promise of God ever stand sure, and God be true to His Word; and so may we go forward undauntedly, though humbly and prayerfully, to whatever work He gives us to do.

**VI\_08 - ELISHA THE PROPHET Return to Jericho - Healing of the Waters of Jericho - Judgment on the Young Men at Bethel - Settlement in Samaria**

**2 Kings 2:15-25**

THE history which now follows reads almost like a chronicle of Elisha. More correctly it may be described as the prophetic history of that period. With the removal of Elijah, Elisha had begun his ministry, the test of its reality having been the parting of the waters of Jordan. The next three incidents must be considered as preparatory to his prophetic activity; the first, as regarded his public acknowledgment by the sons of the prophets (2 Kings 2:15-18); the second and third that by the people, when Elisha publicly appeared as the instrument of God - in the one case, for mercy (vv. 19-22), in the other, for judgment (vv. 23, 24). Having thus established his authority, Elisha immediately afterwards assumed the place of God's representative in the affairs of Israel.

1. As we look more closely into it, a special significance attached to each of the three preliminary events just referred to. In the first it was seen that Elisha occupied precisely the same position of superiority as Elijah over the ordinary "sons of the prophets," as also the folly of their attempted interference in his work. Henceforth they would be unquestioning, obedient instruments of his behests, and this was the rightful position alike for them and as regarded the work of Elisha. According to our modern notions the circumstances may seem strange, but they are in agreement with the condition of the times and with the degree of spiritual understanding

possessed even by the sons of the prophets. As Elisha returned alone, the "sons of the prophets," judging that the spirit of Elijah rested upon him, perhaps because they had watched as the waters of Jordan parted when he smote them - went to meet the prophet and to do him homage. And yet they began by urging a strange request - perhaps because notions such as they expressed were popularly entertained (as by Obadiah, 1 Kings 18:12) in regard to the influence of the Spirit on the prophets generally, or it may be only on the great prophet of fire. Or perhaps they imagined that Elijah might be in a trance or dead in some valley or on some mountain-height; or it may have been only from morbid curiosity to learn something more of what had happened. In any case their proposal marked an entire lack of spiritual understanding and sympathy.

There were fifty strong men among them, capable of enduring any fatigue, and equal to any work or burden. Might these not go to search whether peradventure the Spirit of Jehovah had not uplifted and then cast Elijah into some remote corner of that desolate and rocky region near Jericho? <sup>38</sup>

To men who entertained such notions, it would have been impossible to communicate even what Elisha had witnessed, still less its predicted import to himself. Accordingly he contented himself with a simple negative to their request. And this should have taught them what was the first duty as well as qualification alike of a prophet and of the sons of the prophet: simple, unquestioning obedience. But, like many of us, in the process of our personal sanctification, they had to learn it by painful experience. Their insistence at last made him "ashamed," <sup>39</sup> since it might seem as if he felt less

<sup>38</sup> It will be remembered that Christian legend has placed the scene of the temptation in that neighborhood - it need scarcely be said, contrary not only to the requirements of the Gospel narratives, but to the facts recorded about our Lord's ministry in Galilee immediately after His baptism.

<sup>39</sup> Bahr would render the Hebrew expression by "till he was disappointed," viz., in his hope of dissuading them. But all the passages in the Psalms to which he refers mean "to be ashamed," although in consequence of being disappointed in hope. In the other passages quoted by that critic (Judges 3:25; 2 Kings 8:11), the term could not possibly mean, disappointed in hope.

concern for his master than they, and he yielded to their importunity.

When after three days' unavailing search they returned to Jericho, he reminded them of his first refusal - although for reasons which need not be repeated, he did not even then communicate to them what he had witnessed. But ever afterwards a spirit of willing submission to Elisha prevailed among the sons of the prophets.

2. The next requisite seemed to make such public manifestation of his prophetic authority as would secure for his message the faith and submission of the people. Besides, this was necessary in the contest with Baal, whose worship, if it had been finally established, would, so to speak, have denationalized Israel, even as it ultimately led to that banishment which has not yet been recalled. It was of absolute importance that the presence of Jehovah should appear, as it were, in a concrete form, through a living representative, who should be quick to bring blessing or judgment, and so to demonstrate what he proclaimed, in the only manner which the men of that time could understand. This may also in part explain why the mission of Elijah and Elisha differed in so many respects from that of the other prophets. And, as we farther consider it, we have evidence that it accomplished its purpose. We remember how once and again Ahab himself was arrested through the influence of Elijah. At first the reign of Ahaziah had seemed a return to the worst days of Ahab. But Elijah's announcement of his doom, together with the symbolic judgment on those two captains of fifty who had gone to capture the prophet, had had their effect.

Although Joram "wrought evil in the sight of Jehovah," it was "not like his father, and like his mother;" and we are expressly told that "he removed the pillar of Baal which his father had made" (2 Kings 3:2). This does not mean that he either destroyed the Temple of Baal, or even that pillar - perhaps we should rather call it a column or block. Probably all that was done was to remove this great memorial-pillar of Baal from the public position which it had occupied in the square, or in front, or in the gardens, of the palace, or else before the Temple of Baal, and to place it within the precincts of the latter (2 Kings 10:27).

But even this implied that the worship of Baal was no longer the national religion - although the alternative was only between it and the worship instituted by Jeroboam. From this general estimate of the public influence exercised by the prophet, we turn to consider more fully the first miracle by which he established his prophetic authority - very significantly in an act of blessing. The men of Jericho interceded with Elisha - probably through their representatives - on behalf of their city. Every one might see how pleasant was its site: the very Paradise of Palestine, its rich soil basking under a tropical sun, yet shaded by palm, mulberry, and fig-trees, while the air was refreshed by perennial springs of bright water, and perfumed by the precious balsam-plants, the scent of which the wind would sometimes carry as far as out to sea. But all this luxuriance was marred by the character of the water. At a distance of about a mile from the ancient site of Jericho (not from the modern village which represents the ancient town), "there is a large and beautiful fountain of sweet and pleasant water," the so-called Ain-es-Sultan.

From its situation this must have furnished the water-supply for ancient Jericho, and hence have been the spring which Elisha healed, of which there is this farther confirmation that the other springs in the neighborhood are to this day mostly brackish. To this character of the water the inhabitants ascribed, and as it appears not without reason, the circumstance of the frequent miscarriages which alike diminished the population and the flocks.

Remembering the symbolic import of the mission of Elisha, as before explained, we should expect the prophet to give heed to so humble a complaint - for such it was, rather than a request. The means used were in accordance with the symbolic character of all else. The healing of the waters, although performed through the prophet, was the direct act of Jehovah (v. 21). Accordingly, as everything connected with the service of the LORD, the cruse to be used must be "new" (Numbers 19:2), dedicated to God alone. And the direct means of the "healing" was "salt," borne in this new cruse. Salt was added to everything offered, as being the emblem of incorruption, and

hence of purification. And so they went up to the very spring of the waters, and there, not as of himself, but in the name of the LORD, Elisha "healed" the waters by a symbolic action, resembling that of Moses of old (Exodus 15:25).

Many lessons of deep significance are suggested by this miracle: most notably, how the salt borne in the new cruse when applied to the spring of the waters healed them - hence-forth, completely, and forever; and again, how in the healing three things were combined - the use of means (in themselves ineffectual), the word of the prophet, and the power of Jehovah. But most of all, does it help us to realize how God is a present help in time of trouble - if only we seek Him in the manner which He appoints.

3. Yet another attestation of Elisha's prophetic authority was needed. This time not in blessing, but in judgment - stern, quick, unrelenting. Those who despised his commission, or rather defied the power that was behind it, must learn in terrible experience its reality. And that this judgment at the beginning of Elisha's ministry was so understood, appears from this circumstance that his ministry never afterwards seems to have encountered active opposition.

Once more the prophet was pursuing his lonely way where last he had walked in company with his master. For it will be remembered, that the last station at which Elijah and Elisha tarried on their way to Jericho and the Jordan was Bethel. And this also is significant. As regards Elisha, because it must have called up most solemn thoughts, especially now when he was entering upon his work; and not less so as regarded the Bethelites who had last seen Elisha in company with Elijah just before his ascent. It did recall to them the last appearance among them of the two, but only to make mockery of the event connected with it. But this was to scoff alike at the dead and at the living prophet, and also at the great power of Jehovah. Thus it was really open defiance of God, all the more inexcusable that it was entirely unprovoked, and that it offended against the law of man almost as much as against that of God. For it was not only a breach of hospitality, but it discarded that reverence for authority specially of a religious

kind, which has at all times been a characteristic feature in Eastern life.

Slowly had Elisha ascended those 3000 feet which lead up from the low plain of Jericho to the highlands where Bethel lies.<sup>40</sup>

He was climbing the last height - probably up the defile of Wady Suweinit, where the hills above still bear marks of the extensive forest that once covered them - when he encountered a band of "young men," who, as the text seems to imply, had gone forth to meet him. They were not "little children" (according to our A.V.), but young men, as we infer from the use of the same expression in the case of Solomon (1 Kings 3:7), when he was about twenty years old, and the application of a similar, even stronger, designation to the youthful advisers of Rehoboam.<sup>41</sup>

And their presence there meant a deliberate purpose. We have no means of ascertaining how they may have learned the approach of Elisha, or come to know that the great prophet, whom the fifty strong men had sought in vain, had "gone up," even although they may have attached to this only the vaguest notions. But as the taunt, "Baldhead," was undoubtedly a term of reproach, in whatever sense they may have used it,<sup>42</sup> so the cry "Go up, go up!" with which they followed him, seems to us a mocking allusion to the ascent of Elijah.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Although we do not agree with Captain Conder (Tent-work in Palestine, Vol. 2, pp. 106-108), that the Bethel of the worship of Jeroboam was, as mediaeval tradition represents it, on Mount Gerizim, we cannot help transferring to our pages some lines of his very graphic description of our Bethel: "Bethel at the present day is one of the most desolate-looking places in Palestine; not from lack of water.... All the neighborhood is of grey, bare stone, or white chalk. The miserable fields are fenced in with stone walls, the hovels are rudely built of stone, the hill to the east is of hard rock, with only a few scattered fig-gardens... The place seems as it were turned to stone."

<sup>41</sup> In the present instance, the expression would be equivalent to what in similar circumstances an older man might contemptuously use: a set of boys.

<sup>42</sup> It is used in different application in the following passages: Leviticus 13:43; 21:5; Numbers 6:5; Isaiah 3:17; 15:2.

<sup>43</sup> It has been contended that the expression refers only to Elisha's "going up" to Bethel; but it is exactly that which is used of the ascent of Elijah, and it explains alike the temper of those young men, and the judgment that overtook them.



In the spirit that prompted the words of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 16:6- 8), and of Peter (Acts 5:3, 4), not, we feel assured, in that of personal revenge, Elisha turned round and pronounced on them that doom which soon afterwards <sup>44</sup> overtook them in a manner so strange that it seems to have been specially intended to attract public attention. <sup>45</sup> For although the exceeding danger from bears, especially when irritated, is frequently referred to in Scripture, <sup>46</sup> and the large number (forty-two) slain, not eaten, by the two she-bears, indicates how many youths had combined to go forth for the purpose of mocking Elisha, yet so extensive a calamity from such a cause was so unusual and must have spread such wide mourning as to draw universal attention to the ministry of Elisha.

We can scarcely suppose that Elisha tarried in Bethel. In pursuance of his object publicly to declare himself the successor of Elijah, he passed on to Mount Carmel, where Elijah had been during the latter part of his ministry, and thence returned to Samaria to be in readiness for his work.

**VI\_09 - JEHOSEPHAT, (FOURTH) KING OF JUDAH - JORAM, (TENTH) KING OF ISRAEL  
The Allied Expedition against Moab - The Moabite Stone - Lessons of its Inscription -  
The March through the Wilderness of Edom -  
Want of Water - Interview with Elisha - Divine Deliverance - Defeat of Moab - The Siege of Kir-haraseth - Mesha offers up his Son -  
Withdrawal of the Allies.**

## 2 Kings 3:5-27.

THE first public act of Elisha's wider ministry is connected with an event of which the most strange and unlooked-for confirmation has been brought to light within the last few years. When in August,

<sup>44</sup> It is impossible to decide whether the calamity happened at once or a little while afterwards. But it should be noticed that it was not Elisha who slew those forty-two youths, but the LORD in His Providence, just as it had been Jehovah, not the prophet, who had healed the waters of Jericho.

<sup>45</sup> It may here be noticed that, if the event had not really taken place, the inventor would have ascribed the destruction of the mocking youths to some less startling cause, say to pestilence, or the sword, or else to a sudden and direct interposition from heaven.

<sup>46</sup> Compare here such passages as 1 Samuel 17:34; 2 Samuel 17:8; Proverbs 17:12; 28:15; Daniel 7:5; Hosea 13:8; Amos 5:19.

1868, the Rev. F. Klein, of the Church Missionary Society, was traveling in Moab, his attention was directed by a friendly Sheik to a black basalt stone, about three feet ten inches in height, two feet in width, and fourteen and a half inches in thickness. The stone bore an inscription of thirty-four straight lines (about one and a quarter inches apart), which on learned investigation was found to be in the ancient Phoenician characters. The place where this memorial-stone, or column, was found was Diban, the ancient Dibon, the northern capital of Moab, north of the river Arnon. So far as can be judged from the shapeless mass of ruins (comp. Jeremiah 48:18) that cover the twin hills on which the ancient city had stood, surrounded by a wall, "it was quite within the old city walls; near what, we presume, was the gateway, close to where the road has crossed it." Whether it had originally stood there, is another and not easily answered question.

Before referring to the important evidence derived from this discovery, we shall in a few sentences, give the melancholy history of this stone. It may teach us a lesson about "our unhappy divisions." The unexpected discovery of this stone led, in the first place, to jealousies for its coveted possession among the European communities in Jerusalem. In the end, in their eagerness to make as much profit as was possible out of these contentions, the Arabs quarreled among themselves - and broke up the stone. Happily, most of the fragments have been secured, and some "squeezes" on paper had previously been taken, so that all the important parts of the inscription can be read, and have - with but slight variations - been interpreted by critics of different countries.

Perhaps it may be convenient here to put down such parts of the inscription as are of importance to our present purpose, adding afterwards brief comments in explanation. The inscription begins as follows (we mark the original lines): -

1. I Mesha am son of Chemoshgad, King of Moab, the
2. Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years and I reign-
3. ed after my father. And I erected this stone to Chemosh at Kirkha [a stone of]

4. [sa] lvation, for he saved me from all despoilers, and made me see my desire upon all my enemies, upon Om-

5. [r] i, king of Israel. He afflicted Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his count-

6. [r] y. His son succeeded him, and he also said, I will afflict Moab. In my days he said [Let us go]

7. And I will see my desire on him and his house. And Israel [said], I will destroy with an everlasting destruction. Now Omri took (had taken) the land

8. Medeba and.... occupied it.... the days of his son, forty years. And Chemosh [had mercy]

9. on it in my days, and I built Baal Meon, and made therein the tank, and I [built]

We cannot here continue this quotation, interesting as are the issues involved. What follows describes the reconquest by Mesha of various towns in the north of Moab, formerly occupied by Israel, their reconstruction and the dedication of captive women to "Ashtar-Chemosh" (Astarte-Chemosh), and of what are described as "vessels of Jehovah," to Chemosh - both at the taking of Nebo, in the northernmost part of Moab.

In lines 1-9, first clause of the inscription, Mesha relates the subjugation of Moab by Omri, the father of Ahab, and the deliverance of that country, which he ascribes to Chemosh. This we suppose to have been connected with the retreat of the allied armies from Kir-haraseth, and their evacuation of the country (2 Kings 3:25).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The common view is that the "Inscription" refers to the rebellion of Mesha in the time of Ahaziah, and (in the lines not copied by us) to a supposed later occupation of Jahaz (which some even locate south of the Arnon) either by Ahaziah or Joram, who was afterwards driven from it by Mesha (Comp. Sayce, u.s. p. 95; Schlottmann in Riehm's Bibl. Hand-W.II). But: 1. There is not a trace of any such supposed invasion of Moab either by Ahaziah, or, still less, by Joram before his allied expedition with Jehoshaphat and Edom. 2. Joram could not have penetrated to Jahaz, which assuredly was not south but north of the Arnon, in the territory of Reuben (Joshua 13:18), without having taken the whole north of Moab - of which there is not a trace in the Bible - while the contrary is indicated in the "Inscription." 3. The reprisals upon Edom, also referred to in the "Inscription," must have taken place after the allied expedition, since before that Edom was in league with Moab (2 Chronicles 20:2, 22, 23). All these difficulties are avoided in the view taken in the text.

From all this we infer that the land of Moab, which had apparently recovered its independence during, or immediately after, the reign of Solomon, was, at least in part, reconquered by the warlike Omri. And from the list of towns which in other parts of the inscription Mesha mentions as having been retaken, we conclude that Omri had invaded Moab from the north, while afterwards the allied armies entered it from the south.

Accordingly a number of places are named as such which the king of Israel had fortified and Mesha recaptured. All these towns are north of the Arnon. The deep gorge, and the rapid current of that river, would render its passage by a hostile army extremely difficult. Hence the invading army of Omri seems to have been arrested by that obstacle, and Jahaz, which lay north of the Arnon, is the most southern point mentioned in the inscription, as held and fortified by the king of Israel.

But while Northern Moab was thus occupied by Israel, the southern part of the country seems to have preserved its independence during the reign both of Omri and of Ahab. After the death of the latter, "Moab rebelled" (2 Kings 3:5), under the leadership of their brave king Mesha - a name which is connected with the word "deliverance." He styles his father Chemosh-Gad, which is a compound of the names of the two gods, Chemosh and Gad (the latter the god of fortune). The first intimation of the movement for the recovery of their independence seems to have been the sudden invasion of Judaea by Moab, in alliance with the Ammonites and a tribe of Edomites (2 Chronicles 20). Probably the Moabites had not yet felt themselves sufficiently strong for an attack on the Israelitish stronghold in Northern Moab, and accordingly resolved on making a raid across the undefended boundary of Judah, while at the same time they sought to combine into an anti-Israelitish alliance all the tribes along the eastern line of Palestine. We know that through the Divine help to Jehoshaphat, this expedition signally failed, while in the mutual slaughter which ensued the Edomite allies of Moab were the first to suffer. Hence, the projected anti-Israelitish league was not only broken up, but Edom was drawn into what seems to have been a Palestinian counter league, the pathetic story of which is connected with the so-called "Moabite stone." It is impossible to find

words for the varied feelings which rise as we realize that after the lapse of 2,500 years a monumental stone should in such unexpected manner have been found to bear testimony to Holy Scripture, and especially to its record of that event from which Mesha dates the recovery of the independence of Moab,<sup>48</sup> - all the more that he ascribes the glory of it to Chemosh, his god.<sup>49</sup>

When from the Moabite inscription we turn to the Biblical narrative, we learn that Mesha, like his predecessors, had been under heavy annual tribute to Israel, which was paid in kind. We read that he "was a sheepmaster." The extensive downs of Moab were covered by numberless flocks, and the tribute which he had to pay consisted of "a hundred thousand lambs, and a hundred thousand wethers - the wool." The wording in the original is not very clear, but as the term used for "lambs" generally designates "fed lambs," we conclude that if it is intended to convey that the wool formed the tribute, it must have been that of "the wethers," and that to this the hundred thousand fed lambs were added. It need scarcely be said that this tribute ceased when Mesha cast off the yoke of Israel.

The events previously related will sufficiently account for the anxiety of Jehoshaphat that the growing power of Moab should be checked, and a counter league formed effectually to oppose the common enemies of Palestine. As regards any religious scruples to an alliance with Israel, he

<sup>48</sup> As I understand it, the Inscription traces in the first six lines the state of Moab under Omri and Ahab. For reasons easily understood, reference is not made to the straits to which Kir-haraseth was reduced, while at the same time, and very significantly, emphasis is laid on the help given by Chemosh. Similarly the withdrawal of the Jewish expedition is passed over, and the Inscription goes on to record how (after their withdrawal) Mesha gradually recovered, town by town, all Northern Moab, how he rebuilt the various towns, and finally also made reprisals on Edom.

<sup>49</sup> The language of the Inscription illustrates, perhaps better than anything else, the heathen notion of national deities, how Moab regarded Chemosh as the rival god of that of Israel, and how true even to national thought are those expressions in the Old Testament which represent national calamity or deliverance as clue to the anger or favor of God. In using such expressions the prophets and sacred historians appealed to what were, so to speak, admitted facts in popular consciousness.

may have argued that Joram was not like Ahaziah, nor even like Ahab (2 Kings 3:2), and that since God Himself had given such signal victory over Moab, a common invasion of their land might even be pleasing in His sight. We rarely fail to find a satisfactory or even a religious reason for doing that on which we set our hearts. But it does seem strange, that the answer which Jehoshaphat returned to the invitation of Joram to join him in the campaign against Moab should have been precisely the same as that which he had given on the disastrous occasion when Ahab asked him to go up against Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22:4). Perhaps, however, it was a common mode of expression in such circumstances, or else the sacred historian may have wished to emphasize the folly and wrong of Jehoshaphat's conduct by using the same terms as formerly in the unhappy alliance with Ahab. The plan agreed upon by the two monarchs was to make invasion of Moab from the south. This, not only in order to ensure the co-operation of the king of Edom, who had now joined the anti-Moabite league, and to protect their rear and their communications, but also for important strategic reasons. Northern Moab was, indeed, subject to Israel, but the Arnon marked the boundary, and no prudent commander would attempt to force such a position as the line of the Arnon in the face of a general like Mesha. On the other hand, by fetching "a seven days' compass," and advancing front the south and through Edom, alike their retreat was covered and supplies would be secured. And if Mesha could be drawn into the wilderness which separated Edom from Southern Moab, and belonged partly to the one, partly to the other country, the whole of Moab might be overrun, and the invading army from the south join hands with the Israelitish garrisons north of the Arnon.

But once more the incapacity, if not the treachery, of Edom defeated the plans of the allies. Mesha refused to be drawn into the wilderness of Edom. As we understand it, his army was posted on the Moabite side of the boundary, which is here

formed by the Wady 'el Ahsa,<sup>50</sup> while higher up it passes into the Wady Tufileh.

We suppose that it was here, or in some other dried-up wady close by, that the allies, who were now suffering from want of water, suddenly found themselves in presence of an enemy that swarmed the tangled brushwood and thicket around. Unable to cross the Wady and engage the enemy, who seemed ubiquitous, or to retreat into the wilderness, the position of the allies seemed, humanly speaking, hopeless.

It was in these circumstances that the grand difference in principle between the king of Israel and pious Jehoshaphat appeared, as it always does in seasons of trial and decision between the servants of the LORD and those of "strange gods." Joram could descry nothing but impending ruin, and his only thought concerning Jehovah was that He had brought the three kings together for their destruction. Jehoshaphat, though often and sadly failing through weakness of character, was yet true in the inmost direction of his heart. In his distress he instinctively turned to the LORD for guidance. His inquiry for a "prophet of Jehovah" brought out two facts of infinite comfort: that Elisha, known as the attendant of Elijah,<sup>51</sup> was - no doubt by Divine direction - present in the camp; and that there was one in the following of the king of Israel - probably one of the superior officers - who knew of it, being evidently in sympathy with that which the prophet represented, as Obadiah had been in the days of Ahab (1 Kings 18:3).

We read that the three kings went to the tent of Elisha. This not merely from apprehension that he might refuse to come to them, nor yet from humility; but probably because they may have dreaded the effect upon the host of such words as formerly Micaiah had spoken in similar circumstances (1 Kings 22:17-28). The reception which this incongruous company of kings met at

the hands of the prophet was certainly not encouraging. On the other hand, an appeal for help addressed to the prophet of Jehovah by the heathen king of Edom and the son of Ahab seemed to treat the prophetic office as if it had involved heathen magic and divination, just as Balak of old had sought to employ Balaam against Israel. To an appeal of such a character Elisha could not have listened; it should - as he told the king of Israel - be addressed to the prophets of Baal. How truly Elisha had judged Joram appears from his answer, when with almost incredible dullness, he once more urged - presumably as the reason for his coming - that Jehovah, the God of the prophet, and the old enemy of the house of Ahab, had brought these kings together for their destruction. With such an one it was impossible to argue, and the prophet turned from him to the king of Judah, for whose sake alone he would consent to continue the interview, or would seek the guidance and help of the LORD.

It has been assumed by a certain school of critics that when Elisha next called for a minstrel, it was to rouse in himself the prophetic faculty, or else that such was the common mode of producing prophetic inspiration. But for the latter assertion there is not a tittle of evidence,<sup>52</sup> while, as regards the former, alike Biblical (1 Samuel 16:16) and heathen testimony<sup>53</sup> go to prove that the purpose for which music was employed was to soothe, not to excite the mind.

It was not otherwise in the present instance. From the agitation of his interview with Joram Elisha was restored by the minstrel to quietness, and thus prepared for receiving the Divine communication. This was twofold: it gave promise of deliverance from the present straits and of complete victory over Moab. The people were directed to make the

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It has been objected that Wady 'el Ahsa is a permanent watercourse. But this has not been ascertained in regard to all seasons of the year. Besides it may have been some branch or side wady of 'el Ahsa. At any rate the narrative implies that the allied armies had expected to find water, and were disappointed.

<sup>51</sup>

He who "poured water" on his hands.

<sup>52</sup>

Assuredly, 1 Samuel 10:5 does not afford such; it only records the fact that such prophetic communities employed music, not that they incited themselves thereby to prophesy - if indeed, the term prophesy in that connection means the same as in our passage.

<sup>53</sup>

Bochart has collated many passages to that effect (Hieroz. 1. 2, 44) from which Bahr selects the following (from Cicero): "They" (the Pythagoreans) "were wont to recall their minds from strain of thought to quietness by means of singing and flutes."



Wady full of pits - and then, without sound of wind, or sight of rain, would the Wady be filled with water, and the host set free from their present straits. But this was only preparatory. A complete victory would be granted to them, and in their victorious progress they would destroy all fenced cities and absolutely lay waste the enemy's country. It is not ours to vindicate the work of warfare here indicated, although not prescribed (v. 19).<sup>54</sup>

It seems to be opposed to the express Divine direction in Deuteronomy 20:19, 20. In judging of it some considerations must, however, be kept in view. First and foremost we have to remember the spirit of the times. Nor is the time so far distant when a mode of warfare not very unlike this was common in an enemy's country. As a matter of fact, this mode of laying waste a hostile country seems to have been general at that time among all nations. Accordingly it is frequently represented on the Assyrian monuments, and referred to in classical writings.

It may be of interest here to recall two points which might otherwise be overlooked. It will be remembered that the inscription on the "Moabite stone" makes the following special reference to this mode of warfare: "In my days he said, [Let us go,] and I will see my desire on him and his house. And Israel (said), I will destroy with an everlasting destruction." Thus the Moabite stone to a certain extent bears testimony to the very words which Elisha had used. Again, it may be doubted whether, if Israel had not adopted this mode of warfare, the retreat of the allied army from Kir-haraseth would not have been followed by a most formidable Moabite invasion into Palestine. As it was, the repair of the havoc wrought in his country must have engaged all the energies of Mesha. And to this work of necessary restoration and recuperation the closing part of the Moabite inscription bears testimony.

We return to the narrative of what happened on the morrow of the interview with Elisha. As directed

by the prophet, pits had been dug - as we imagine, either in the rear or along the sides of the camp of Israel, although we know too little of the actual circumstances to venture on any more detailed statement. However it may have been, the Divine prediction by Elisha was literally fulfilled. Once more it all happened in the orderly succession of events, while, if viewed by itself, the issue would seem, as in the highest sense it was, miraculous. And this indeed holds true of the record of most Biblical miracles, that they are the statement of effects, without the assignment or explanation of the causes that led up to them. In the present instance, it was no doubt a sudden storm that had burst in the mountains of Moab which sent a rush of water down the Wady by which Israel was camped. The prophetic historian, who loves to connect Jehovah's deliverance with the loved services of the sanctuary, reminds us that it was "when the meat-offering was offered," that "there came water by the way of Edom," - to disappear as suddenly as it had come, when the object had been served.

The Israelites in their camp had seen it, and hastened to quench their thirst. The Moabites also saw it, but to them it seemed as the eastern sun shone on the water in the pits, reddened as it was by the color of the soil, that they were gazing on pools of blood. Their late expedition into Judah suggested a ready explanation of the strange sight. Perhaps their superstition might lead them to imagine that Chemosh, of whose help we read so much in the Moabite inscription, had now granted to Moab a success precisely similar to that of Judah. The kings were destroyed - they had smitten one another: now, therefore, Moab to the spoil!

Meantime, the commanders of the allied army would naturally keep their men within their camp, so as to allow the disorderly rush of Bedawin, intent on spoil, to cross the Wady and approach them quite closely, before suddenly sallying forth to inflict indiscriminate slaughter. Mesha was too wary to risk another defeat of the same kind. He retreated before Israel, evacuating every fortified town, till he reached the stronghold of Kir-haraseth, where he resolved to make a final stand. The Jewish army slowly followed the retreating

<sup>54</sup> Some critics have regarded ver. 19 as only a prediction of what they would do. But in such a case it seems difficult to distinguish between a prediction of certain acts and at least an implied sanction of them.



enemy, destroying every town and laying waste the country around. Their progress was arrested at the walls of Kir-haraseth. As we consider the situation of that fortress, we scarcely wonder that the allies found themselves unable to do more than harass the garrison by posting sharpshooters on the hills around ("the slingers went about it"), and attempt to reduce it by hunger. The position of Kir-Moab, "the fortress of Moab," (Isaiah 15:1),<sup>55</sup> Kir-haraseth (Isaiah 16:7), Kir-harash (Isaiah 16:7), or Kir-haraseth - for it bears all these names, which seem to mean "fortress of brickwork," - has been ascertained beyond reasonable doubt.

The Chaldee paraphrast designates it (Isaiah 15:1) Keraka deMoabh, which exactly answers to the modern name Kerak. A continuous ascent from the south, amidst Alpine scenery, leads up to Kerak, which lies 3,720 feet above the Mediterranean. From the last crest, whence there is a magnificent prospect far away, we look down into the "Wady of Kerak, some 1800 feet of nearly sheer precipice on the opposite side."

Along that Wady winds among rocks the road, so narrow that a few resolute men could hold it against an army. As the Wady widens, the ground is cultivated "with olives, figs, pomegranates, and a few vineyards and patches of corn." Soon Kerak itself is seen, towering high aloft. To reach it, we must first descend into the valley. Then an hour's climb up the opposite cliff brings the traveler to an arched tunnel of about eighty yards in length, through which he emerges into the city of Kerak.

The plateau on which the town stands is almost level, and measures from 800 to 1000 yards on each face of the triangle which the city forms, and of which the north-eastern side is the longest. Here, and to a less degree at the south-west angle, the plateau is connected with the heights which surround Kerak on every side. But everywhere else the town is cut off from the encircling range by "Wadies (in part) from 1000 to 1500 feet deep, with steeply scarped or else rugged sides." If we imagine this isthmus of rock, jutting into and rising above a sea of deep Wadies, itself surrounded by a broad wall with towers and other

defenses, and crowned by a city to which there were only two entrances, each through a tunnel in the side of the cliff - we can form a picture of Kir-haraseth, as it appeared to the Jewish host that gazed on it from the heights around.

But although the allied army could not reduce the city, "the slingers" posted on the overlooking heights might inflict serious losses on the garrison. In fact, the place would soon have become untenable. In these circumstances Mesha endeavored, at the head of 700 swordsmen, to cut his way through the besieging army in the direction where the king of Edom was posted - either because this was the weakest point in the camp of the allies, or probably because he may have expected less resistance in that quarter. Driven back into the city, the frenzy of despair seized him. The idea underlying sacrifice was in heathen worship also that of substitution, though not as provided by the mercy of God, but in order to appease His wrath. It was not the infinite compassion and love of God which provided a ransom, but the despair of mercy and goodness that suggested such means as the last hope of expiation. Hence that which was nearest and dearest to a man was offered up to propitiate, if possible, a god who was not known to be full of compassion. And so the king of Moab now took his eldest son, who should have succeeded him on the throne, and in sight of besiegers and besieged offered him on the wall as a burnt offering. Thus would he conciliate Chemosh; thus also would he show his devotion to his country. It was a horrible, sickening spectacle, which made deepest impression on all onlookers - friend as well as foe. The undertaking on which Israel had engaged its allies became hateful to all - and the allied army retired from before Kir-haraseth. So ended the campaign against Moab,

<sup>55</sup> Isaiah 15 and 16, should be studied in connection with the history of Moab.

**VI\_10 - THE MINISTRY OF ELISHA AS THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LIVING GOD IN ISRAEL The Prophet's Widow and her Miraculous Deliverance - The Shunammite and Elisha - The God-given Child - His Death and Restoration to Life - Elisha at Gilgal - "Death in the Pot" - The Man from Baal-Shalisha - God's sufficient and unfailing Provision for His own.**

**2 Kings 4**

THERE is something grand and truly characteristic of "prophetic history" when the Biblical narrative abruptly turns from the expedition against Moab, which, although so simply told, was of such deep and lasting political importance, to tell what reads like a summary of the prophetic activity of Elisha. It shows, on the one hand, how all events are regarded from the Divine point of view, while on the other hand, it helps us to understand the real meaning and purpose of the miraculous element in the ministry of Elisha, as designed to recall Israel to a realizing sense of the presence and power of Jehovah, and by such religious revival to avert imminent national judgment. Accidentally we obtain in the course of the narrative, interesting side-glances into private and public life in Israel, which generally confirm our confidence in the historic truth of what is related.

At the outset we may say that the impression which this history as a whole makes on us, is that it seems transferred or perhaps rather summarized, from some special narrative or work descriptive of the activity of Elisha. The incidents do not seem arranged in their strict chronological succession, but grouped according to their internal connection, so that an account of the more private activity of the prophet, as regards individuals, families, and communities, is followed by that of his public activity, in its bearing on Israel and Syria. Again, it is reasonable to suppose that all which is here recorded had not occurred exclusively during the reign of Joram, which lasted only twelve years (2 Kings 3:1). For as Elisha died during the reign of Joash (2 Kings 13:14), his ministry must have extended over four reigns, and lasted altogether about fifty-five or fifty-seven years. Hence there would be a blank of forty-five years in the narrative if all that is recorded of Elisha had taken place in the time of Joram. But the deepest lesson

which the life and ministry of Elisha were intended to teach was to set forth, as against the dark background of coming judgment upon Israel's apostasy, the tender care, the sufficient provision, the ever-present help which the LORD would extend to His own servants and people.

The first narrative <sup>56</sup> in this biographical sketch - as for want of better name we may term it - has somewhat inaptly been compared with the account of Elijah's miraculous provision for the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17:9-16).

On carefully comparing the two narratives, they will be seen to differ in every detail, except this, that in both instances the recipient of the benefit was a widow. But besides, the great object and meaning of the miracle at Sarepta was to be a prefigurement of the mercy and help to be extended to the Gentile world, with all of warning and teaching to Israel which this implied. Its counterpart, in the history of Elisha, would be the healing of Naaman, rather than this narrative of Divine help granted to the impoverished widow of one of the sons of the prophets.

Josephus and some of the Rabbis have suggested that this widow had been the wife of that Obadiah who had provided shelter and food for the persecuted prophets in the reign of Ahab (1 Kings 18). But here also the only point of similarity between the two narratives is that the widow of the prophet pleads, in the words of Obadiah (1 Kings 18:12), that her husband "did fear Jehovah." The narrative bears that on the death of her husband, who had been one of the sons of the prophets, and (what is even more important) apparently well known to Elisha as one that feared Jehovah, the creditor had come to take her two sons as bondsmen. We know not through what adverse circumstances the family had been so far reduced; but we can readily believe that in those days faithfulness to Jehovah might lead to outward reverses, not to prosperity. And when he was removed who had been the support of his family by that daily labor, which evidently was not regarded as incompatible with his vocation as one of the "sons of the prophets," then "the creditor"

<sup>56</sup> And the latter part of the second narrative, 2 Kings 4:32-37.

seized on the sons of the widow. In so doing he availed himself of his legal right in the matter (Leviticus 25:39; comp. Matthew 18:25),<sup>57</sup> although his action was unjustifiably harsh and selfish.

If in these circumstances the prophet had not given heed to the appeal of the widow, it would have implied either that he was not the living medium between God and His people, which he professed, or else that Jehovah was not the living and the true God in the sense in which Elisha had preached Him. With reverence be it said, the appeal to the prophet could no more have remained unanswered than a cry for help addressed to Christ in the days of His flesh.

A similar conclusion would be reached if, somewhat realistically, we were to transport this history into our own days. If a widow were, in like circumstances, to seek guidance and comfort, she would be pointed to the living God, and to His sure promise of help in all straits. But what is this when translated into concrete fact other than the miracle wrought at the intercession, or, if you please, at the instance, though not by the hands, of Elisha? And may we not say that, as regards the result, the same miracle is still daily enacted, though not in the same manner as regards the succession of events? In truth, the two worlds of the seen and unseen are not so wide apart as some imagine. To many of us the answer to the "Give us this day our daily bread," comes directly from heaven, and more than the daily bread, or the like of it, is assured to us in the realization of His daily and indirect help. And if in this history all this was exhibited in a concrete manner, it was required in the circumstances of the time and for the purposes of the mission of Elisha, although its lesson is to all time and to all men.

We mark, that in order to put aside any idea of direct agency in the matter on the part of the prophet, the miraculous help was not sent by the hands of Elisha, but connected so far as possible

<sup>57</sup>

The Athenian and Roman law equally sanctioned servitude for debt, - in fact, this seems to have been the universal practice in the ancient world, and the law of Moses only softened it by special injunctions and provisions, and modified it by the law of the Jubilee.

with some visible and ordinary means. It is in this manner that we explain the question of the prophet, what the widow had in her house. And when she replied, "Anointing oil,"<sup>58</sup> the promised help was connected with the use of it as a means.

The widow was directed to borrow empty vessels from all her neighbors, then to shut the door behind her and her sons, and to pour from what she had into those empty vessels, when the multiplying blessing of God would fill them. It would be difficult to imagine any symbol more full of meaning and instruction, alike in its general direction and in its details. It showed that God was a present help. His special blessing, given when needed directly and miraculously, would increase our scanty provision. Nor can we be mistaken in supposing that the direction to shut the door behind her and her sons was intended to enjoin not only reverent acknowledgment, but silent worship of God. And truly so ought we also, when seeking help from Him, ever to feel ourselves alone with Him, combining, like her of old, absolute trust in the promise of His Word with active obedience to His direction: doing what lies in us while praying; and praying while doing it. Lastly, it seems quite in accordance with what had passed that when all the borrowed vessels were full, and the oil had stayed, the widow should, before disposing of anything, have gone to the prophet for his direction, and, we may add, equally so that Elisha should have told her first to pay her creditor, and then to employ the rest towards the sustenance of herself and her sons.

The second narrative<sup>59</sup> in this series of "the acts" of the prophet, transports us to the quiet of the village of Shunem, and the retirement of a pious Israelitish home. We know Shunem from our

<sup>58</sup>

Not "a pot of oil." The expression occurs only in this passage. It unquestionably means oil for anointing, which, it is well known, is in universal use in the East. But it must be left undetermined whether, as the LXX. and the Vulgate imply, there was only left sufficient for anointing once, and whether the answer indicates that this had formerly furnished the means of livelihood to the family. The latter view seems suggested by verse 7.

<sup>59</sup>

Here also there are peculiar expressions, confirming the view that the whole section is derived from some special work on the subject.

former history,<sup>60</sup> but then it was associated with battle or else with scenes far different from those to which we are about to be introduced.

The modern Sulem is a wretched collection of mud-hovels. Except from its situation, it scarcely recalls the thriving, healthy, happy, agricultural village of old, as it seemed to look in sunny contentment over the rich plain of Esdraelon. It was in close contiguity to the summer palace of Jezreel, which was perched on the hill above, occupying a position equally beautiful and commanding. And despite its nearness to a corrupt court, there was quite another moral atmosphere about its homes. Shunem seems to have preserved something of the old Israelitish spirit, some of that purity, earnestness, impulsiveness, and we had almost said intenseness, which even long afterwards characterized Northern Palestine and the people of Galilee. A sturdy sense of independence (2 Kings 4:13), combined with reverent simplicity (verses 9, 10), warm home-affections (verses 16, 18, 20), earnest religiousness, and an unwavering spiritual faith (verses 23, 24, 28) - such are the ideas which we have learned to associate with Shunem. And the very physique of this population seems to have corresponded with this moral healthiness. Apparently Shunem was not only the home of wealthy men, but also of fair women, such as of the beautiful Abishag, King David's maiden wife (1 Kings 1:3), or the lovely Shulamite who ravished Solomon's heart (Cant. 6:13, etc.), and of the Shunammite of our present narrative.

We infer that at this time Elisha had been frequently passing between Samaria and what was probably his ordinary place of abode on Carmel.

The direct road from the one to the other place does not lead by Shunem, which lies somewhat farther to the east, at the south-western slope of "little Hermon," and on the opposite side of Esdraelon from Carmel, at a distance of about fifteen or twenty miles across the plain. But it so happened that on a certain occasion Elisha,

<sup>60</sup> We think of it in connection with such battles as those of Gideon, of Saul at Gilboa, and generally with those fought on or by the plain of Esdraelon, as well as with the near palace of Jezreel.

"passed over [thus literally] to Shunem."

According to good Israelitish custom, hospitality would be offered to him; but it was only what was becoming that such should have been extended to the prophet by the mistress of what seems to have been the "great" house<sup>61</sup> at Shunem.

We infer that Elisha was at first unwilling to accept the invitation to the "great" house. Probably there were few such in the land where the prophet could have felt himself at home. But when he yielded to the urgent yet modest importunity of the Shunammite, he must soon have perceived that this was not only a pleasant place of rest on the journey, but one to which he might safely resort for refreshment of body and mind. We are too apt to apply our modern habits of thought and expression to the relationships of ancient times. Yet this may here be pointed out, that the manner in which the Shunammite marked Elisha as a "holy" man of God, indicates enlightened piety; the care with which she received him, affectionate regard; the provision which she made for his absolute privacy, unselfishness and reverence; and the circumstance (later alluded to) of her attendance on Elisha's religious instruction (v. 23), a certain spiritual relationship between them. And so it came that, after this first visit, "as oft" as Elisha "passed across" the plain of Esdraelon, "he turned aside" [and this also literally, since Shunem was not in the direct road] to enjoy the hospitality of the pious mistress of the "great" house at Shunem.

But the frequency of his visits, so far from inducing familiarity, only led to increased reverence on the part of the Shunammite. Her observation had led her to regard Elisha as not only far different from those who at that period may sometimes have passed as prophets, but even from ordinary sons of the prophets - even as a man of God distinguished by holiness. All this she

<sup>61</sup> It matters little whether we regard the expression "great" as referring to wealth, or, which from the after history seems more likely, to standing and family (comp. 1 Samuel 25:2; 2 Samuel 19:32). The further question, why the mistress, not the master, of the house is named, may be answered by the suggestion that the property had originally been hers, or else that her piety made her take the lead in all good works, to which her husband was more the consenting than the proposing party.



urged on her husband as she proposed to make provision not only for his more proper entertainment, but for his complete privacy. In Palestine an outside stair led up from the road to the roof of the house, so that it was not necessary to pass through the interior of a dwelling. Part of the roof of the house she would now surround with walls, so making an "upper chamber" of it. This would give to the prophet at all times undisturbed, and, if he wished it, unobserved access to, and egress from, his lodging. This was indeed thoughtful, unselfish, and withal, respectful kindness and hospitality. The chamber thus provided, as well as the scanty furnishing of it, may seem to our modern notions very simple. Yet it implied the surrender by the family of the part of the house most appreciated in the East, while the furniture, however scanty according to our ideas, included not only more but better than was ordinarily found in the very simple sleeping apartments of Orientals.<sup>62</sup> Evidently the object was to provide for a prolonged stay on the part of the prophet, and for his complete privacy, and, as appears from the context (v. 13), it included not only the prophet, but also his servant.

There was such delicacy about all this "trouble" with which the Shunammite had been "troubled"<sup>63</sup> for him and his servant, that Elisha, who had at first been reluctant to accept any hospitality, now regularly availed himself of the provision for his comfort and retirement. It was only natural that he should have thought of some return to his hostess. Accordingly on one occasion he directed his servant Gehazi,<sup>64</sup> whom we here meet for the first time, to inquire of the Shunammite what service he could render to her.

<sup>62</sup> "A table" was not ordinarily placed in a mere sleeping-room, while the expression "chair," not "stool," as in the A.V., indicates a seat of honor. Comp. here 1 Kings 10:19; 1 Samuel 1:9, 4:13; Psalm 122:5; Nehemiah 3:7. The conceit of the Rabbis that the Shunammite was a sister of Abishag (1 Kings 1) needs not refutation. If the latter had lived, she would at that time have probably been about 140 years old.

<sup>63</sup> The word means unrest and trouble, rather than care.

<sup>64</sup> Probably "Valley of Vision." The name is perhaps derived from his birth-place, which may have been so called from the sojourn there, or near it, of a prophet.

The suggestion: "Is there [ought] to be spoken for thee [is there occasion for it] to the king or the captain of the host?" indicates a somewhat insecure state of things, as well as a somewhat despotic order in the State when "the captain of the host" stands ominously near to the king. At the same time it also implies the existence of better relations between the monarch and the prophet, and so confirms the view formerly expressed that the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, attested at almost every stage by direct Divine manifestations, tended at least to arrest the progress of apostasy in Israel.

The answer of the Shunammite to Gehazi: "I dwell among my own people," manifests not only a true Israelitish spirit of frank independence, but reflects a favorable light on that district, which (as all other parts of the country) would be primarily under the rule of its own eldership.

What followed is most pictorially set forth. To the question of Elisha, what there was to be done for her, Gehazi, who certainly had keen worldly insight, replied: "Surely, she has no son, and her husband is old." It was only a suggestion, and in this respect also characteristic of Gehazi. But now, when it was not to be a favor asked of man, but wondrous mercy to be granted by God, Elisha spake to the Shunammite not through Gehazi but directly, giving her the promise of what under the Old Testament was regarded as bringing far deeper than merely a mother's joy.

And there is about her answer such air of genuineness, a mingling of hope with a not daring to expect, and withal such absence of any legendary embellishment, that we can almost imagine ourselves hearing her speak it, as she respectfully stands within the shadow of the door.

It was as Elisha had said, and the Shunammite became the joyous mother of a son. Since then years had passed, during which we have no record of Elisha's continued visits to the "great" house, now gladdened by the voice of a child. Perhaps he no longer, or at least, not so often, passed by; more probably Scripture, after its wont, is silent on that which is purely personal in the history. But the child had passed through five of the stages which Jewish affection, watching with special fondness the opening life, has successively marked by no



less than nine designations. They are so interesting that we shall here put them down. The yeled ("born," "babe") had successively become a yonek, or suckling, and an olal, who, no longer satisfied with only this nourishment, asks for bread,<sup>65</sup> then a gamel, or weaned one, and next a taph, one who clings to his mother.

And he had passed through this stage also, and was just entering on the stage designated by elem, becoming firm and strong. It was the time of harvest, and the child was going out to his father to the reapers, when the hot Eastern sun struck his head. At his cry of pain the father bade one of the servants carry the child back to his mother. All that long morning she pressed his aching head to her bosom, till when the mid-day sun shot down its arrows he lay still and dead in her arms. Not a cry of lament escaped that brave mother to tell them in the house of the terrible desolation that had swept over it. Her resolve was taken with the rapidity and unfailing certitude that comes of faith. To Elisha, or rather to Elisha's God! He had given; He could restore the child. In any case she would go with her complaint, not to man, but to the God of almighty help, and not rest satisfied with anything unless it came directly from Him.

It was quite in accordance with all this, and very significant, that in silence she carried her dead child to the prophet's chamber, and there laid him on the bed. Here let him rest, as it were, in keeping of the prophet's God, whose promise had first brought him, till, if ever, the prophet's God would again waken him. And so, like the prophet's widow when she received the Divine help, she shut the door. For, what had man to do with it? her appeal lay directly to God. But she must have been a strong as well as a good woman, strong also in faith, when she could so well keep her feelings under control that her husband had not even suspicion of aught amiss when she preferred the unusual request that one of the servants and one of the beasts of burden should be sent back from the field, that she might at once resort to the man of God. For it was neither New Moon nor Sabbath, when, as we are led to infer, the prophet was wont

to give religious instruction, and people gathered around him, and perhaps came to Carmel from a considerable distance.<sup>66</sup>

With a deprecating "Peace" - as it were, Pray let it be so - she waved aside the inquiry of the busy man. And, once her home behind her, she fully gave herself to what was before her. It was no longer a weak woman on whom the greatest earthly sorrow had descended, but one strong, resolute, bent on a great purpose, and wholly self-forgetful. As she had herself, no doubt for speed, seen to the saddling of the ass (v. 24), so she now bade the servant: "drive on,<sup>67</sup> go; delay me not in my riding [hinder me not, keep me not back], unless I bid thee."

The sun must have been declining towards the west, when, after that ride of fifteen or twenty miles, she was nearing Carmel. From a bluff of the mountain the prophet had been watching the rider speeding in such haste across the plain, and recognized the Shunammite. Although not Divinely informed, and therefore not Divinely assured of a happy issue, he must have known that only some great trouble to herself, her husband, or her child, would have brought her on that afternoon and in such manner. And so he sent Gehazi to meet her with an inquiry meant to reassure her, at least so far as his own interest and sympathy were concerned. But all the more that she so understood it, would she be neither detained by Gehazi, nor could she have opened her heart to him. Indeed, to have attempted telling her sorrow or her need to any man would have been to unfit her, in every sense, for telling it to the prophet. At sight of Elisha the strong woman for the first time gave way. She had reached the goal, and now in an agony of passion she threw herself at his feet and laid hold on them, as if in her despair she could not let him go without helping her. It was, as in Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, the mode of agonizing prayer suited to Old Testament times,

<sup>65</sup> Lamentations 4:4: "The tongue of the yonek cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the olalim asks bread."

<sup>66</sup> The inference does not, indeed, seem absolutely certain, but it appears implied that in the time when this narrative is laid the interpretation of the fourth commandment was not so rigidly literal as to forbid the use of an ass for such purposes as that in the text.

<sup>67</sup> The word is the same as in reference to Jehu: "for he driveth madly" (2 Kings 9:20).

when God and His help, and, indeed, most spiritual realities were presented in a concrete manner. From a spurious zeal for his master's honor, from false notions of what became, or did not become - the consequences of his utter want of spiritual insight and sympathy - Gehazi would have thrust her away. So would the multitude have silenced blind Bartimaeus, and even the disciples sent away the importunate Syrophenician woman (Matthew 15:23); and so do we in our mistaken notions of what is becoming or unbecoming too often hinder souls from personal contact with our LORD. But Elisha would not suffer Gehazi, for he knew that her soul was in anguish, although as God had not made him to know its cause, he was ignorant of what its issue would be.

It is this, we feel persuaded, which explains much in the conduct of Elisha - such as his first mission of Gehazi, which otherwise would seem strange, if not unintelligible. But surely never was Elisha more humbled than on the eve of the greatest miracle wrought by his hands; never did the poverty of his humanity, as merely an instrument in the hand of God, appear in more clear light than by the side of the help which Jehovah was about to send. And Elisha himself gave vent to these feelings when he spoke with such sorrow of Jehovah having hidden it from him, and not revealed it. <sup>68</sup>

But this we may say, that never was legend so constructed. To every thoughtful reader such purely human traits of felt weakness and of ignorance not only of the future, but of the present and the past, must carry instructive conviction of the truth of this narrative, full of the miraculous though it be.

The first words which the Shunammite spoke to Elisha revealed the state of the case. They were not an entreaty of help; they contained not even a suggestion of it. And yet they were the strongest appeal that could have been made, since they laid hold on the faithfulness of God to His word and promise. The commission of the prophet to Gehazi

to hasten on and lay Elisha's staff upon the face of the dead child seems at first difficult to understand. It is quite true that this was not an ordinary staff, but, as it were, the symbol of prophetic authority and rule, with all that this implied, like the staff of Moses (comp. here Exodus 4:17; 17:5, 9; Numbers 20:8, 9). But it is impossible to believe that Elisha expected either that the staff would restore life to the dead, or that Gehazi would be able to perform such a miracle; or, on the other hand, that Elisha acted under misapprehension, as Nathan had spoken to David when still uninstructed as to the will of God (2 Samuel 7:3, etc.); or else that the prophet could have imagined that the child was not really dead. Nor can we accept the suggestion sometimes made that Elisha had full well known Gehazi would not succeed, but had still sent him, in order to show - either to Gehazi, or to the Shunammite, or to Israel generally - that miracles were not magic, and that neither a Gehazi nor even a prophet's staff could produce them. It is difficult to use moderate language in rejecting suggestions which imply that Elisha had purposely employed what he knew to be useless measures in order to teach some abstract lesson, or that he could have done so at a moment of such agony and suspense. Kindred views in regard to God's dealings with us when under severe affliction are, indeed, too often entertained by Christians. They should give place to more enlightened conceptions of the character of God, and to a more simple and childlike faith in Him, Who afflicteth not willingly, but for our profit.

We feel convinced that the explanation of Gehazi's commission must be sought within the narrative itself. When Elisha dispatched his servant with his staff, it was with the intention that he should take his master's place. What afterwards determined him to go personally was the expressed resolve of the woman: "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee [viz., behind; I will not go, nor yet go without thee]. Then he arose and went after her." All this seems in accordance with what has been previously stated. If, as Elisha expressed it with sorrow, Jehovah had not communicated to His servant what had happened in the house of the Shunammite, then the prophet was not only ignorant of the final issue, but left

<sup>68</sup> It seems well nigh the extreme of critical misunderstanding when these words of Elisha are regarded as meaning that, if Elisha had known it, he would have hastened to Shunem. Comp. the opposite conduct of our Lord in the case of Lazarus (John 11:6).

without any Divine commission in the matter. In these circumstances he would wait for such direction as might be indicated to him in the course of events. And he received it, clearly and unmistakably, through the expressed resolution of the Shunammite. Accordingly he immediately followed her. The previous mission of Gehazi may have been tentative and preparatory; and the laying of the prophet's staff on the face of the child perhaps symbolic of the arrestment of the progress of decay. Nor can there be difficulty in understanding the prophet's direction to Gehazi not to salute any one by the way, nor to return any salutation. It was intended not only to indicate the necessity of speed on what brooked no delay, and of avoiding any worldly distraction when on such an errand, but also to prevent all such publicity as to the matter in hand, as would have been the natural sequence of conversation, especially on the part of one like Gehazi (comp. here also Luke 10:4).

The narrative passes in silence over the long ride across Esdraelon to Shunem. Evening must have gathered on the deep blue summer sky, when the two at length neared the desolate home. Ere they came to it, Gehazi had met them with the report: "The lad is not awaked," - and this also is significant of Gehazi's thoughts about the matter. He had literally obeyed his master's behest, and laid the staff upon the face of the child, "but there was neither voice nor attending [on the part of the dead child]." But by this time, we dare not doubt it, Elisha knew what he had to do. Even if the Lord had been silent to him, he had already received sufficient direction (comp. here Exodus 14:15). What follows in the narrative (v. 32) is chiefly intended to set more clearly before us the reality of what now took place. Arrived in his chamber, the prophet shut the door upon himself and the dead child that lay on his bed. We have learned to understand the meaning of this act, which symbolically set forth being alone with God. As regards his prayer to Jehovah and the close personal contact with the dead child, Elisha followed, as from every point of view we would have expected, the example of his master, Elijah,

when he recalled to life the widow's son at Sarepta <sup>69</sup> (1 Kings 17:17, 24).

Differences in detail there are between the two narratives, such as will readily be noticed. But these are best accounted for by the difference both in the circumstances and character and mission of the two prophets. In any case they are not of importance. But alike the symbolism and the lessons of this history must be apparent to all.

First, as regards the Shunammite. We see in her a true and faithful Israelitish woman, who, in a time of general apostasy, owned Jehovah alike in her life and her home. Receiving a prophet, because of Him Who had sent him, because he was a holy man of God - and with humility and entire self-forgetfulness - she received a prophet's reward in the gift most precious to a Jewish mother, which she had not dared to hope for, even when announced to her. Then, when severely tried, she still held fast to her trust in the promise - strong even when weakest - once more self-forgetful, and following deepest spiritual impulse. And, in the end, her faith appears victorious - crowned by Divine mercy, and shining out the more brightly from its contrast to the felt weakness of the prophet. As we think of this, it seems as if a fuller light were shed on the history of the trials of an Abraham, an Isaac, or a Jacob; on the inner life of those heroes of faith to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews points us for example and learning (Hebrews 11), and on such Scripture-sayings as these: "Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up" (1 Samuel 2:6); "Know that Jehovah hath set apart him that is godly for Himself: Jehovah will hear when I call unto Him" (Psalms 4:3); or this: "All the paths of Jehovah are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies" (Psalms 25:10).

The last glimpse we have of the Shunammite in this narrative is when called by Elisha to receive back her living son, she bends in lowly reverence, and then silently retires (2 Kings 4:36, 37). When

<sup>69</sup> The attempts at natural explanation of this miracle - such as by animal magnetism, by the administration of something to smell, or of some drug - are so utterly childish as not to deserve discussion.

next we meet her, it is in circumstances of trial almost as great as that through which she had formerly passed. Once more she proves true, trustful, and brave; and once more is her faith crowned by mercy and deliverance.

Secondly, we think of the symbolical and typical teaching of this history.<sup>70</sup> The Rabbis discuss the question, whether the dead child of the Shunammite could have Levitically defiled those who touched him.

This Pharisaic scruple deserves record for the significant answer it elicits: "The dead defileth, but the living does not defile." To us all this includes a meaning deeper than they could attach to it. The story speaks to us of Him through Whom "death is swallowed up in victory." As we think of Him Who, as God Incarnate, and as the Sent of the Father, is to us the Representative and the Prophet of God in a unique sense, we recall that it was not, as by Elijah or Elisha, through prayer and personal contact, but by the Word of His power that He raised the dead (Mark 5:39-42; Luke 7:13-15; John 11:43, 44). And beyond this we remember that "the hour.... now is, when the dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live"; and that "whosoever liveth and believeth" in Christ "shall never die" (John 5:25; 11:26).

Lastly, as regards the supernatural in this history, we fully admit that, as previously indicated, the history of Elijah and Elisha marks, so to speak, the high-point in the miraculous attestation of the mission of the prophets. But, by the side of it, there are so many elements of purely human interest, so many indications of human weakness, and so many details which would not have found a place in a legendary account (such as the fruitless mission of Gehazi), while, on the other hand, there is such unadorned simplicity about the whole narrative, and so much spiritual and typical teaching in it as to carry home almost instinctive

conviction of the truth and reality of what is recorded.

Yet another, we might almost call it twofold, narrative taken from the history of Elisha's more private ministry claims our attention (2 Kings 4:38-44). It is instructive, as confirming the view that this whole section about Elisha's ministry is taken from a special work on the subject, that the scene is now laid at a considerable interval from the previous history, and at a time of famine (v. 38), which is only long afterwards described in connection with Elisha's prophecy (2 Kings 8:1). The prophet is once more at Gilgal - not that near Jericho, but another Gilgal, close to Ebal and Gerizim, south-west of Shilo, and situated on a commanding plateau, 3,000 feet above the sea. Here a community of "the sons of the prophets" seems to have been settled (comp. 2 Kings 2:1). It is impossible to say whether Elisha was in the habit of visiting these settlements occasionally or at regular intervals, or else had come on purpose to share the poverty of the community at a time of exceptional distress. The former seems, however, the more likely, since we are told of "the sons of the prophets sitting before him," which, according to well-known Hebrew usage, means that Elisha was giving them instruction (comp. 2 Kings 6:1; Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 33:31; Zechariah 3:8; Acts 22:3).

While thus engaged the prophet directed that the usual humble meal should be prepared for the wants of his hearers. Even although it was a time of famine, yet the fare provided was so poor - and this, so far as the text informs us, not merely exceptionally, owing to the dearth - that our former impressions, derived from the straitened circumstances of the prophet's widow (4:1, 2), are fully confirmed. In truth, "the sons of the prophets" seem not only to have supported themselves by manual labor, but to have lived in the humblest manner. This willing submission to poverty and want from devotion to their work reflects the most favorable light on the institution to which they belonged. In the present instance one of their number was sent to gather "green

<sup>70</sup> From the time of Origen a somewhat fanciful allegorical view of this history has been presented. The dead lad represented the human race dead in sin; the staff of Gehazi, the law of Moses, which could not set free from sin and death; while Elisha was the type of the Son of God, Who, by His Incarnation, had entered into fellowship with our flesh, and imparted a new life to our race.



esculents"<sup>71</sup> to be seethed for pottage in the great pot in which their common meals were prepared. By some misadventure the person so sent brought among other herbage a very noxious fruit - probably the wild, or so-called "squirting" cucumber,<sup>72</sup> which he had mistaken for the ordinary cucumber, one of the most common and favorite articles of food in the East.

The dangerous error was discovered after the meal had begun. An appeal to Elisha as the "man of God" brought speedy help. The symbolic meaning of casting "meal" into the pot was, that this was the ordinary and healthy food by which that which had been bitter and dangerous was now to be changed into palatable and nourishing diet. While the help Divinely brought by the prophet as the "man of God" was miraculous, it had, as we readily perceive, also a symbolic significance, the more so, that "the sons of the prophets" had, as disciples, been learning from Elisha. And thus did it become true in every sense: "Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot."

Closely connected with this is the next event recorded. If the former showed how easily God could remove from the provision of His people that which was hurtful by the addition of that which in itself is nutritious and wholesome, the next event affords another instance how readily He can send unexpected provision to supply the wants of His servants. The lesson which it teaches is as old as that of Isaac's reaping an hundredfold of what he had sowed in Gerar at a time of famine (Genesis 26:12), and as true to all time, and to all God's servants, as it had been to the patriarch. In the present case, much needed help in their straits came to Elisha and to his companions from Baal-Shalisha, or Beth-Shalisha. We remember the district as connected with the history of Saul (1 Samuel 9:4): "the land of Shalisha," perhaps the "three valleys" land. It lay north of Lydda, in the

plain of Sharon, and was not far distant from that Gilgal which we have described, and the location of which it confirms.<sup>73</sup>

We know that the Lord directed the first-fruits to be given to the Priests and Levites (Numbers 18:13; Deuteronomy 18:4). This ordinance could not any longer be obeyed in the kingdom of Israel, since the Aaronic priesthood, for whose support it was destined, was not in office there. But the pious in Israel, to whom such contributions were not merely matter of obligation nor only of law, but who willingly offered to Jehovah, in acknowledgment of His sovereignty and proprietary over the land, knew to observe the spirit, if they could no longer obey the letter, of the law. Accordingly this unnamed man from Baal-Shalisha brought, as is expressly stated, to the "man of God" "bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley and bruised ears of corn"<sup>74</sup> in his sack."<sup>75</sup>

The provision supplied by the piety of this unnamed giver Elisha would, in the same spirit of devotion, have shared with those around him. But such conduct ill accorded with the spirit of Elisha's servant. Indeed, it may have been that this history was recorded to mark the character of Gehazi. In any case it was not in him at a time of dearth to dismiss the cares of the morrow by unselfish care for others. He would scarcely venture to state his views explicitly, but, adopting the more prudent course, contented himself with pointing out the apparent insufficiency of such provision for so large a company. It might, according to the pious intention of the donor, have supplied for some time the wants of the prophet, but to set it "before an hundred men" - probably a round number for the whole community - was to lose the real good

<sup>71</sup> This, rather than "herbs." It evidently refers to such "green" stuff as was boiled and eaten.

<sup>72</sup> The cucumis agrestis or asininus. Others understand by the Hebrew expression the cucumis colocynthi, or colocynth plant. But, from the Hebrew etymology of the word, the former explanation seems the more likely.

<sup>73</sup> Suffice it that it would have been impossible for a man to have carried such a load of bread and corn "in a sack" from Beth-Shalisha to the Gilgal near Jericho.

<sup>74</sup> So, according to the Rabbis, who regard the expression as referring to green ears of corn, of which, in some parts, soup is made. Others understand it as meaning fresh and tender ears of corn roasted over the fire. The former explanation seems the more likely, and in that case the scene would be laid about the end of April.

<sup>75</sup> So, and not "in the husk," as in the A.V.



that might be obtained, without an equivalent benefit to others. It needed the direct command of Elisha to secure his obedience. But Elisha did more. For the teaching not only of Gehazi, but of all, he added the promise, of which, indeed, this unexpected provision was an earnest, that, scanty as it might seem, this provision would not only suffice, but that there should be left over from it. And this, as we understand it, in the widest sense of constant and sufficient supply for all the wants of God's servants. For although this narrative is generally, and in a sense correctly, regarded as prefiguring the miraculous multiplication of the scanty provision with which our Lord fed the multitude (Matthew 14:19-21; John 6:9-13), yet the text does not here indicate any such miraculous increase of the food. But it does most emphatically indicate that Elisha was truly the prophet and servant of Jehovah; that his trust in his God was absolute and unwavering; and that, true to His promise, the Lord will always provide for His servants who look up unto Him. And this is the final lesson of this history to all time and to all men.

**VI\_11 Illustration and Confirmation of Biblical History from the Assyrian Monuments - The Deliverance of Syria through Naaman - Naaman's Leprosy and Journey to Samaria - Elisha's Message to Joram and to Naaman - Naaman's Healing and Twofold Request - Gehazi's Deceit and Conviction.**

**2 Kings 5**

FROM the more private ministry of the prophet the Biblical narrative next passes to an account of his public activity.<sup>76</sup> Very significantly, it was the means of bringing Israel once more into direct contact with their great enemy, Syria - this time, not in war, but in peace. And the bloodless victory which was achieved might have taught king and people how easily the LORD could turn the hearts of their adversaries, and by the manifestation of His goodness make them fellow-believers and fellow-worshippers with Israel. In this respect, the

present history, as others in this section, is specially prefigurative of New Testament times.

As the narrative proceeds on the supposition of close relations between Israel and Syria - not otherwise mentioned in the Bible - and involves, at least indirectly, certain points of general interest, this seems a fitting opportunity for a brief summary of what recent discoveries of ancient monuments has taught us, not only confirmatory, but illustrative and explanatory of this period of Biblical history.<sup>77</sup>

But in so doing we must keep some considerations in view by way of caution. For first, our knowledge of what may be called monumental history is as yet initial and fragmentary. Secondly, in any seeming discrepancy or slight divergence in details between the inscriptions on the monuments and the records of Jewish history, it seems neither reasonable nor safe to give absolute preference to the former. Jewish writers must have known their own history best, while, in their slight differences from the records on the monuments, we fail to discover any adequate motives on the part of the Jewish historians that could account for their falsifying facts. And, we need scarcely add, the same facts will assume different aspects when viewed from opposite sides. Again, it is admitted on all hands that there are manifest errors on the Assyrian monuments, and this on points where error is difficult, to account for. Thus, to mention one instance - on the Assyrian monuments, Jehu is designated as "the son of Omri," and that by the very monarch to whom he is both represented and described as bringing tribute. Further, we have to bear in mind that our knowledge of Jewish history is also fragmentary. The Old Testament does not profess to be a handbook of Jewish history. It furnishes prophetic or sacred history, which does not recount all events as they happened, nor yet always in their exact succession of time, but presents them in their bearing on the kingdom of God, of which it tells the history. Hence it records or emphasizes only that which is of importance in

<sup>76</sup> This, with the exception of 2 Kings 6:1-7. But that narrative is altogether so exceptional in several respects, that we feel as if we were not in possession of all the details of it.

<sup>77</sup> We have here availed ourselves of the classical work of Professor Schrader (Die Keilinschriften und d. Alte Testament. Second Edition. Giessen, 1885), and also of that able and most useful tractate by Professor Sayce: Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments. (London: Religious Tract Society).

connection with it. Lastly, we must remember that the chronology of the Bible is in some parts involved in considerable difficulties, partly for the reasons just stated, partly from the different modes of calculating time, and partly also from errors of transcription which would easily creep into the copying of Hebrew numerals, which are marked by letters. Keeping in view these cautions, the neglect of which has led to many false inferences, we have no hesitation in saying, that hitherto all modern historical discoveries have only tended to confirm the Scripture narrative.

Turning to these extraneous sources for information on the earlier history of Judah and Israel under the Kings, we have here, first, the Egyptian monuments, especially those on the walls of the Temple of Karnak, which record the invasion of Judah and Jerusalem by Shishak, described in 1 Kings 14:25, 26, and 2 Chronicles 12. Pictorial representations of this campaign are accompanied by mention of the very names of the conquered Jewish cities.

But with the death of Shishak, the power of Egypt for a time decayed. In its stead that of Assyria reasserted itself. From that time onwards its monuments more or less continuously cast light on the history of Israel. Just as in the Biblical narrative, so in the Assyrian records of that time, Syria occupies a most important place. It will be remembered that that country had recovered its independence in the reign of Solomon, having been wrested by Rezon from the sovereignty of Judah (1 Kings 11:23-25). Thus far we perceive a general parallelism in the outlines of this history. But the Assyrian record leaves a strange impression on the mind, as we recall the importance of Omri, as having been the second if not the real founder of the Israelitish kingdom, the builder of its capital, and the monarch who gave its permanent direction alike to the political and the religious history of Israel. For the common designation for the land of Israel is "the land of Omri," "the land Omri," or "the land of the house of Omri." We regard it as a further indication of the political importance attached to that king when Jehu is designated as "the son of Omri." This could not have been from ignorance of the actual history, since the name of Ahab occurs on the

monuments of Assyria, although (if correctly read) in a connection which does not quite agree with our ordinary chronology. Further illustration comes to us from the Assyrian monuments, both of certain phases in the Biblical history of Ahab, and of the explanatory words with which the account of Naaman's healing is introduced: "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him Jehovah had given deliverance unto Syria" (2 Kings 5:1).

Each of these statements requires some further explanation. As regards the history of Ahab, we note incidentally that the name Ethbaal (1 Kings 16:31) as that of a Sidonian king, occurs also on the Assyrian monuments, just as does Sarepta (1 Kings 17:9, 10), as being a Phoenician town, situate between Tyre and Sidon. But of greatest interest is it to learn from these monuments the political motives which prompted the strange and sudden alliance proposed by Ahab to Ben-hadad (a name amply confirmed by the monuments), after the battle of Aphek (1 Kings 20:26-34). In passing we may notice that in a fragmentary inscription of Asarhaddon, this Aphek, situated east of the lake of Galilee, and a little aside from the great road between Damascus and Samaria, is named as the border-city of Samaria.

Similarly, the mention of thirty-two kings allied with Ben-hadad in his campaign against Israel (1 Kings 20:1), is so far borne out by the Assyrian monuments, that in the campaigns of Assyria against Syria Ben-hadad is always described as fighting in conjunction with a number of allied Syrian princes.<sup>78</sup>

From these inscriptions we also learn that the growing power of Assyria threatened to overwhelm - as it afterwards did - both Syria and the smaller principalities connected with it. A politician like Ahab must have felt the danger threatening his kingdom of Samaria from the advancing power of Assyria. If Ben-hadad had

<sup>78</sup> In one inscription 12, in another 11 of these are specially mentioned. A similar discrepancy also obtains in regard to the number of troops employed, and in that of the slain in battle. But, as Schrader rightly remarks, the Assyrians, no doubt, mention only the more important of Ben-hadad's allies - not all of them. (See Keilinschr. u. d. A. Test., p. 204.)

endeavored to strengthen himself by the subjugation of Samaria, Ahab, in the hour of his triumph, desired, by an alliance with the now humbled Ben-hadad, to place Syria as a kind of bulwark between himself and the king of Assyria. This explains the motive of Ahab, who had no real trust in the might and deliverance of Jehovah, but looked to political combinations for safety, in allowing to go out of his hand the man whom Jehovah "appointed to utter destruction" (1 Kings 20:42).

Another circumstance connected with the treaty of Aphek, not recorded in the Bible, and only known from the Assyrian monuments, casts light on this prophetic announcement of judgment to Ahab: "Therefore thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people." From the monuments we learn, in illustration of the alliance between Ben-hadad and Ahab, and of the punishment threatened upon it, that in the battle of Karkar, or Aroer, in which the Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser II. so completely defeated Syria, the forces of Ahab, to the number of not fewer than 2000 chariots and 10,000 men, had fought on the side of Ben-hadad. As we read of 14,000 or, in another inscription,<sup>79</sup> of 20,500 of the allies as having been slain in this battle,<sup>80</sup> we perceive the fulfillment of the Divine threatening upon that alliance (1 Kings 20:42).

At the same time we may also learn that many things mentioned in Scripture which, with our present means of knowledge, seem strange and inexplicable, may become plain, and be fully confirmed, by further information derived from independent sources.

The battle of Karkar was not the only engagement in which the forces of Syria met, and were defeated by, those of Assyria. It was fought in the sixth year of the reign of Shalmaneser. Another successful campaign is chronicled as having been

undertaken in the eleventh year of the same reign, when Shalmaneser records that for the ninth time he crossed the Euphrates; and yet another, in the fourteenth year of his reign, when at the head of 120,000 men he crossed the river at its high flood. Two inferences may, for our present purpose, be made from these notices. The defeat of Ahab's forces, when fighting in conjunction with Ben-hadad, will account for the cessation of the alliance entered into after the battle of Aphek. Again, the repeated defeat of Ben-hadad by Assyria will explain how Ahab took heart of grace, and in company with Jehoshaphat undertook that fatal expedition against Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings 22), in which literally the "life" of Ahab went for that of him whom, from short-sighted political motives, he had spared (1 Kings 20:42). Lastly, these repeated wars between Assyria and Syria, of which the Assyrian monarch would naturally only record the successful engagements, help us to understand the phrase by which Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, is introduced as he "by whom the LORD had given deliverance [perhaps "victory"] unto Syria"<sup>81</sup> (2 Kings 5:1).

The expression just quoted seems to forbid the application of the words to the victory of Ben-hadad over Ahab, although the Rabbis imagine that the fatal arrow by which Ahab was smitten came from the bow of Naaman.

Accordingly we cannot (as most commentators do) mark this antithesis: that the conqueror of Israel had to come to Israel for healing. But the fact is in itself sufficiently remarkable, especially when we think of it in connection with his disease, which would have placed even an Israelite, so to speak, outside the pale of Israel. In striking contrast to the mention of the strength and bravery of Naaman, and of his exalted position, Scripture abruptly, without pause or copula of conjunction, records the fact: "a leper."

<sup>79</sup> There is a manifest discrepancy between these two numbers - the one recorded is an inscription of Shalmaneser, discovered on the banks of the Tigris, the other on an obelisk at Nimrud, in which that monarch describes the acts of his reign.

<sup>80</sup> The large number of the slain, and of the forces led on either side to battle, throws light on what are sometimes described as the "exaggerated" figures introduced in the accounts of wars and battles in the Old Testament.

<sup>81</sup> For, evidently, the conquest of Syria could not have been either permanent or even complete, since Shalmaneser required again and again to undertake fresh expeditions. Besides, Syria was evidently free when Shalmaneser's successor ascended the throne.

We need not pause to consider the moral of this contrast, with all of teaching which it should convey to us. Quite another lesson comes to us from an opposite direction. For we also learn from this history how, when our need is greatest, help may be nearest, and that, in proportion as we feel the hopelessness of our case, God may prepare a way for our deliverance. It was certainly so in this instance. Once more we mark the wonder-working Providence of God, Who, without any abrupt or even visibly direct interference, brings about results which, if viewed by themselves, must seem absolutely miraculous. And this, by means which at the time may have appeared most unpromising.

It must have been a crushing sorrow that came upon that Israelitish household, when the Syrian bands carried from it the little maiden whom we find afterwards waiting on Naaman's wife. Yet this was the first link in the chain of events which not only brought healing of body and soul to the Syrian captain, but anew proved alike to Jew and Gentile that there was a living God in Israel, who had placed there His accredited representative. Assuredly the most devoted affection could not have desired for a child a place of greater honor or usefulness than that which this Jewish maiden occupied in the household of the Syrian captain. What follows is told with utmost simplicity, and bears the impress of truth. For, it was only natural that this child should tell her mistress of the prophet in Samaria, or express the full confidence in his ability to recover her master of his leprosy.

<sup>82</sup> Similarly, it was only what we should have expected when her mistress repeated to her husband what the child had said, and perhaps equally natural on the part of Naaman to repeat this to his king, <sup>83</sup> alike to obtain his leave for going to Samaria, and in such a manner as would be most likely to secure the desired result.

As heathens, and especially as Syrians, neither Naaman nor Ben-hadad would see anything

strange in the possession of such magical powers by a prophet of Israel. Similarly, it was quite in accordance with heathen notions to expect that the king of Israel could obtain from his own prophet any result which he might desire. A heathen king was always the religious as well as the political chief of his people, and to command the services and obedience of his own prophet would seem almost a matter of course. It was for this reason that Ben-hadad furnished Naaman with a letter to the king of Israel. Hence also, imperious as the tone of the letter seems, it scarcely warranted the interpretation which the king of Israel - probably Joram - put upon it. What is reported of it in the sacred text (2 King 5:6) must, of necessity be regarded as only forming a part of the letter, stating its main object. On the other hand, we can quite understand that, from the Jewish point of view, Joram would speak of what he regarded as a demand that he himself should heal Naaman of his leprosy, as equivalent to requiring of him what God alone could do. His only it was to kill or to make alive (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6), and leprosy was considered a living death (Numbers 12:12). As he communicated this strange behest to his attendants and advisers - presumably not in the presence of Naaman - it was not unnatural that Joram should regard it as a desire to find occasion of quarrel. The craven king of Israel rent his clothes, in token of deepest mourning - as if he had already seen his own and his people's destruction.

Some of the lessons suggested by the conduct of Joram may be of practical use. We mark first the cowardice of the man who gives way to despair before any danger has actually arisen. Yet there are not a few who tremble not before that which is real, but before fears which, after all, prove wholly groundless. It need scarcely be said how much good work, whether on the part of individuals or of the Church, has been hindered by apprehensions of this kind. The source of all lies, perhaps, not so much in disbelief as in non-belief, which is by far the commonest form of unbelief. Joram knew better and believed worse than the king of Syria - just as is sometimes the case with the children of God and the men of the world. He knew, as the Syrian did not, that God alone could give help; but he did not look for Divine help, as

<sup>82</sup> Assuredly no legend would have been so conceived. There would have been miracles or visions to bring a Naaman to Elisha, not a poor little slave, naively telling the story of her country and her faith.

<sup>83</sup> The proper rendering of verse 4 is: "And he [viz. Naaman] went in and told his lord" [viz. the king of Syria].



the Syrian, although in mistaken manner, had done. He had religion, but it stood him in no good stead; it was laid aside precisely when it was needed. He did not call to mind that there was a prophet in Israel, but in helpless terror rent his clothes. So we also, instead of immediately and almost instinctively resorting to God, too often forget Him till every other means has been exhausted, when we apply to Him rather from despair than from faith.

Reverently speaking, it would have been impossible for Elisha as "the man of God" to have been silent on this occasion. His message of reproof to the king: "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?" and of confidence: "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel," is not one of self-assertion, but of assertion of God. It was a testimony and, let us add, a test alike for Israel and for the heathen world<sup>84</sup> of the presence of the living and true God. Yet while viewing it in this grander application, we ought not to forget what confirmation it gave to the simple faith of that "little one" in the service of Naaman's wife. For God's dealings are most wide-reaching: they extend up to heaven, and yet embrace also the poorest of His people upon earth.

In accordance with the direction of the king, Naaman now betook himself "with his horses and his chariot" to the humble dwelling of Elisha, which, as we infer from verse 3, was in Samaria. Greater or more instructive contrast could scarcely be imagined. We know that Naaman had come to Samaria not only armed with a royal letter, almost imperious in its tone, and at the head of a great retinue, but bringing with him, as princely gifts for his expected healing, a sum of not less than ten talents of silver (computed at from 3000 pounds to about 3750 pounds), and six thousand pieces of gold (computed at from about 7500 pounds to about 9000 pounds), together with "ten changes of raiment," that is, of those festive suits which were so costly and so much valued in the East. Between this display and pomp and the humble waiting outside the lowly home of the prophet there was

<sup>84</sup> The bearing of the mission of Elijah and of Elisha on the heathen world is both distinctive and most important. It also casts light on the peculiarity of the ministry of these two prophets.

sufficient contrast. But it was unspeakably intensified when the prophet, without even seeing the Syrian captain, sent him this message: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee,"<sup>85</sup> and thou shalt be clean." We may at once say that the conduct of Elisha was not prompted by fear of defilement by leprosy, nor by a desire to mark the more clearly the miracle about to be performed, least of all by spiritual pride.

The spiritual pride of a Jew would have found other expression, and, in general, those who cherish spiritual pride are scarcely proof against such visits as this of Naaman. We cannot doubt that the bearing of Elisha was Divinely directed. One has said that it was dictated by the inner state of Naaman, as evinced by the manner in which he received the prophet's direction (ver. 11). Perhaps we should add (with another old writer), that Elisha would thus teach Naaman that neither his pomp nor his wealth was the cause of his healing, and also that help did not come from the prophet, as if such power were inherent in the prophet. The latter, indeed, would seem of chief importance in the teaching required by a heathen.

We can readily perceive how alike the manner and the matter of Elisha's direction would stir the indignation of Naaman. As Syria's captain he would naturally expect a different reception from the Israelitish prophet, and as a heathen, that Elisha would have used some magical means, such as to "move his hand up and down over the place," calling the while upon the name of Jehovah<sup>86</sup> his God, and so heal him of his leprosy. And Naaman spoke both as a heathen and as a Syrian when he contemptuously compared the limpid waters of "Abana and Pharpar,"<sup>87</sup> which transformed the wilderness around Damascus into a very paradise

<sup>85</sup> In leprosy the flesh was supposed to be consumed - hence its healing would be the coming again of the flesh.

<sup>86</sup> The name Jehovah as that of the God of Israel occurs on the Moabite Stone. It was, therefore, known to the neighboring nations.

<sup>87</sup> The "Abana" is, no doubt, the modern Barada or Barady, "the cold river" which divides into seven arms, and flows through the city of Damascus. The Pharpar is probably the modern Awaaj, to the south of Damascus.



of beauty and riches, with the turbid flood of Jordan, if, indeed, healing were to be obtained by such means.

"So he turned, and went away in a rage." The reasoning by which Naaman had so nearly deprived himself of a benefit which would be to him as life from the dead, is substantially the same as that which leads so many to turn from the one remedy to which God directs them. The simple command of the Gospel to "Wash, and be clean," like the words of the prophet which had prefigured it, is still to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. The difficulty felt by Naaman is the same as that of so many in our days: the need of humiliation, and of faith in a remedy which seems so inadequate to the end. If washing be required, let it be in the Abana and Pharpar of our own waters, not in the turbid stream of Israel! But it is ever this humiliation of heart and simple faith in God's provision which are required for our healing.

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). And so Naaman had to learn it. It was well that the relation between himself and his servants was so simple and affectionate ("my father"), that they could address him in terms of respectful expostulation, and so turn him from his rash purpose. For, often those around can see the true bearing of things far better than we. At the same time, we may also learn from the relation between Naaman and his servants how the faithful performance of ordinary duties may prepare the way for the reception of a higher blessing.

So it came to pass that instead of returning "in a rage" to Damascus, a leper, Naaman went down to Jordan. And as, obedient to "the saying of the man of God," he "dipped himself seven times in Jordan," "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." We can scarcely be mistaken in regarding the number seven as symbolic of the covenant (comp. also 1 Kings 18:43), and as also implying a trial of faith, since presumably the healing did not come till after the seventh washing. And now it appeared, by the effect produced, that Elisha had throughout sought the restoration not only of bodily health,

but also the spiritual recovery of Naaman. Although not so bidden by the prophet, yet following the promptings of a renewed heart, like the grateful Samaritan in the Gospel (Luke 17:15), he returned to Elisha, and made such full acknowledgment of God - both negatively and positively - that it might have been said of it at that time: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matthew 8:10).<sup>88</sup> And he also showed, in such manner as he could, the evangelical fruits of gratitude, and of a new life direction. Of the first he gave evidence in his desire to offer a gift;<sup>89</sup> of the second, in his request for "two mules' burden of earth." This, for the purpose of constructing an altar to Jehovah, as we infer from the expression of his resolve henceforth only to bring offerings unto the LORD.

Only very brief explanation seems necessary of Elisha's refusal to accept any gift from Naaman. For the prophets seem not unfrequently to have accepted such offerings (1 Samuel 9:7, 8; 1 Kings 14:3), and Elisha himself had only lately done so (2 Kings 4:42). But in the present instance it was of the utmost importance to show - in contradistinction to heathen soothsayers - that, as the prophet of God did not work miracles in his own power, nor by his own will, so he did it not for reward, and that the gift of God could not be purchased with money. Indeed, we can scarcely exaggerate the impression which the refusal of Elisha must have made both on the followers of Naaman and generally in Israel. One of the Fathers has here marked in the prophet's conduct the same principle which underlay the direction of our LORD when He sent out His disciples with this injunction: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Nor could Elisha be in doubt about the other request of Naaman. If in making

<sup>88</sup> For instances of similar confession see Daniel 2:47; 3:29; 6:26, 27. Those who object to what they call "sudden conversions" might here learn how rapid, and often more decided and thorough-going is the change of feeling and of life in those who have had no previous religious preparation.

<sup>89</sup> "A blessing" in the sense of a gift. Comp. Genesis 33:10, 11; Judges 1:15; 1 Samuel 25:27; 30:26, and other passages. We may remark how much more suitable in such circumstances seems the Biblical expression, "a blessing," than the modern Western, "a gift."

his altar of earth according to the Divine direction<sup>90</sup> (Exodus 20:24), he wished to use that of the land of Israel, it could not have been with the thought that the God of Israel could only be worshipped on Israelitish soil.

Any idea of Jehovah as a national Deity, bound to the soil of Israel, would have been in contradiction to his expressed conviction that there was "no God in all the earth but in Israel:" no national deities, but the One living and true God, Whose knowledge and manifestation were only in Israel. Nor would Elisha have given his sanction to what rested on so serious a mistake. But we can easily understand the feelings which prompted a desire to rear an Israelitish altar, not only in loving remembrance<sup>91</sup> of the benefit received, but as congruous to the worship of Israel, to which his new faith had led him. It would be an outward expression of his inward faith, and would at the same time constantly proclaim throughout Syria that there was no other God than He of Israel, and no other worship than His.

And yet wider thoughts come to us. The Old Testament dispensation seems to enlarge as it has touch of the heathen world: it seems to break through its temporary bounds; it becomes universal in its application, and in its wide-hearted toleration loses its exclusiveness. Thus this incident also is prefigurative of New Testament times. For the implied sanction of Naaman's sacrifices - though probably only burnt and thank-offerings,<sup>92</sup> - seems to carry us beyond the

preparatory dispensation. On the other hand, it is evidence of this toleration when Elisha does not return a negative answer to the plea of Naaman - in which, however, an important alteration in the reading should be noted: "When my master goeth into the house of Rimmon<sup>93</sup> to bow down there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon when he boweth down in the house of Rimmon - oh, let Jehovah forgive thy servant in this matter."

It will be noticed that according to this reading a sharp distinction is drawn - even although the terms used are the same - between the "bowing down" of Naaman, simply because his royal master leant on his arm, and the "bowing down" of the king of Syria for the purpose of worship. The very mention of this scruple by Naaman proved not only the tenderness of his enlightened conscience, but that he was not in any danger of conformity to heathen worship. And so, without specially entering on the matter, Elisha could bid him "go in peace."<sup>94</sup>

But there was yet another and a sad sequel to this history. We have already had repeated occasion to notice the essential difference in spirit between the

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not discussed either in the Talmud or by Jewish commentators, although the latter regard the two mules' burden of earth as destined for an altar. The Talmud regards Naaman as a proselyte, though not in the complete sense of one who had become a Jew by circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice (Gitt. 57 b, line 18 from top).

<sup>93</sup> Rimmon - or rather Raman and Rammanu - occurs on the Assyrian monuments as the name of the god of thunder, lightning, and flood (see also the cuneiform account of the Flood, col. ii., line 42, apud Schrader p. 62, and the note on p. 72, also pp. 205, 206). The Assyrians regarded Rimmon as identical with Hadad, the god of the sky. But the introduction of Rimmon in the worship of Damascus casts light on the historical relations between Syria and Assyria formerly referred to.

<sup>94</sup> We cannot sympathize with the views of those commentators who either blame Elisha's compliance, or regard him as not referring to Naaman's words, - in fact, ignoring them - when he bade him "go in peace." On the other hand, we are keenly alive to the dangers which may beset an indiscriminate application of what we have called the principle of wide-hearted toleration. The character and limits of it must be learned from Holy Scripture (see especially Romans 14:1; 15:7; 1 Corinthians 8; 9:20-23; Philippians 3:15). And this seems a safe practical principle, that we cannot be too strict as regards our own conduct, nor yet too charitable (consistently with truth) in interpreting the motives and actions of others.

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<sup>90</sup> This, we can scarcely doubt, in contradistinction to the heathen altars, which were of stone, and the rites of which, among the nations inhabiting Palestine and the neighboring countries, represented and embodied all that was most vile.

<sup>91</sup> Somewhat similar feelings prompted the construction (according to the account of Benjamin of Tudela) of the synagogue at Nahardea of stones and earth brought from Palestine; and they may explain the campo santo of Pisa, where the dead are buried in Palestinian earth.

<sup>92</sup> This seems implied in the terms used. The argument is, however, only one of inference. We infer from the mention of sacrifices which follows, and from the circumstance that the request is addressed to Elisha, that Naaman asked the two burdens of Israelitish earth for an altar, which in turn could only have been intended for sacrifices. If so, this would exactly represent an adaptation of the religion of Israel to the circumstances of pious Gentiles. It is strange that this point is

prophet and his servant. It now appeared in such manner as, if left unpunished, to have marred the work of Elisha. It seems difficult to understand how, with full knowledge of the great work just wrought, and of all that had passed, Gehazi could have taken up a position so different from that of his master. But, alas, there have been too many similar instances to make it appear quite strange. The character of Gehazi was in every respect the exact opposite of Elisha's. He was covetous, selfish, and narrow-minded. There is a striking contrast between the "As Jehovah liveth," with which Elisha prefaced his persistent refusal to receive aught of Naaman (ver. 16), and the same phrase in the mouth of Gehazi, as he resolved to "take somewhat" of "this Syrian" (ver. 20). To Gehazi it seemed that his master "had spared this Syrian" very needlessly and very foolishly, "in not receiving at his hands that which he brought." He could not see in what had passed anything higher than a transaction between man and man. It had been an act of romantic generosity, an unpractical display of mistaken principle, where every consideration - even nationality and religion - pointed in the other direction. At any rate, there was no reason why he should not act differently.

Naaman had pursued his journey a little distance, when he saw the servant of the prophet hastening after him. Showing to the servant honor similar to that which he would have paid to his master, the Syrian captain descended from his chariot to meet him. In answer to Naaman's anxious inquiry, Gehazi pretended a message from Elisha to the effect that two of the sons of the prophets had just come to him from Mount Ephraim, on which both Bethel and Gilgal were situated, and that he requested for them a talent of silver and two changes of garments. Probably we are to understand that these imaginary "sons of the prophets" were represented as having come in name of their respective communities, to crave help from Elisha. This would explain why Naaman should have urged Gehazi to "be pleased" - to "consent" - to take two talents (each from 300 pounds to 375 pounds). But for the hardening effect of sin, especially of lying and covetousness, Gehazi must have been touched by the evident simplicity of Naaman, and by that respectful courtesy which now would not allow the servant

of the prophet, who had come on such a charitable errand, to be burdened with carrying the silver, but detailed two of his attendants for the purpose.

Gehazi allowed them to come as far as "the hill,"<sup>95</sup> and then dismissed them, to prevent possible detection.

Having secreted the money in the house, Gehazi made his appearance before his master. To what he might have felt as a searching inquiry, "Whence, Gehazi?" he replied by a bold denial of having been absent from the house. Evidently Gehazi did not realize that the Jehovah Whom he had erst invoked, and before Whom Elisha stood, was the living and the true God. Taking up the very words of Gehazi, "Thy servant did not go," Elisha put it, "Did not my heart go?"<sup>96</sup> and then set before him the whole scene as it had been present to his inward spiritual vision.

Then, setting forth the incongruity of such mean lying and self-seeking on such an occasion - when the glory of God should have been the sole thought and aim of a true Israelite, he pronounced upon him what must be felt a sentence of meet retribution. The Syrian had become an Israelite in heart and spirit, and he was healed of his leprosy in Israel's waters. The Israelite had become heathen in heart and spirit, and he and his were struck with the leprosy of the Syrian, whose money he had coveted for himself and his family. What each had sown, that did he reap. And this also was not only for just judgment, but for a testimony to God and to His servant.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> This, and not "tower" as in the A.V. (ver. 24). Probably the hill on which Samaria was built, and not a hill on which, as some have supposed, the house of Elisha stood.

<sup>96</sup> Except that "mine heart" (ver. 26) stands for "thy servant" (cf. ver. 25), the words in the Hebrew are exactly the same.

<sup>97</sup> It affords painful evidence of the absence of spiritual understanding, when the Talmud (Sot. 47 a) blames the conduct of Elisha towards Gehazi, as it does the destruction of the young men at Bethel by the she-bears. Another point which it selects for blame is Elisha's bearing towards Joram 2 Kings 3:13-16 (Pes. 66 b, line 15 from bottom). According to the Talmud, Elisha was visited by sickness, on account of the two first mentioned occurrences. The same authority would also have us believe that when Elisha went to Damascus (2 Kings 8:7), it was to lead Gehazi to repentance, but that this was not effected, according to the principle that no such return is offered to those whose sin has a general or public effect. If these

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references disclose the unspiritual character of the study of Scripture by the Talmudists, we must in fairness quote this beautiful saying of theirs, which occurs in the same connection: "Ever let the left hand repel [the sinner], and the right hand bring him near".

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