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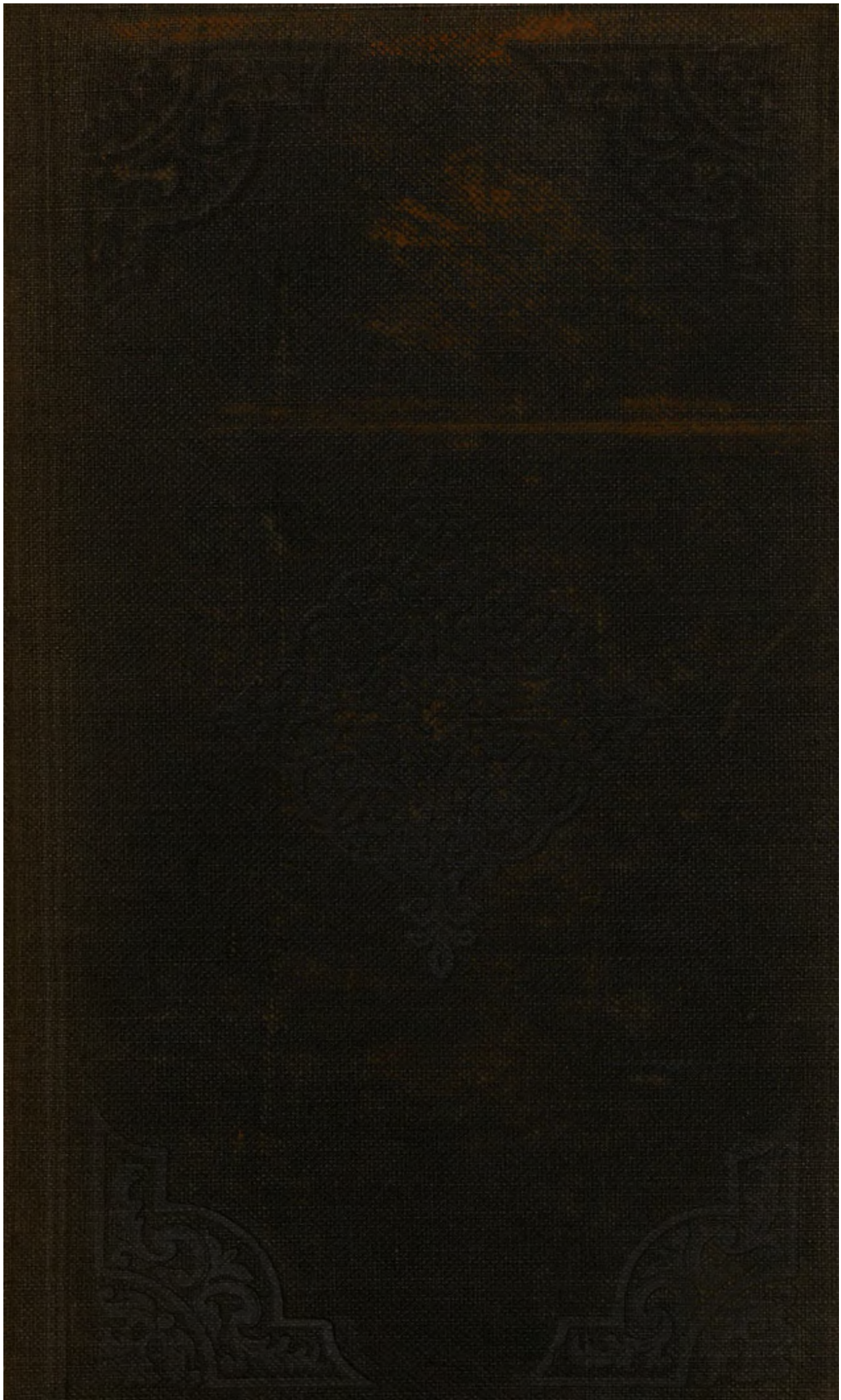
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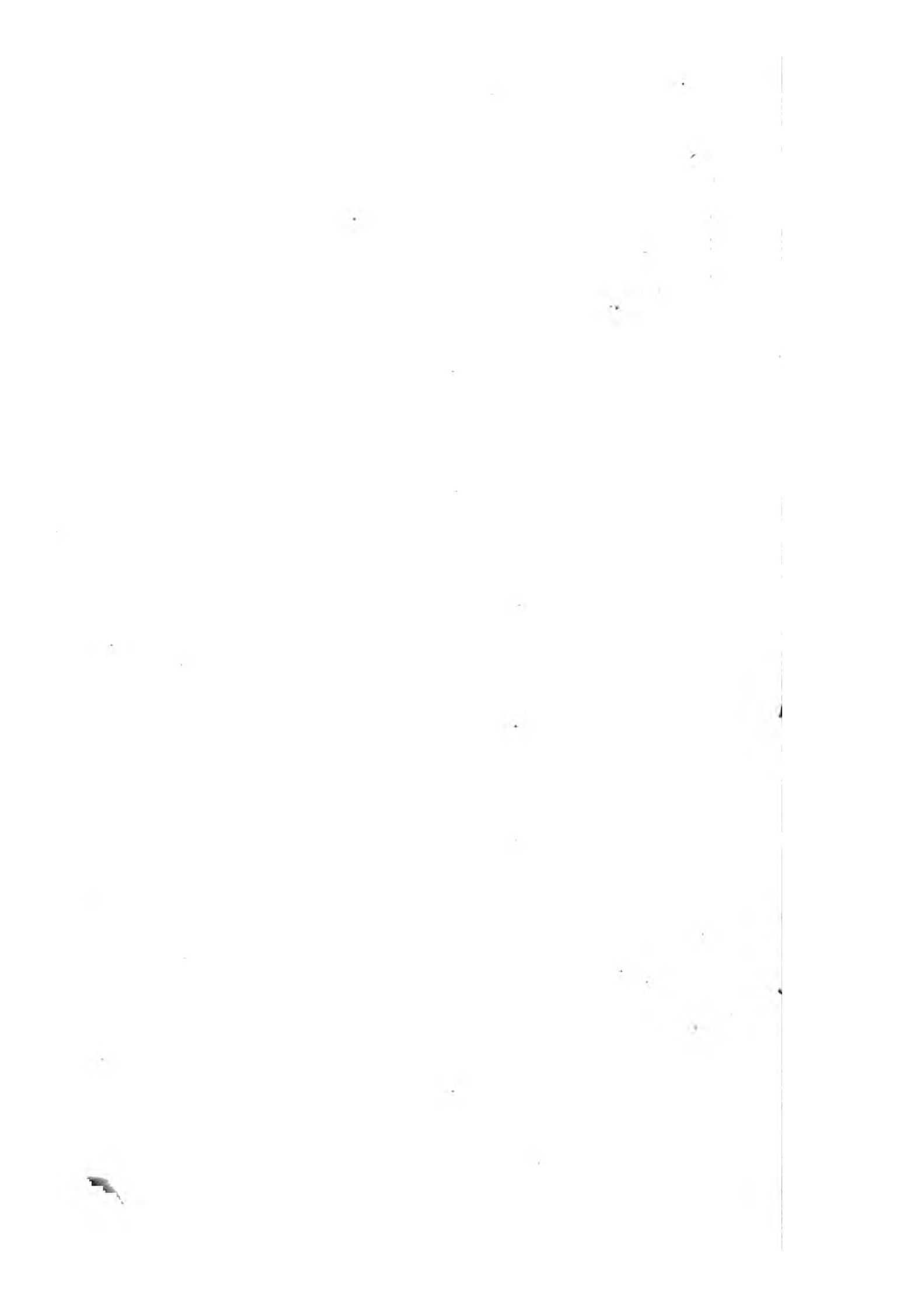


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OR  
DISTRICT VISITOR'S SCRIPTURE  
ASSISTANT.

By the Rev. Charles Dolland, M. A.,  
INCUMBENT OF SHIPLEY, SUSSEX.

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## ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

---

*“For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.*

*“And she went, and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.*

*“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.” I KINGS xvii. 14—16.*

Elijah was one of those prophets who were sent to bear witness against the sins of the people of Israel. He lived in the days of Ahab, a wicked king of Israel, and testified against his and his wife Jezebel's many sinful and idolatrous doings.

He was a remarkable prophet on many accounts, but chiefly in being one of the two men who have passed away from the world without returning to dust. Elijah, like Enoch, was translated, that he should not see death.

Elijah appeared with Moses on the Mount of transfiguration talking with Jesus.

Elijah is spoken of in the prophecy of Malachi; thus, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." And though John the baptist came in "the spirit and power of Elias," so that our Lord said of him, "and if ye will receive it, this is that Elias that was to come," yet, as our Lord also says, "Elias shall truly first come and restore all things," there is reason to suppose Elijah will come again when the Jews have their kingdom restored to them. The coming of Elijah is one of those prophecies which has more than one accomplishment. It has been partly fulfilled in John the Baptist, it will be more fully fulfilled in the very person of Elijah, for it cannot be said John "restored all things."

There is another allusion to Elijah in the New Testament which we must now notice, as it has to do with what we read about him in this chapter we are considering. In the last chapter of St. James' epistle, he says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed

earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Now, we learn from this what we should not have otherwise known, that when Elijah told the people of Israel that there was to be no rain for three years, he had been praying to God that it might be so.

Elijah said unto Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word."

We may suppose therefore, that Elijah was fully convinced that the people needed some heavy judgment to bring them to a sense of their sins, and turn them from their idolatrous worship of Baal to the worship of the true God. He sought therefore in this way to convince them. He showed them that the God they were neglecting was the Creator of heaven and earth and all things, and that it was He, who for their sins withheld rain from them. And then when they had destroyed their false prophets as they did, that it was He who sent them the great blessing of rain at the end of three years and six months.

This was something like what Samuel had done in his days, when he wished to convince the people that God was angry at their asking for a king; he prayed to God, and God sent thunder and rain, although at harvest time when such a thing used not to happen naturally.

Such is an instance of the power of prayer, the power of "the fervent prayer of a righteous man." What encouragement to ask what we will at the hands of the great God! How wonderful that He should listen to man's prayers about the weather! And even more than this, in Joshua's case we read, that "the Lord hearkened to the voice of man," and caused the sun to stand still, while the Israelites finished the work they were engaged in. We must bear in mind that Joshua, Samuel, and Elijah, who prayed such things, were "men of like passions as we are." They are not beyond us as examples, that is to say, we must pray in faith for things which are desirable, although they seem as difficult to be done, as it was difficult to stop the course of the sun, or to stay the rain and dew from heaven for three years. "All things are possible to him that believeth." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believe that ye have it and ye shall

receive it." All the things that we can want to ask God for, are surely but little things, compared with these great things for which Joshua and Elijah prayed! It is the same God who is rich unto all that call upon Him. Oh! let us use this great privilege of our's more frequently. Why should there be with us difficulties unremoved; wants unsupplied; sins unsubdued; holiness unattained?

But trust and confidence in God are still further taught us in what next happened to Elijah. This also is referred to in the New Testament. "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." (Luke iv. 25, 26.)

Our Lord said this to those unbelieving Jews who would not receive Him as the Great Prophet. He reminded them that even Elijah had not been received by the people of Israel in his days, and that one of the few to whom God sent him as ready to welcome him, was one who was a Gentile and not a Jew, this poor widow; Zarephath, where she dwelt, being a city of Phoenicia, between Tyre and Sidon.

The reason of Elijah's visit to this poor woman was, that the Lord sent him to be maintained by her. Elijah must have trusted that in all this time of drought and famine, God would support him. And he did not trust in vain. Directly after Elijah had told Ahab there would be no rain for three years, we read the word of the Lord came unto him : "Get thee hence and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan, and it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." And so it came to pass. "The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook."

Then, this source failed, the brook dried up from lack of rain, he was to trust God for another.

So does God ever keep His people's faith in lively exercise. New wants arise that new modes of help may be sought and given. The brook drying up, the ravens are commanded to cease their daily supply, that Elijah may be sustained by another source. The means used in both cases were such as to give God the glory of this help. Who but God could make ravens thus readily

discover meat in the time of dearness of provisions, then carry it, not to their own young, not to lay it up for themselves, but to man, of whom they stand in fear? Then, the next means was almost as unlikely as this first. It was a poor woman who had just come to the end of all her small stock.

But here we see the wisdom and love of God in His dealings with His people. It was not only to excite faith in His servant Elijah that he was sent to this woman, but also for her sake, and to do her good both in body and soul.

Let us see how these things were brought about, "when Elijah came to the gate of the city; behold the widow woman was there gathering sticks." So accustomed was Elijah to see the hand of God in everything, he accosts this woman at once as the person God had appointed him to find. He asks her for water. "Fetch me I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." Then, encouraged to believe this was the woman appointed of God to sustain him by seeing her readiness to get the water, he asks for bread, "and as she was going to fetch the water, he called to her, and said, bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand."

And now this brought to light her real



condition, as being herself in the last extremity of want, and Elijah could now see why God had sent him to her. If it was to sustain him, it was also to supply his wants. "She said, as the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse ; and behold I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it, for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

Here then Elijah saw it was time for him to begin his work, as the servant of the Lord, sent to magnify His name. The poor widow was in the extreme of want, having no more food than for one meal: no prospect of anything after that; preparing to die. Elijah knew that if she were to sustain herself, her son and him, she must have fresh supplies. His own had been miraculously supplied by ravens sent by God. Now the same God will miraculously supply this woman. Elijah in the boldness of faith said, "Fear not, go and do as thou hast said ; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain on the earth."

Now why, do we think, did Elijah bid her first use her present supply and make him a cake? Not selfishly, not merely because he was himself so pressed with hunger, though that may have been the case. Surely, there was a reason beyond this. The woman's faith was thus put to the test. For so God gives His blessings to faith, first trying it, then rewarding it. It would be with her according to her faith, as it was with Naaman when ordered to wash seven times in Jordan. And when she thus acted on faith, and consumed her last little measure of meal and brought it to the man of God, and returned, then she found fresh meal, and fresh oil, in the place of what she had used. "She went and did according to the saying of Elijah; and she and he and her house did eat many days: and the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."

Thus did God put the faith of His servants to the test, supply their wants in the time of famine, and make them know Him better as an all-powerful all-merciful God and Saviour.

But the widow was to learn another lesson besides this. And Elijah's faith was again

called into exercise even more than before. Something now happened in the family which though first a great sorrow and trouble, proved in the end a great blessing.

The widow's only son fell sick and died. She received the blow as from God ; and as richly deserving it. It reminded her of her deserts as a sinner. She said to Elijah, " what have I to do with thee, O thou man of God, art thou come to call my sins to remembrance, and to slay my sons ! " Thus did her troubles weigh on her mind. They reminded her of her many sins and what they deserved, and made her think that as this holy man was sent to live with her and teach her, so also it was to bring some chastisement for her sins.

And so indeed should all affliction do for us. It should bring our sins to remembrance. It should make us look narrowly into our lives and hearts, and see what calls for correction, in what points we need humbling, and wherein we need more careful walking. It should bring our deserts also to remembrance. It should lead us to reflect, " wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins. " It should remind us of what we should have if God only dealt with us according to our deserts.

It should lead us to acknowledge the justice of the blow, and to see God's faithfulness in it. It should thus make us "search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord."

But God "doth not willingly afflict, nor grieve the children of men." It is always the pathway to blessings. So with the widow. She had a friend close at hand whose strong faith in his God, made him a most powerful and efficient friend. Elijah now appears again before us as a mighty wrestler with God in fervent prayer. Again we see a proof that "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." He prayed to God, "Let this child's soul come into him again." It was a great thing to ask. But his faith was sufficient for such a request. And God was at hand to answer the prayer of faith. "The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."

Then came the double benefit to the widow. The restoration of her son, and the increase of faith in and love to the God of Elijah. How great her joy, when Elijah came down with the child alive, and presenting him to the astonished mother, said, "see thy son liveth." How strong her conviction in the God of Israel, though

denied by nearly all the people of Israel at that time! How fixed her purpose henceforth to trust Him, to love Him more, to serve Him better! and so she seemed to imply when she said to Elijah, "now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

O Reader! is this God your God? Have you learned, and are you learning to trust Him in every matter, as All-powerful to assist you in every possible want, and to deliver you in every possible danger or trouble!

Do you know the power of prayer? Like Elijah, can you feel confident that whatever you lay before Him He is able to perform; and that fervent prayers, prayers of faith, prayers in spirit and truth, prayers in the hands of the Righteous Mediator, are certain to be heard and answered abundantly?

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### PRAYER.

O LORD! give me, I pray Thee, more of that faith which was in Elijah. Grant me grace to trust Thee in all times of want, and in all straits and difficulties. May I call upon Thee in the day of trouble, and being always delivered by Thee, may I see Thy hand both in the trouble and in the help, so that I glorify Thy name, through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

## ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL.

---

*“ So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.*

*“ And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”* 1 KINGS XVIII. 20, 21.

HERE is an interesting and wonderful account of how Elijah the prophet convinced a whole nation of the sin of idolatry, and of the duty of serving the one true God.

This was the great thing that Elijah had at heart. For this, as we have seen, “he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of a year and six months.” This was one part of the means adopted to bring the people of Israel to repentance. He knew that “when God’s judgments are in the earth,” men are more disposed to learn righteousness. But another means was also adopted by Elijah, doubtless, under the teaching of the Lord.

For so we read, "after many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, go, show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." God had made men think of Him by shutting the door of heaven and withholding rain; now He would make them further think of Him by opening heaven and pouring down His blessings.

But neither was this the only means used. God was going to speak to men not only by water, but also by fire from heaven: and this in such a way, as to show on one hand the impotency of Baal, the false god they worshipped, and on the other, His own power and glory.

It was for this purpose that Elijah told Ahab to gather together all Israel unto mount Carmel, and all the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty. For this he asked them how long they halted between two opinions, the service of Baal, and the service of God. And for this he asked them to be guided in the matter by this one thing, "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God."

But before we attend to the particulars of this wonderful account, our attention is called first to another servant of the Lord, besides Elijah. This was Obadiah, who was

the governor of Ahab's household. This good report he obtained, "Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly." And he himself testified of himself; "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." His was, therefore, rather a remarkable case. He was one of the very few faithful in the midst of a perverse nation, and at a time when the children of God were very few in number, and rare to be met with. Look too, at his position: he was governor of the house of the wicked king Ahab, and still worse queen Jezebel. Yet under such circumstances he feared God. And how did he show his fear? For one thing, by "making much of them that fear the Lord,"—by loving and assisting the Lord's people,—by doing what he could to stop the torrent of wickedness flowing from his master's house. This was the proof of his fearing God. "It was so that when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water." He did this at the risk of his own life, and no doubt under no common difficulties, seeing it was the time of drought and famine. But he loved the brethren. And the love of the brethren is a good proof of a gracious fear of



God, as St. John says, "By this we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren."

But now let us turn to this great work of conviction which Elijah wrought upon the people at this time. He did it in this twofold way, first by telling the people to call upon their god Baal, and offer sacrifices to him, and then, when they failed to get any answer, he offered up a sacrifice to God in the manner God had appointed, and called upon God, who answered as He was wont to do, by sending down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

Elijah wished to bring disgrace upon Baal, as much as he did glory upon the God of Israel. He made the people see the great difference between this false god they were worshipping and the one true living God. He said, on your side you have four hundred and fifty prophets, whereas on the Lord's side there is but one, and that is myself Elijah. Yet, you shall see that my one prayer to God will be effectual, while the prayers of all your prophets shall be unanswered. He let their prophets pray all the day, while he prayed but one short prayer at the usual time of seeking God, the time of the evening sacrifice.

He turned the idea of their false god's not answering them into ridicule, by mocking them, and saying, "cry aloud for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked."

He let them practice all their follies and cruelties which they were accustomed to think were part of their religion. "They leaped on the altar, they cried aloud, they cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them." And all to no purpose, "there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded."

Then the people were invited to go to Elijah, and see the success of his way of seeking the true God. First he repairs the altar of God, neglected and broken down. Next he takes twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. And with these he built an altar in the name of the Lord. A trench was then dug round it. And this he made them fill with water, first covering the whole sacrifice of the bullock which was laid on the altar, with water also. This would make it more surprising to see fire come down and burn all up thus drenched with water, and even lick up the water in

the trench. It would make it more clearly the work of the Lord, and prevent the idea of any deceit or trickery on the part of Elijah. Then, when all this had been done, he made his prayer to God, calling on Him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, therefore the God who had made a covenant promise to hear His people, and he asked Him to now prove that He was the God of Israel. "Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me: that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."

The bystanders must all have been wonderfully struck at what they now saw. Clearly they must have felt convinced and fully persuaded, both of the absurdity of serving Baal, and of the God of Elijah being the only true God, and that God they had been neglecting. All which they showed, first by confession, and then by deeds, slaughtering all the prophets of Baal. "And

when all the people saw it they fell on their faces : and they said, the Lord he is God : the Lord he is God. And Elijah said unto them, take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape. And they took them : and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there." This was doing no more than the law commanded them to do to all who led them from the true God to false gods. (Deut. xiii.)

Thus, then, did Elijah lead the people to conviction. He made them choose that day and decide one way or another : and bade them not halt between two opinions : as he had said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God follow him : but if Baal then follow him." Baal was disgraced. God was glorified. Baal was (for the time at least) rejected, and God was (for the time) taken to be their God.

Then it was after that that God sent rain on the earth. His anger was stayed, and His judgments withdrawn when the people's idolatry ceased.

We learn then, from all this history, first of all, the cruelty, the iniquity, the folly and the helplessness of idolatrous worship. We are led, to make a comparison between the peace, and happiness, and great blessedness

of those who know how to worship God acceptably, in spirit and in truth; and on the other hand, the wretched, unhappy, and miserable condition of those who worship "they know not what" under the name of a false god, or falsely in the name of the true God. See these poor creatures taught by their false teachers that by reason of loud cries, and sharp cuttings on their flesh, and jumping about, they would be accepted of their god. So it has been found, and still is the case in all heathen countries. The religion of the heathen is a cruel one. The Chinese slay their poor little children. The Indians put themselves to all kinds of torture, and think they do their gods service, and gain a place in the heaven they have imagined for themselves. They are taught these things by their ignorant priests.

We who have the blessed Gospel, and know the easy burden and light yoke it imposes on the followers of the meek and lowly Saviour; we who know the privilege of being able to offer up a simple prayer in the name of the one Mediator between God and man, and the certain success of such prayers; we who know the God Elijah served, ought indeed to have Elijah's zeal in behalf of those poor ignorant people who

serve false gods, who can neither hear nor answer, nor help them. Like Elijah, we ought to do what we can to convert them. We ought to pray for them as he did. We ought to help those who are gone forth from among ourselves to carry the good news of the way of peace, and pardon, and life to the heathen.

Surely, we shall be glad to do this according to our means, if we are really sensible of the advantages and blessings we have in the light we enjoy so fully, so freely shining around us. No cruel worship is ours, no vain expectations from a god that cannot hear or help us; ours is the God that made the heavens and the earth, and that has so loved us as to give His Son for us, and to offer His Holy Spirit as the teacher, the sanctifier, and the quickener of the soul and body. Let us show forth our gratitude not with our lips only, but with our lives and our actions.

But again, are there not some even among those called Christians, who need Elijah's call to be more decided in their opinions about the service of God?

Are there not too many who seem to be really halting between two opinions, as much as did the worshippers of Baal? They

cannot make up their minds to give themselves up decidedly to the Lord. They waver between the world, with its attractive pleasures, its society, its people who scoff at the too religious, its pressing claims to be engrossed with this world's affairs, they waver between all this on one side, and on the other, the calls they hear from God's Word, witnessed by their own conscience, to give their hearts' affections to the Lord, to come out and be separate from the world, its unsanctified pleasures, its ungodly and Christ-hating society, to be earnest, frequent, and fervent in prayer, to be constant frequenters of the Lord's house, and the Lord's table.

Such persons are in a dangerous state. They are very like those in the Laodicean Church, of whom it was said by Christ, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev iii. 15, 16.)

This state of indecision must cause luke-warmness. And this, as you hear, is most hateful to God, and if it continue, will be rejected with disgust. Oh! fear continuance in such a state. The next step backward is a hardened, wreckless state, out of which

there is little prospect of awakening. You ought to become decided at once, and lose no time, lest it be too late. You ought to consider that if religion have any truth in it, it is worthy of being everything to you, it is the one thing needful, one thing in comparison of which everything else is a trifle and light matter. You ought to consider which you will take up with, the world and its joys and pleasures such as they are, or God and all the blessings He gives to those who are His own beloved children. Can the world give you uninterrupted and lasting peace? Can the world gratify your desires so that you can say, I have need of nothing else, I want nothing beyond, I am perfectly happy? Can the world help you in the day of affliction, and comfort you in the hour of trouble? Can it give you a helping hand in the sick room, or on the death bed? If so, you are right in cleaving to it. Serve it. But if not, if it is a grand deceiver, if it is a shadow and no substance, if the greatest pleasures it can give are carnal and not such as satisfy the immortal part of you, if it will forsake you and laugh at you in the hour of need, when you most want comfort and help. Oh! then be decided to give it up, be decided in your opinion that it is



good for you to draw near to God, and to live close to Him. Be no longer luke-warm ; Christ was not luke-warm when He poured out His soul unto death for His people that they might have life. Be zealous, and warm ; Christ was so, when He left His glory above, and walked in the dust of the world, or when He hung upon the cross bleeding, that we which believe might have life. Love as He has loved. Be zealous in prayer for His Spirit. Be zealous in watching against sin. Be zealous in bearing witness for Him against an ungodly world. And so confessing Him before wicked men here, He will confess you before saints and holy angels and in the presence of His Father hereafter.

---

### PRAYER.

GIVE me, O Lord, I beseech Thee, the zeal and love of Thy servant Elijah ! Give me grace to bear witness against an ungodly world with all boldness as He did. May I become more decided in Thy service. May I never halt between Thee and the world. May my whole heart be given to Thee. May I walk closely with Thee. May the love of Jesus constrain me to do this. Lord ! make me wholly Thine, both now and for ever. AMEN.

## GO AGAIN SEVEN TIMES.

---

*“And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,*

*“And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.*

*“And it came to pass, at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.*

*“And it came to pass, in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.” 1 KINGS XVIII. 42—45.*

WE have here another instance of successful prayer on the part of Elijah. He prayed that it might rain. And when he cast himself on the earth, and bowed down his head so that his face touched his knees, he was in the posture of prayer. And when he sent the servant to a higher part of the mountain, and told him to look if he could see anything, he was looking out for an answer to his prayer. He was sure it would come, and so, though the servant said he could see nothing like clouds bringing rain, he told

him to go seven times,—so certain was he it would come at last. And then, when on the seventh time of going, the servant had seen a little cloud which only seemed as big as a man's hand, Elijah knew this was the beginning of an answer to his prayer. So he acted accordingly, and sent a message to Ahab the king to make haste down, for rain would soon come in abundance. And so it did, for "meanwhile the heaven became black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain."

We know that Elijah was praying for rain, because another part of God's Word tells us so. St. James says, "he prayed again and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit."

We might perhaps have thought that it was not necessary for Elijah to pray for this rain, since God had said to him, "Go shew thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth." Here was a direct promise of rain. Yet Elijah sees it needful to go and pray earnestly that rain might come.

This, then, is one thing we learn from Elijah about prayer. We learn that the promise of a blessing does not do away with the necessity of praying for it. He prayed for rain, and was engaged in fervent suppli-

cation for that very blessing which God had most plainly promised. And this was constantly our blessed Lord's example. He prayed for the safety of the disciples who were surely safe because the Father had given them to Him. And again, "He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard," although he knew well His Father had promised to glorify His name in bringing Him through all His trials.

So, also, with regard to blessings promised the Israelites. Although God (Ezekiel xxxvi.) promises plainly to bless them in divers ways in the latter days, and says, "I the Lord have spoken it and will do it;" yet it follows directly after, (v. 37.) "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Yea; it is even followed by the promise in the very same verse, "I will increase them with men like a flock."

So then, must it be with us. Say not, I need not pray for this, because God's Word promises it, but rather say, I must be urgent in my prayers for this, for God has promised it. God can indeed, and does often, give blessings and gifts which we had not

thought of asking for. But His general way is to make the prayers of His children the channel through which their blessings are to come to them. He has wise and gracious reasons for this. Among them are these,—He is more glorified in this way. The saint is drawn nearer to God,—the exercise of prayer producing faith, and the answer to prayer, confirming His love. Thus, then, pray for what you want, and the more hopefully as you find a promise where-with to back your request.

Secondly, Elijah is an example in praying for very hard things: that is, things far beyond the reach of man, things which man has not the least power over. He prayed first that it might not rain for three years and a half,—He prayed that it might rain, though the sky was perfectly clear and free from the smallest speck of a cloud,—He prayed that life might come into a dead child,—He prayed that Elisha, his successor, might have a double portion of God's Spirit, so as to be able to work mighty miracles. And in each of these cases and others, he obtained his requests. Yet, he was "a man of like passions with us."

Such instances, and others like them, are to encourage us to pray for and expect

hard things : things impossible with men, being things possible and easy with God.

Elijah brought up clouds heavy with rain to cover the clear blue sky of heaven. Samuel's prayer also brought up a tempest with terrific thunder and lightning, at a time most unusual for such a thing, in the midst of wheat harvest. Joshua stopped the sun in its course, by the power of prayer. A barren woman, Hannah, became a happy mother of children through the prayers of faith. And what would seem a more difficult thing than to move a gigantic mass of earth, such as a mountain is, and plant it in the sea ? Yet, this is what our Lord chooses as the figure to show what the power of the prayer of faith can effect as it flows from the lips of men like ourselves. It is with reference to prayer that Jesus says to us "Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass ; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

(Mark xi. 22, 23, 24.) This is indeed a most glorious promise. One that should never be far away from our minds. One that should be specially present when we engage in prayer, or when our troubles are pressing on us, or when our wants seem many or great. A wonder indeed it is that God should so vouchsafe to open the door of heaven's treasury to us poor sinful beggars ; a wonder only accounted for in the great fact, that One in our nature, and yet also, in the Divine nature, by obeying and suffering in our stead, has made God as it were our debtor, so that while our unworthiness is no bar to His blessing us, the worthiness of Jesus the Son of His love, is the reason why He will withhold no good thing from His own people, but give them every thing they ask for.

O reader, avail yourself of this great privilege oftener than you have done. Pray for hard things. Pray believingly. So shall all your mountains be removed. Mountains of guilt, mountains of trouble, mountains of temptation, mountains of difficulty and trial.

But next, look at Elijah's perseverance in prayer. He went on praying all the while his servant kept going and looking for the

expected answer. He would not give over. He had no doubts about an answer coming ; the only thing he knew not, was the exact time it might please God to send it. So his one word to his servant, was "go again seven times." If a cloud had not appeared the seventh time, we cannot think he would have stopped praying : no, not for seventy-times seven. But seven was God's number, and so he had faith in the seventh time of looking out. Seven is the number of perfection. Probably it began to be counted as this and as God's number, from the fact of the seventh day being blessed by God. Hence it came to be a number greatly honoured of God. And as the seventh day was sanctified, so under the law the seventh week, and the seventh month, and the seventh year, and the seven seventh year, became periods appointed in certain feasts and observances. Some purifications too were effected by sprinkling some things with blood and with oil seven times. (Lev. xiv. 16 and 51.)

There is reason to expect that the seventh thousand year of the world's existence since the creation of man, will be that happy time spoken of in the Book of Revelation, when Christ and His saints shall reign over the



earth a thousand years. It is as the number of perfection we read of it thus in Revelations, the seven spirits, the seven eyes, seven lamps, seven stars. It was as God's number that Elijah made Naaman the Syrian wash seven times in the river Jordan, in order to be cleansed of his leprosy.

Now though this may not teach us to expect that God will answer us now at the seventh time of praying, we do at least learn that we must persevere and go on praying, and not give over because we do not get an immediate answer. It pleases God often to bear long with His people, and to keep them waiting, and it is to keep them praying. Therefore St. Paul says, we must be "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." (Ephes. vi. 18.) Our Lord spoke a "parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." He knew this would be our temptation to give over asking for what we do not get soon.

It pleases God at times "to make as though He heard not," as David says. Yea; in that psalm (the xxii.) written by David, and quoted by the Son of David on the cross, it is said in the second verse, "O my God, I cry in the day time, and thou hearest not."

St. Paul prayed three times before he got an answer about the "thorn in his flesh," which he asked to be rid of. Our Lord prayed the same words three times over in the garden of Gethsemane.

Let this then be our rule, "I will go again seven times;" yea; if need be, though that is not likely, till seventy times seven.

It is not of course that God does not hear the very first petition. It is only that God has His own time of answering, and the mean time is to be spent by us in persevering in prayer.

I have said it is for the trial of our faith that God sees fit to keep us waiting. For so it pleases Him to give many blessings in such a way as does try our faith. As when Naaman must needs go and wash seven times in the river Jordan. As when the gentile woman of Syrophenicia was first refused her request by Christ, who said, "let the children first be filled." As also the blind man, who had to go and wash in the pool of Siloam before he received his eye sight. Thus it is that our blessings will come to us in the way of obedience. We must do as He commands, and He will give as He promises. As the Israelites had to go forward, and in going forward, found the

protection they had prayed for, so God may not let us find out how He has graciously planned any help or desired blessing for us, until we have shown our faith by persevering in prayer and supplication. And as Elijah would not get up from his knees, nor run down from the mountain, nor let his servant weary in watching, so do you not run away from the throne of grace, nor get weary of kneeling, or of looking out constantly for the answer you want. It will surely come, and will not tarry ; therefore wait for it.

Learn too, like Elijah, not to despise the day of small things. The man's hand, the tiny cloud, was enough for him ; it was the first fruits, the rest was sure to follow. It could be no passing mist, or cloud without rain, it must be the beginning of the promised rain. So look out for the blessings you have prayed for. Let not the smallest tokens of God's mercy escape you. They will, if observed, strengthen your faith, and encourage you to hope the rest of the blessing will follow.

Remember too, God can make the smallest and weakest instrument become big and weighty with blessings. At His bidding they will increase, or change their character.

And that which seemed when seen in the distance as the most unlikely to answer the right end, will quickly spread and grow, and do all that was wanted ; just as this little cloud did expand and spread, and cover the whole heavens with darkness, and the earth with refreshment.

Then, lastly, there is a rain we should all pray for, for our own souls, and for the Church of God. It is the rain of the Holy Spirit. "Until the Spirit be poured from on high," our souls are barren ; we hear in vain, we read in vain, God's Word is a dead letter, a sealed book ; our prayers are lifeless, cold, unmeaning, unsuccessful. Yea ; we are altogether barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ : there are no fruits of the Spirit, no fruits of righteousness.

For this blessing God will be sought. Of this it is He says, He will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

O, be much in prayer for this one the first and best of all God's gifts. Without it, Christ is nothing to us, but a source of condemnation, a proof of unbelief, a witness to accuse us, a judge to condemn us. With it, Christ becomes exceeding precious, a beloved Saviour, a praying friend, a righteousness that perfectly and freely justifies,

a strength that never fails, and always triumphs, a beloved Redeemer waiting to receive us into everlasting mansions of glory. Go again and again, pray earnestly that God will pour this holy gift into your heart, that He may be to you, the Spirit of grace and supplication, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of adoption, and the source of joy, and peace, and hope that will never make ashamed.

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## PRAYER.

O God, who dost always hear those who continue by faith to seek Thee. I pray Thee to pour down on my poor barren soul, a gracious shower of a heavenly blessing. I can do no good thing, and think no good thought. I am altogether unprofitable, and weak, and helpless in myself. Give me a full measure of Thy Holy Spirit, that so I may become a fruitful disciple of Christ, and bearing much fruit, may evermore glorify Thy name, through Jesus Christ, my Lord.  
**AMEN.**

## ELIJAH'S REQUEST FOR DEATH.

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*“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.*

*“Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.*

*“And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.*

*“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life: for I am not better than my fathers.” (1 KINGS XIX. 1—4.)*

It is not very common to find persons so desirous of death as to pray for it. There are indeed those who because of the ills of life, have become weary of it, and so have wished to die, to be delivered from the miseries and sufferings of life. Still there is in most such a strong love of life, and such a clinging to it to the last, that many persons even when suffering to the utmost, have not gone so far as to pray for death. And doubtless but a few are found who deliber-

ately would sit down and request for themselves that they might die.

But as this was a very uncommon prayer, so we find it proceeded from a very uncommon person under no common circumstances. It was the prayer of Elijah the Tishbite. And we must not think that the reasons which led him to wish for death were only a weariness of life, or a fear of his enemies, from whom he was at that time fleeing.

Several things shew us this was not the case. And one is the remarkable way in which God heard and answered his prayer. He requested he might die, and God soon after took him to Himself: first, having revealed Himself to him in a remarkable way; next, having comforted him concerning the state of the Church, and also having appointed a prophet to succeed him.

These things, as well as Elijah's state of mind at this time are instructive.

And first, Elijah's wish to die arose from a justifiable weariness of life. If a person wish and pray to die, simply to be delivered from pain and trouble, their wish may be said to be a selfish one. But we cannot say this of Elijah. See what his circumstances were. It is true that Jezebel had sworn that she would destroy him because he had

been the means of destroying the prophets of Baal. "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, he left his servant there," and then himself travelled on into the wilderness where he thus sat down and poured out his complaint to God. Some have thought there was unbelief and distrust on his part in thus fleeing for his life. But this is not so clear. For instead of any rebuke, he received a messenger from the Lord, who gave him food and helped him on his journey. "As he lay and slept, behold, then an angel touched him and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked and behold a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

Here he held communion with God. If he had any want of faith at this time, and if there was anything like rebuke in God's question to him, "what doest thou here Elijah?" it was not seen in the fact of his



escaping from Jezebel, which may only have been a prudent use of means,—but it was rather in taking wrong views of God's people, and thinking there were none left; whereas God told him, there were the seven thousand who had not worshipped Baal: for Elijah had said, "I, even I only am left."

Here, then, was the grounds of his reason for wishing for death. He saw no more opportunity of usefulness. He thought it had all been in vain, proving to the people, as he had done, that the Lord He was God, by calling on God to answer by fire. He considered that in vain had all the prophets of Baal been slain. The people with Jezebel at their head were all given to idolatry: "the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant." He had been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts. And now that his labour seemed all in vain, he sees no further use in his life, and prays that he may die.

Here was no selfish wish to be rid of the weary burden of life, which he felt unable to bear. Here was no discontented feeling or repining at his lot. A life of suffering he had, as God's servant, always. But this alone would not have made him wish for death. It was when besides this he had a feeling his work in God's vineyard was at

an end that "he requested for himself he might die."

Alas! how rare is this single eye to the glory of God. Some may be found wishing for death when all their powers of enjoying life are weakened by age or disease; but not many who, like Elijah, have one great object of life, and that, to glorify God, and like St. Paul desire "that Christ shall be magnified in their body, whether it be by life or death." (Phil. i. 20.)

But let us look a little closer at this zeal for God which Elijah had, and which made the work of God as dear to him as his life. Did it not arise from a bitter hatred of sin? The one lamentation of his heart, and the chief embitterment of his days, was that the people around him were idolaters, and did not serve or fear God!

Then, next to that, did he not know the value of immortal souls, and feel anxious that they should be saved from the ruin to which he saw men hastening? Then, besides, had he not in his heart that genuine love to God, which made him feel jealous when he saw men around him robbing God of the glory, and of the worship, and of the affection due only to Him?

And is there one of these points in which

we ought not to imitate him? Persons are apt to consider that when they are told they ought to live to God's glory, that this is only a high aim attained by few, and not a necessary point for a Christian. But this is a sad mistake. We may well fear that those whose strongest desire in the matter of religion is the salvation of their own soul, will fall short even of that. Because if they were seeking that in the right way, they would soon learn to have a higher aim, and to wish for the salvation of others, and for the glory of the Saviour they would have learnt to love.

If we know anything of the true and damning nature of sin, we shall hate it cordially, and desire and strive for its overthrow in ourselves, in others,—in the whole world.

If we love God for His great love to us in the gift of His dear Son, and all the blessings from our election in Him to our final reception into glory, we shall feel a holy jealousy in His cause, a holy zeal and indignation against His enemies.

If we have really believed what God has said concerning hell, and the only way of deliverance from His wrath through the atoning blood of the Lamb, we shall feel

how precious are those for whom Christ died, and desire to bring them under the influence of the Gospel.

Thus shall we be very jealous for the Lord of Hosts. Thus shall we be prepared indeed for death. And though we may not request that we may die, we may at least be in that state of freedom from this world's love, and readiness to meet the Lord, that we shall not fear death, but rather meet it with a bold and happy spirit, as could Elijah.

But let us next notice the peculiar manner in which God appears to Elijah at this time and answers his prayer, and his "intercession against Israel."

There was a peculiarly gracious character in all God's dealings with Elijah at this time. God seemed to meet the desires of his heart in an especial manner.

Elijah was mourning over the iniquity of his people, and the fearful ungodliness of the government under Ahab and Jezebel. God now told him of how all this would be avenged. Elijah had thought God's elect had ceased upon earth. God tells him He had yet seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah had asked to die, and yet with every desire that the work he had in hand should prosper. God grants

him the blessedness without the bitterness of death, and makes him appoint Elisha as a successor to carry on his work. Hence the Lord directed him to go and return on his way to Damascus; anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu to be king over Israel; and Elisha to be prophet in his room. And one object of these appointments he has told; "And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay."

But great grace was also seen in the peculiar manner God appeared to His servant now. A beautiful description is given of it. While Elijah was standing in the mount, "Behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice."

What, then, was the peculiar meaning of this way of revelation?

Perhaps it was to assure Elijah, that God's way of speaking to men might be very differ-

ent from what he was expecting. Not always by outward and open might or by power, but by His Spirit. Elijah had been looking for an open and striking exercise of God's power to convince the people of His power and Godhead. Now, God reveals Himself, not in the mighty hurricane which tore up the rock ; nor in the mighty heaving of the earthquake which shook the ground ; nor in the awful blazing of the destroying element of fire ; not in any of these did God speak to His servant, but in a still, small voice, which followed these.

So does God choose to reveal Himself to His people. It is true, when He spoke and gave the law from Mount Sinai, there was fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, besides the voice of words. But that was the giving of a law which cannot save, it was the "ministration of condemnation." But in what way has God spoken in the Gospel of salvation ? It is in the still, small voice of a loving Saviour, gentle and lowly, who did not strive nor cry, whose voice was not heard in the streets. And how does He speak now to sinners and reveal Himself to them ? It is in the silent, but powerful ministry of the Word. The Gospel is preached, by

weak instruments, and "it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe."

By what means is the proudest, and most rebellious heart broken, made contrite, and brought under the yoke of Christ? Is it not by the unseen influence of God's Holy Spirit, opening the sinner's eyes and touching his heart with the truths of God's Word?

As then Elijah was assured and comforted by this way of God's addressing him, so that he could thus without fear go out of the cave and listen to the Lord; so are sinners now, in this day of grace and salvation, and before the day of fire, and of judgment, and of vengeance, encouraged to come and listen to what the Lord God will say to them.

Only let us take heed that we are indeed regarding this voice, and are among those to whom God thus graciously reveals Himself.

God has many ways of speaking to men. And when the gentle way of a still, small voice is unheeded, He will speak by His awful judgments. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven;

whose voice then shook the earth : but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." (Heb. xii. 25—27.)

When we think of the many awful and terrible ways in which God, who is provoked every day, might speak to sinners, we ought indeed to be grateful for the still, small voice with which He yet addresses man. To hear God speak, we go not where the earthquake roars beneath our feet, threatening to swallow up all around us,—we go not where the mighty tempest rages, or the vivid flash of lightnings succeed the roaring peals of thunder,—though in these ways God lets His voice be heard sometimes,—but we go into our closets, and take up our Bibles, and read and pray, and in the still, small voice of a verse of Scripture, God speaks to us. God calls on us to hear Him speak. "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak ; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, and my speech shall distil as the dew ; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." (Deut. xxxii. 1, 2.)

Oh ! let us avail ourselves of this gracious opportunity of hearing this gentle voice,



and let us open our hearts as well as our ears to this gentle striving of God's Word and God's Spirit. The terrible sound of God's angry voice will one day break upon the world, and rouse all the ungodly and impenitent to judgment. But if we have learned to know and love the Good Shepherd's voice now, that same voice will be the welcome sound to greet our ears in the last day, calling us not to angry judgment, but to inherit everlasting glory.

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### PRAYER.

O GOD; who didst deal very mercifully with Thy servant Elijah, speaking gently to him, hearing his prayer, and delivering him from his enemies. I pray Thee to hear me and to help me. Lord, speak unto me in the still, small voice of Thy Holy Word. Enlighten my understanding, that I may understand the Scriptures. Teach me to do Thy will, as well as to know it. And so to live to Thy glory that I may be always ready to die, whenever it shall please Thee to call me, Through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

## AHAB AND BEN-HADAD.

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*“And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.*

*“And the kings of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*

*“And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, (as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions,) that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array; and they set themselves in array against the city.*

*“And, behold there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.”—1 KINGS XX. 10—13.*

NOT a few sieges and battles are related in the history of the Israelites. The reason is that we may see how God was concerned in them. For no others than those with which the God of Israel had much to do, find a record in Scripture.

This is not the only siege of Samaria which took place while occupied by the kings of Israel. This one is related because

of the chief characters connected with it, Ahab, king of Israel, and Ben-hadad, the king who sought to besiege it. And this is one of those battles in which the words of Solomon are verified, "the battle is not to the strong." Ben-hadad was very strong in numbers. Ahab, very weak. Yet the victory was to the latter.

The several points of instruction from this history will come out as we consider the whole account. There is first the vain boastings of the ungodly, who presume in their own strength, or wisdom, and so vainly fight against God.

So confident did Ben-hadad, king of Syria, feel, that he could easily defeat the king of Israel, that in order to call him out to battle and provoke him to anger, he sent a message to say to the king of Israel, "Thy silver and thy gold is mine : thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest are mine."

Ahab seems either from cowardice, (and most wicked men are cowards,) or else from what he thought prudence, to submit to this. He said, "My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have." Then when Ben-hadad saw this tame submission on Ahab's part, he sent again a

more impudent message, to say, " Yet I will send servants unto thee, to-morrow about this time, and they shall search thy house, and the houses of thy servants, and it shall be whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put in their hands and shall take away." Of course this was too much to be borne, it was evident as Ahab said, "this man seeketh mischief." As is always the case, further submission to unreasonable and unrighteous demands would only have led to still further demands. He sent Ben-hadad word, "this thing I may not do."

Ahab's next reply to the king of Syria's insulting message was this wise one, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Whether this speech was the result of Ahab's faith in the help he was going to receive from the Lord, we are not told. It may have been so. For though a bad man, he was a very great mixture of character, and at times he seemed to have some kindlings of penitence in his heart, and some faith towards God.

We must also observe that the help which God gave in this case, and in many others, was not for the sake of the individual helped, but for His own name's sake, because of His

promise made to the fathers of the nation, and for His own glory. So in the first help Ahab received, "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord."

The victory under the hand of the Lord was soon obtained. "They slew the Syrians with a great slaughter."

Then at the end of the year, when Ben-hadad came up again against Ahab, because he boasted against the God of Israel, therefore was Ahab again helped and Ben-hadad's army over-thrown. "The servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills, therefore they are stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." We then read of the great disproportion in strength and numbers between the two armies. "The children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country."

Who, in looking with the natural eye on these contending armies would have doubted to which side victory would have gone? Who would not have said, it is impossible but that the Syrians must over-

come, for against these two little flocks of kids, they bring more than a hundred and thirty thousand men? But neither numbers nor strength count any thing with the Lord. The question is, which side does God take? And the Lord was on the side of Israel. And the invisible strength of God was what made the Israelites far stronger in reality than their enemy. "And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord." Then we have the result of the battle. "And the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber."

Learn then from this battle these two lessons. First, that however unworthy a person may feel, and really is from sinfulness, this is no bar to the help God graciously grants for His own name's sake to those who

ask for it through the merits of the Redeemer. A sense of unworthiness will indeed increase upon us just as we learn out more of our own hearts' pollution, and are taught to weigh ourselves in the balance of God's Word, and not with the judgment of man. But never let this feeling rob us of the comfort of a promise and an expectation of God's help in the time of trouble, difficulty, or affliction. Such a strong plea as the merits of the Redeemer can never meet with a refusal from our Heavenly Father, and ought always to give to the believer strong consolation and confident hope.

A second lesson is, to fear no evil from our enemies, however great the disproportion between our strength and theirs. Let us apply this to the enemy that the world with all its strong temptations and allurements can be to us, and against which we can bring but a weak nature with great proneness to fall. Let us apply it too to our spiritual enemy, of whom it is said, he is "not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers, rulers of darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places." He is the god of this world, very subtle and very powerful. And what are we that we should go against such an enemy? Surely we are

weakness itself. Yet we need not fear. We may safely say, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ." Christ is the stronger One, and the believer in Him may triumphantly say, "If God be for us who can be against us?"

But we have next to learn something from Ahab's weakness on this occasion, in the way he used his victory; and also from the remarkable way in which a prophet brought reproof to him.

Benhadad applied to Ahab to spare his life. And the grounds on which he did so were these, "His servants said, We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings." This was good grounds for such an appeal. It is well when even the world can see something of the character of God in the people of God. It ought ever to be so.

As a drowning man will catch at a straw, so now, the servants of Ben-hadad marked well the words which came from the mouth of Ahab, the victorious king before whom they stood with sackcloth on their loins, and ropes on their heads, in token of complete submission to their conqueror. "Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily



catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad," and why did they call him a brother, but because Ahab first had said, "Is he yet alive? he is my brother." Here was weakness and error on his part. Flattered by the submission of so great a king, he called him brother, who was the enemy of God, and then proceeded to make an alliance with him, whom he ought to have destroyed. He should have destroyed him, as it would seem, from the direct command of God; but if not, yet in obedience to the commandment given in the law with reference to such enemies, "Thou shalt utterly destroy all the males." (Deut. xx. 13.)

Ahab's sin was, therefore, somewhat like that of Saul, when he spared Agag, king of the Amalekites. God now sent a prophet to tell him of his sin. And the circumstances under which the prophet brought it are remarkable. "A certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the Lord, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as thou hast departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him and slew him. Then he found

another man and said, Smite me, I pray thee, and the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. So then the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way and disguised himself with ashes on his face." Then, by a kind of parable, he proceeded to show the king his error, and to make him condemn himself.

It was no easy matter doubtless to convey a reproof to a king, and such an one as Ahab. He therefore put the matter before the king in this way. "Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle ; and, behold a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man : if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be ; thyself hast decided it. And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face ; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thine hand a man whom I had appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of

Israel went to his house heavy and displeased."

Here, then, is weighty instruction from all this, especially on the one subject, of the extreme importance of obedience to the word of the Lord: and the exceeding sinfulness, and terrible consequences of the sin of disobedience.

Striking, indeed, are the many instances of where God has visited disobedience to His word with punishment in this world.

Indeed, what but one single act of disobedience brought ruin, misery, pain, death temporal and eternal, into this world,—that one act of our first parents, Adam and Eve? We learn from that what sin is.

Then, of the word of God given under the law, we find "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward." The man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath: the man who was stubborn and rebellious to his parents: the man who blasphemed and cursed in the name of the Lord: each of these met with his death, like many others, because they broke the word of the Lord! One act of disobedience lost Saul his kingdom. One act of disobedience on the part of the man of God, though deceived by a prophet, cost him his life.

(1 Kings xiii.) And so now here, Ahab is condemned for one act, and a young prophet is slain by a lion, for one act also, because these acts proceeded from a heart in a state of rebellion against the Lord whose word they disobeyed.

For, observe of this young prophet, lest his case should seem hard, when the man of God asked him to strike him, it is said, he did it "by the word of the Lord." It was not on the authority of his own will and wish, but on the authority of God; to whom the prophet was required to give obedience. Failing in that he perished. Oh! what force do not all these cases give to the words of the Apostle to the Hebrews chap. xi. 1. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation: which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord; and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him." How dreadful will be that last judgment with which God will visit those "who know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." The severity on them that have fallen here ought, indeed, to make us fear the severity reserved in the next world, and feel how awful it will be "to fall into the hands of the Living God." Are we hidden from the wrath of the Lamb, by

being washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are we really giving the obedience of faith to the Gospel of Christ, and trusting in the merits of the righteous One.

Ought we not also to learn from this prophet's case, that with regard to the things which God's word requires of us, we must never turn away from them because they are unpleasant duties. For a man with any tender feelings, it was no doubt a most unpleasant duty to have to smite a brother so as to wound him and bring blood. But he should not have hesitated on that account, his only enquiry should have been, Is this really required of me by God. We must never consult our own feelings, and tastes, and inclinations, when the will of God and our duty to Him or our neighbour are concerned. One only question let us ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" One only resolve let us make. "What the Lord saith unto me, that will I do."

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## AHAB AND NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

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*“And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,*

*“Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria : behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.*

*“And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, thus saith the Lord, hast thou killed, and also taken possession ? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.*

*“And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ? And he answered, I have found thee ; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.”* 1 KINGS XXI. 17—20.

It is said of Ahab in this chapter, “there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord : whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.” His wickedness was therefore very great, and his wife was often at the bottom of it ; and yet this did not lessen his guilt in the eyes of God. This is an important consideration in

studying Ahab's character, and examining into the causes of his great wickedness.

In the matter of Naboth's vineyard we have only one out of many such sins as Ahab was guilty of. But it is a very instructive history on many accounts. There is the smallness of its beginning,—it began with a wish of the heart, and the sin of covetousness. It was planned and carried out by Ahab's wife, he all the time taking no part in the transaction itself. Then there is an account of the discovery of his guilt, his reproof and condemnation by Elijah.

Let us look at these points, as related in the history, and learn from them the lessons taught us.

What a proof we have in Ahab's case that a man's happiness is not secured by the abundance he possesses. He who has much wants more. And his happiness is marred by not being able to have everything he wants. This is the case of those who, like Ahab, seek their happiness only from this world's things. He was a king. He had wealth, and power, and servants, and palaces, silver and gold, and everything that heart could devise; yet see him coming to his house, heavy and displeased, and laying himself down on his bed and turning away his

face, refusing to eat bread. (ver. 4.) And what is the cause of his sorrow? What did he say when his wife came and said to him, "Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" He said unto her, "Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite; and said unto him, give me thy vineyard for money; or else if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard for it."

Thus the thing that destroyed the king's happiness, was this one unsatisfied want;—here was something he had set his heart upon, but he could not obtain. Naboth would not part with it, because it was the inheritance he had received from his father.

Now we see here that Ahab had some conscience. He did not think of taking by unjust means what he could not obtain by fair treaty. He therefore settled down into a discontented state of mind, like a child when forbidden some pleasure. Moreover that Ahab had some workings of conscience acting upon him at times is plain from what happened after Elijah had reproved him for his guilt. "He rent his clothes, put sackcloth on, fasted, went softly," and in fact "humbled himself."

How then was it he attained to this great



degree of guilt, whereby Naboth was killed, and Ahab obtained his vineyard? It was through the deceitfulness of his heart, by which he made himself think the guilt would not be his own, if his wife did it for him. She was the agent of Satan by which the wicked deed was accomplished. Mark her subtilty and her depth of wickedness. "Jezebel his wife said unto him, dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Ahab had been content to think the thing impossible. But his wife thought a king should find nothing impossible. Ahab had thought such foul means as robbery, much more murder, were a barrier to the wishes of even a king. Not so his wife, more accomplished in guilt. With a readiness of mind only the result of the devil's spirit and the devil's teaching, she saw at once a plan for securing her husband's wishes. Therefore she said to him, "Are you a king of Israel, and is there anything in Israel you cannot have if you wish? How weak and foolish of you,—I will get you what you desire,—leave the matter in my hands, and be again cheerful with the sure prospect of quickly having what you wish." She

then set to work. She used her husband's name and his seal, and "sent letters in his name to the elders and the nobles that were in his city; dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him to bear witness against him, saying, thou didst blaspheme God and the king; and then carry him out and stone him, that he may die." The devil never wants for instruments in this world to do his worst deeds. She too knew there were sons of the devil to be found ready enough for any black deed. She gave therefore the order: and two sons of Belial were at once forthcoming directly. The crime was soon done. Word was brought to Jezebel of it, and she went and said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard, for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

Ahab inquires not how this was brought about. All we read of him is this, "And it came to pass when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it."

But here he was quickly followed by one who had seen all his guilt, and all the evil

workings of his heart while he let Jezebel his wife work outwardly for him. The Lord sent Elijah to him directly, with this message, "Thus saith the Lord, hast thou killed and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, thus saith the Lord, in the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

Observe how God regarded his guilt. Not a word was said about his wife having been the cause: he himself is addressed as the doer of the deed,—the murderer, "Hast thou killed and also taken possession?"

His punishment is added. It was a just one. He should die a violent death, and that in the same spot where he had been the cause of the death of an innocent man, merely to satisfy a selfish wish.

His own conscience now also condemned him. This was clear from his words to the prophet, "Ahab said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" One who was the messenger from the Lord might have been his friend; but an enemy to God himself, Ahab regarded every one from God as his enemy. He knew he could come for no other purpose than to remind of his guilt and to tell of his punishment.

A sentence was next passed on Jezebel his wife. "Of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." The spot where she was to die was also to be one that should bring to mind her guilt, and show the justice of the Lord in avenging innocent blood.

The effect of this sentence on Ahab's mind is striking, as also the result of his partial repentance. "It came to pass when Ahab heard these words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

Looking back, then, at the beginnings of Ahab's sin, let the first lesson we draw be this, that a person who lets another sin for him, is as guilty as if he did the deed himself. Ahab lying on his couch, grieving because he had not got the vineyard he wanted, was in fact as guilty as his wife, who was using his name and seal, and telling people to get Naboth murdered. And yet persons are very apt to think they are free

from the guilt of a wicked action, because they do not take a more active part in it than knowing of it, and leaving others alone who do it for them. Sometimes a parent will thus let a child steal, or become a lying beggar for them, and they will shut their eyes to the child's doings, because they are glad of the result of them. And they think that they themselves are not the guiltiest party. It would be well for all such to remember Ahab's case.

There are other cases in Scripture history teaching the same thing. The first sin in the world, Adam was accused of, and punished for, although it was his wife who took the fruit and gave it to him. David was counted as guilty of the death of Uriah, whom he sent to fall in the field of battle, as if he had himself taken a sword and slain him. Pilate was a partaker of the guilt of the crucifixion, although he wished to let Jesus go, as he found no fault in Him, and only yielded to satisfy the Jews.

Besides, too, we may not only sin by shutting our eyes to sins others commit, but also by not using our best endeavours to prevent crimes which we know others are accomplishing. Ahab might surely have restrained his wife; and at the least he

would not have been guilty had he done all in his power to prevent her doing as she did.

But for another lesson, do we not here see the immense influence a wicked wife has over a weak husband, and therefore the dreadful consequences of marrying without a thought about the character of the person we unite ourselves to for life?

Ahab's character is painted in the blackest colours possible. But all is traced up to his wife. "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." One of his greatest sins was idolatry. And where did he learn to love and worship false gods, but from his wife who was an idolatress when he married her. "He took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him." This too was directly contrary to the commandment given to the Israelites when God first gave them the promised land. Of the heathen nations God had said to Moses, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them.....for they will turn away thy son from following me that they may serve other gods." (Deut. vii. 3, 4.)

Oh! the evil of marriages in which only beauty, or rank, or riches, or carnal affections

are the attractions, and in which there is no fear of God, no religious feelings to cement the union! If evil communications between friends corrupt good morals, how much more when between husband and wife!

A partner for life, a fellow-traveller, always with us, how great the influence for bad or for good! Every such companion is either a help or a hindrance. Either they help us on towards God and heaven, or hindering and preventing us they turn us back; nay, it may be as in Ahab's case, they lead us by the hand, so that we travel more quickly down the broad road that leadeth to hell. Nor will it be an excuse for guilt, to say we were led away by others, or even to say "it was not I that sinned, it was my partner," if we all the time were silently assenting to the sins.

What then must we do to avoid such evil influences? If unmarried, remember in the choice of a partner, how much depends for our weal or our woe. To marry in the Lord must be our aim. To be guided by God, our prayer. To be sincere and honest in committing our ways to the Lord, and not praying with the idol set up in our hearts, and so tempting the Lord to only answer us according to our idols.

Or if married, how earnest our endeavours and frequent our prayers, we may be communicators of good to one another. That God and our partner may point and lead us in the same direction ; but if from unhappy causes it be not so, then that we may have wisdom and grace to follow God's way and not be drawn aside from it, even by our bosom friend.

Withal too, let us learn from Ahab's case, to check the first beginnings of covetous wishes. To want what we have not and what God withholds from us, may be a worm at the root of all our happiness, or may prove as with Ahab the first step in a series of crimes. God has said, and said it for our happiness, "Thou shalt not covet," and "be content with such things as ye have, for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Heb. xiii. 5.) Wants we must have as long as we are in this wilderness world. But having committed them to God, we must banish care. If prayer brings not the things we want, we are certainly better without them. God is not only All-powerful and can give, but is faithful and will give what is good for us. He may withhold it till we pray for it, to try our dependance on Him, but when He withholds it after that,



it is to teach us to depend on Him for happiness without it. He withholds no good thing from them that thus walk uprightly. Every thing we think good does not really prove so when we get it. And those who seek from the devil what God refuses, are sure to find as Ahab did, that the devil's gifts bring more misery than God's refusals.

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### PRAYER.

O GOD, teach me to be content with such things as I have. May I never covet what belongs to others, or what Thou dost not see good to give me. May I quickly cast out every discontented wish that ever finds a place in my heart. May I find godliness is great gain. Having Jesus for my Friend, and heaven for my home, and Thy glory for my aim in life, may I find true happiness and peace that passeth understanding. Hear me for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

## AHAB AND MICAIAH.

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*“And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness : wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host ; for I am wounded.*

*“And the battle increased that day ; and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even : and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot.”*

I KINGS XXII. 34, 35.

WE have here a very wonderful account of the way in which Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, came to his end. It had been foretold by the Lord that in the very place where Naboth's blood had been shed, there should Ahab, the murderer of Naboth, also have his blood licked up by the dogs. However unlikely this might seem, and whatever might be done by Ahab to prevent it, it was sure to come to pass, because God had said it. And so indeed it did in a wonderful way.

In the account given us in this chapter, we see Ahab thinking to act in such a way as to avoid the fulfilment of God's word.

But in doing so, we see him take such steps as were the very means of bringing about God's will.

God had appointed that he should fall in battle at Ramoth Gilead. One would have thought that his blood would be spilled there, and not in Samaria, where Naboth had died. But so it was ; his blood stained the chariot in which he was wounded, and the chariot and his armour were washed in Samaria, in a place where the dogs had licked Naboth's blood. Thus we read, "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria : and the dogs licked up his blood, and they washed his armour ; according unto the word of the Lord which he spake." Thus surely and speedily will vengeance overtake the murderer. The innocent blood of the murdered man cries unto the Lord, and it never cries in vain.

But let us go back to the beginning of the account of Ahab's fall, and see how he vainly tried to avoid that fall of which Micaiah the Lord's prophet had prophesied.

Ramoth in Gilead was a city that had once belonged to Israel, but had fallen into the hands of an enemy. It occurs to Ahab to take possession of it. He cannot do it alone, so he invites the king of Judah to

help. He says, "Know ye not that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, wilt thou go with me to battle?" With sinful weakness Jehoshaphat agrees to go with him. But Jehoshaphat, being a man who feared God, and was in the habit of seeking God, proposes on this occasion to begin by inquiring what God's will was. He said to the king of Israel, "Inquire I pray thee at the word of the Lord to day."

We must remember that Ahab was a worshipper of Baal, and a believer in the prophets of Baal. But these were all false prophets, and only prophecied out of their own hearts. They always prophecied such things as they thought would please the king their master. No wonder then that the king of Judah should not be satisfied with their opinion about the war. No wonder too that Ahab should, on the other hand, fear to have the advice or prophecy of any other prophet except his own.

Now all the false prophets came and gave their opinion, and when asked whether Ahab should go to Ramoth Gilead or not, they all agreed in saying, "Go up: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king."

Then came Micaiah's turn to prophecy: for when Jehosaphat asked about him, the

king of Israel said, "There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord ; but I hate him, for he doth not prophecy good concerning me, but evil."

We gather from this, how faithful a prophet Micaiah was. And this was why he was a terror to the evil doer, Ahab. He had not scrupled to tell him the truth, and to reprove him for his sins. Just as John Baptist did to Herod. This naturally begets hatred towards the reprovor. And as Ahab called Elijah his enemy, so now he says of Micaiah, "I hate him." And this is no more than all the faithful witnesses of God have found in all ages of the world. David was a prophet, and said, "They hated me without a cause." This the greatest of all prophets, Jesus Christ, applied to himself, (John xv.) and at the same time warned his disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." Men who do dark deeds cannot but hate the light, as well as every spark of light which ever shines from a holy man and reflects light on their evil doings.

Micaiah is suffered to prophecy. Perhaps Ahab would have been ashamed to pass him over before the king of Judah.

Observe Micaiah's honesty and boldness before the Lord. The messenger who fetched him thought to give him friendly council, when he told him, "Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth, let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good." This was the devil's prompting. But Micaiah stood firm,—he said, "As the Lord liveth what the Lord saith unto me that will I speak."

But next observe Micaiah's peculiar way of forcing conviction of his error on the mind of his royal listener. The king asked him, Shall we go, or shall we not go? He answered first in the very words of the false prophets, "Go, and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." He seems to have done this with a view to make the king and others present, feel strongly how they were only deceiving themselves. Their consciences told them they were wrong, and had not really got God on their side. Micaiah knew well enough that Ahab would not be content with his merely repeating the very same words the false prophets had uttered. Ahab knew their word was not God's word, and that Micaiah had not really as yet given

out God's word. He appeals to him again therefore : "How many times shall I adjure thee, that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" Then Micaiah tells him the true word of God, which described the scattered state of Israel, and therefore foretold that the battle would go against the kings. "I saw all Israel, scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd : and the Lord said, these have no master ; let them return every man to his house in peace." This was evil to Ahab, for he wanted to go to battle. But it was truth, and that he might more see into the falsity of the prophets of Baal, Micaiah tells him still more of the word of the Lord. He proceeds to describe a wonderful vision, "And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord : I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead ? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith ? And he said, I will go forth,

and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee." (ver. 19 to 23.) Here we see God on his throne in the heavens. Hosts of angels and spirits around Him. God asking, who will persuade Ahab to go to Ramoth Gilead to fall in battle? A spirit coming forth, and saying, "I will persuade him. I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." God permits it.

Micaiah is smitten and persecuted for this. Imprisonment and the bread of affliction are his lot. But the word of God was not bound. All that he had spoken came to pass. Ahab thought to escape by disguising himself, and not going to battle as a king, but as a private soldier. So foolish was he, and ignorant of God's power. Of course his scheme was of no avail. Fall he must if God had said so. And though he fell not from being marked for slaughter as a king, he fell by a chance shot, or rather an arrow guided by God. "A certain man drew a bow at a venture, (or in his simplicity,) and smote the king of Israel between the joints of his



harness : wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand and carry me out of the host, for I am wounded ; and the battle increased that day, and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even ; and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot." Then came the proclamation fulfilling the very words of Micaiah, "saying, every man to his city, and every man to his own country." Then too did one soon unconsciously fulfil God's other word, as he washed the royal chariot and the king's armour in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, "according unto the word of the Lord which he spake."

From all this we learn some very solemn lessons, besides the important one of the way in which the judgment of God speedily and awfully overtakes the sinner that goeth on in his wickedness. We learn also something from this vision of Micaiah as to what passes in heavenly places in the carrying on of the government of this lower world. We learn something of the great power which Satan possesses, and which God permits him to exercise in this world.

The Spirit that stood before God, and offered to go and deceive Ahab by being a

lying spirit in the mouth of all his false prophets, this was an evil spirit. This is not the only part of Scripture that tells us Satan is in heavenly places, and often stands before God. In the opening of the book of Job it is said, When the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them. So Micaiah saw all the host of heaven standing before the throne of God, and an evil spirit among them. In each case too God converses with the spirit, and permits him to go forth and tempt men. In the one case his servant Job, in the other, the wicked king Ahab.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians St. Paul speaks of the devil, not as some people think of him, as already shut up in the pit of hell, but as "spiritual wickedness in high or heavenly places," the very same heavenly places where he says Christ is set down at the right hand of God. (*See chap. i. ver. 20, and chap. vi. ver. 12.*)

This is a great mystery. We shall not understand it in this world. But it is an awful fact. Satan is a bold and sometimes a successful plotter against man, and he is also an "accuser of the brethren." He has legions of evil spirits at his command. He is ever considering his opportunity of tempt-

ing man. He desires to have even God's dear children, that he may "sift them as wheat." He considers them, as he "considered" Job. He studies their characters, marks their weak points, and then suits his temptations accordingly.

He has also earthly instruments at command. The four hundred prophets of Baal were all his servants, doing his work. So now wicked men are his tools. This world's things his arms. And truly none are secure but those who are dressed in the armour of God, have Him for their shield, and buckler, and house of defence, and have Christ to intercede and pray for them.

Here is the comforting truth to put along side of this dreadful sight of Satanic power and malice. God is stronger than Satan. Christ is ever before hand with him, foreseeing his devices, and praying against them. Satan's power is limited. He cannot go beyond what God permits him to do. He tried it in the case of Job. But when God said, "Behold he is in thine hand," He added, "but save his life." He tried to ruin Peter wholly, but Christ prayed for him, and he rose again.

How important the question, to each of us, is God on our side? We know, we

are certain Satan plots against our souls, seeks to blind our minds, keeps us from Christ, and tries to ruin our souls. We know also that in the case of many many souls, Satan is very successful. He holds thousands captives. He will hereafter claim very many who have lived in his service here, and have not known Christ, or sought His deliverance.

How important the enquiry, am I delivered from his bondage? Has Christ, the Stronger Man, entered my soul and cast Satan out? While Satan plots against me, does Christ, as for Peter, pray for me? Are my sins and failings answered for by Christ, so that Satan has nothing against me?

O! Reader, do you dress daily in the whole armour of God? Do you pray every day that you may be delivered from this evil one, and that no strong delusion may ever be sent you, to cause you to believe a lie? Do you watch against him, and pray that you may not be ignorant of his devices, or be overcome by them? If you do this you shall stand now and in the evil day. "If God be for us, who can be against us."

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## PRAYER.

O GOD ALMIGHTY ! save me from the power of evil spirits. Let not Satan plot successfully against me. Deliver me from temptation.

Blessed Saviour ! pray for me, that my faith in Thee may never fail. Give me thy grace, that I may watch against the sinful inclinations of my heart, lest Satan get advantage over me. Give me thy strength, that I may resist sin from without and from within. Let thy Good Spirit dwell within me ; lead me and sanctify me wholly. AMEN.

## JEHOSHAPHAT.

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*“Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the fore-front of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy : for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies.*

*“And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries, and harps, and trumpets, unto the house of the Lord.*

*“And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel.*

*“So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet ; for his God gave him rest round about.” 2 CHRON. XX. 27—30.*

IN studying the characters of the Old Testament saints, we must have often observed there is scarcely one in whom there was not some great failing. If they had any special weakness showing itself by some act of wickedness, that act is generally told us. No doubt it is in order that we may learn not to think too highly of them, and also to make us remember that they were men like ourselves, and that whatever excellency of character they had, was owing to the grace

of God,—the same grace which God vouchsafes through the Gospel now.

And this we shall find to have been the case with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. He was one of the best kings Judah had. It is said of him, “He walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim, but sought to the Lord God of his fathers, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel.” Yet Jehoshaphat had his faults, and one of these is related of him. He made sinful alliances with wicked kings.

In viewing his character we will first look at him as thus tempted to go astray, and will then regard his good qualities and doings.

The first error Jehoshaphat committed in this way was when he joined Ahab the wicked king of Israel, “He joined affinity with Ahab.” No doubt the temptation to do this was great. He was flattered by Ahab’s seeking his friendship and help. He saw at first no evil in helping a friend, for Ahab asked him to help him with his army, in getting back what seemed to be his right. Yet in this he was wrong. He sinned and was reprovèd. He went home after the battle, and the prophet came out to meet

him and said to him, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

Thus we are taught to avoid evil alliances. God is angry with those who join the ungodly, love them, and help them, that is, help them by countenancing them in their evil doings. We see too that no good, but only evil, ever comes from such alliances. Jehoshaphat did not gain the end for which he joined this king. In many ways he hurt himself. They were both beaten in the battle against Ramoth-gilead. He had to countenance Ahab while consulting the false prophets of Baal. And in the battle he himself was all but slain.

This was the king of Judah's first offence in this way. But he was guilty of a similar offence later in life. So we read, "And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly. And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish." Here also he was unsuccessful. God would not bless his work. Another prophet reproved him. Eliezer prophecied against Jehoshaphat, "saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath



broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish..”

This seems to have been Jehoshaphat's greatest temptation : to join the ungodly.

It is still a strong temptation to the people of God. They often have a difficult path to pursue in their dealings with the ungodly. The men of this world and the sons of God are so mixed up in this world, it is impossible to avoid at times being brought much together. Yet there is undoubtedly a line of separation which ought to be carefully observed by the people of God. Men of the world are not desirous that that difference should exist, for it often reflects on their ungodliness, and is a silent reproof of their evil doings. They will therefore often try to make the godly to slur over that difference, and act together with themselves, making their difference of religious views a light matter. Thus are the people of God tempted to make sinful friendships and love them that hate the Lord, and sinful alliances, countenancing the ungodly and uniting themselves with them. They bring reproach upon the cause of truth. They entangle themselves in evil and worldly courses. They lose their savour

as salt. They dim their light of grace. They wound their own and their brethren's consciences. And they are corrected of the Lord.

But Jehoshaphat is also famous for his good points. The prophet who reprov'd him said, "Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee." Let us now notice some of these.

Jehoshaphat was in many respects the pattern of what a king ought to be. One of "the good things found in him" was this. He took care that his people had good judges among them, who would see that they had justice done them. He not only gave them judges which they had not, but did his best to give them good judges. "He set judges in the land, throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it; for there is no iniquity in the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts."

Another good thing found in this king was that he made provision not only for the bodies, but also for the souls of his people.

He not only gave them judges to decide their temporal affairs, but he gave them Priests and Levites, to teach them concerning spiritual things, and "the law and commandments and statutes and judgments of the Lord." xix. 8—11.

See too the good consequences of this righteous proceeding on his kingdom at large. His reign was prosperous, and free from all inward disturbances. He ruled a united people, who all acted together as one man in the common cause of the good of the kingdom, and in defence against enemies. "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet : for his God gave him rest round about."

Thus does God ever keep His promises, whether to a nation or a person, a king or a poor man. "Them that honor Him He honors."

But another good thing found in this king was that he was a man of prayer. A time of trouble came upon him and found him not wanting in confidence in his God to whom he sought in the time of difficulty. As it is said of him, "He prepared his heart to seek God."

This trouble came from an enemy that rose up against him. And his conduct on this occasion forms a chief part of his history

as given us here. Such instances of faith and prayer are mentioned not only as best describing the character of the person, but also as being suited for our imitation. We cannot copy many things which as a king Jehoshaphat did, but what as a godly man he did we can.

There came tidings to the king, one day, that a great multitude was come up against him. We read at once after that, that Jehoshaphat "Set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah : and Judah gathered themselves to ask help of the Lord : even out of all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord." We then have the prayer that the king offered up at that time. (ver. 6—12.) The character of the prayer showed his faith. It was a written form of prayer ; but it was by no means a formal prayer. There was the life of faith and a fervency in it. He appealed to God, as the author of all power and might. As "Him who ruled over all kingdoms, and in whose hand was all power and might." He appealed to God as a God of faithfulness to keep the promise He had made to "Abraham His friend," of the land of Israel. He also put God, as it were, in remembrance of Solomon's dedication of

the temple of Jerusalem, when God had promised to hear and answer all prayer directed towards His Name in that place, whether in the time of pestilence, plague, or war, or any other evil. Lastly, he appealed to God as a God of love, for "all Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, their wives, and their children." And he said, "we have no might in ourselves, but our eyes are upon thee."

To such a prayer an immediate answer came. The spirit came upon Jahaziel a Levite, and he told them, "the battle was not their's, but the Lord's," and that they need not to fight, for the Lord was with them.

Jehoshaphat's faith now shone forth brightly. He took an opportunity of speaking to all the people, and said, "Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem : Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established ; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper."

But what even more showed his faith was his appointing singers that praised the "Lord, and the beauty of holiness," as they went before the army, and who said, "Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever." So confident did they feel of an answer to

their prayers, that they exchanged prayer for praise, supplication for thanksgiving.

Then came the great victory. "They were smitten"—"every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped." They were more than conquerors. For they found among them riches and precious jewels, more than they could carry away ; and they were three days in gathering the spoil, it was so much. Besides this, there was the good effect on the countries around : "And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel."

Here then is indeed encouragement to prayer, to prayer arising from a believing heart. Here you see what great things the believer can expect to receive in answer to simple and child-like confidence, which leads to simple and fervent prayer to a Father which seeth in secret.

Only let our prayers be faithful, and we see what mountains can be removed. It is remarkable that we read not here of any other preparation made by Jehoshaphat to withstand the enemy, than this of prayer.

It cannot be doubted that he also gave orders about his army, and all the manner of defence and attack. But the chief thing he did, is only told us, and that is to show his main trust was in the Lord, and not in himself or his army.

As we read of these wonderful deliverances we are apt to think they belong not to our times or to us. But this is a great mistake. This is to lose sight of one of the greatest sources of comfort and encouragement which God has graciously given us. It is only written for us, that we through the Scriptures might have hope in the same God. God has no less means than then of helping his people. If we see not as marvellous deliverances, it is because we see seldom such great faith.

See also, what should be the foundation of our faith, and what the construction of our prayers. The mighty power of God, we should appeal to—not in words only, as “O Almighty God”—but really considering all that is said of this great God in His word, of whom we are permitted to ask what we wish: that He has all things in His hands, and that with Him “all things are possible.” And as we think over our difficulties, our troubles, our wants, our perplexities, let us often ask the question, “Is anything too hard

for the Lord?" Is the thing I am asking as great a difficulty as it would be to remove a mountain into the sea?—for this is what the Lord promises I can do, or have done for me, if I ask Him in the name of Jesus Christ.

Nor ever forget this all-important point. What was the merit of Solomon's temple? Why should prayer directed to that place never be unanswered? Jehoshaphat's prayer tells us when he says of the temple, "For thy name is in this house."

Where is the name of the Lord now? Not in the temple, for it is laid even with the dust: the name of the Lord is in the Person of Christ. The glory of God appeared in Him when He visited this earth. He was "God manifest in the flesh." The glory of God shone in Him more brightly than in the Holy of Holies in the temple.

Like Jehoshaphat, we must appeal to this Name, and place all dependance on God's faithfulness to keep His covenant with His people. Abraham was called the friend of God. And the promise to him, supported Jehoshaphat's petitions. But Christ is the Son of God,—will He not then with Him freely give us all things? Will He withhold any one good thing from them that ask Him? Will He not rather, as it is written,



make "us more than conquerors through him that loved us." Good shall come out of our troubles. We shall grow rich by their means. And they who think to do us evil shall be made to minister to our good.

Go then often, and go in faith to the throne of grace. There will God meet you, and commune with you. There will you get mercy, and grace to help in time of need. Go with prayer, and return with praises, for the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever.

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### PRAYER.

O LORD GOD of my fathers! art not thou God in heaven, and rulest thou not over all this earth! In thine hand is all power and might, and none is able to withstand thee. I have no might against my enemies, or to deliver myself out of troubles. Mine eyes are upon thee. I plead thy promises. I plead the Name of Jesus Christ. For His sake give me whatsoever thou knowest to be good for me. Turn from me all evils I deserve. Send thy good Spirit into my heart. Make me more than a conqueror over all evils of this world; and give me grace to fight the good fight of faith, and to finish my course with joy, for the same precious Name's sake. AMEN.

## ELIJAH TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN.

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*“And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.*

*“And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.*

*“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.*

*“And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.” 2 KINGS II. 7—10.*

IN a former chapter we have seen that Elijah on one occasion, weary of life, sat down and requested for himself that he might die. He little knew at that time the good things God had in store for him. He was never to see death. He was to be translated from earth to heaven, as Enoch was.

We now have an account of the manner

of Elijah's ascent into heaven. And also of the blessings sent down, in answer to his prayer, upon Elisha, who became prophet in his room.

This was a great and wonderful event. The like to it had not happened since the days of Enoch, (Heb. xi. 5,) nor after it was the like event until the Lord Jesus went up into heaven in the presence of his apostles. Those who saw Elijah's ascent into heaven were fifty men of the sons of the prophets, "who stood to view afar off," while Elisha was by his side.

But one of the last things Elijah did before he went away, was to prophecy to Ahaziah, a wicked king of Israel, and tell him of his death. As this event was accompanied by some severe judgments on some of Ahaziah's servants, we must pay a little attention to it before we notice his ascent into heaven.

Ahaziah was sick and ill. He had fallen out of a window in his house. He sent, not to the Lord's prophet, but to Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, to know whether he should recover. This was a false god which the Philistines worshipped. Ekron was a city of the Philistines. Baal-zebub means god of the flies. It is supposed by some that

the inhabitants of Ekron worshipped this false god as having power over the minute stinging flies which infested that country. It is from this name the chief of the devils is named Beelzebub, of whom we read in the Gospels.

Ahaziah sent to this false god. But the angel of the Lord sent Elijah to meet his messenger. And he said to him, "Is it not because there is not a god in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore, thus saith the Lord, thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Ahaziah was angry because Elijah had thus stopped his messengers. He asked them who it was. They described the man.

He said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite." The king then sends a captain with fifty men to go and take Elijah. "Elijah answered, if I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty men. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty." This also Elijah did to the next captain of fifty and his men. But the third captain and his men were spared, and why! Because they asked for mercy. This captain fell on his knees and besought him,

and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight, and the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, go down with him, be not afraid of him. Elijah went to the king and told him he should die. And he did die according to the word of the Lord. (See chap. i.)

Was Elijah cruel in thus acting? No—for these reasons. First, he acted under God's direction, for an angel of the Lord seems to have been his counsellor here. (ver. 15.) Secondly, He could have had no revengeful feelings, or he would not have had power to act as he did in the name of the Lord, saying, "If I be a man of God, let fire come down."

Besides, his very character and whole object of life were the very opposite to any feelings of revenge; his life was a life of labour of love. No—his object here was to let God's judgments against sinners be known and felt in such a way as to become a witness in God's behalf against the evil doings of sinners. Hence the captain and fifty who seemed penitent, and came and asked for mercy, obtained it.

Yet this was, no doubt, a severe judgment, and we are reminded of it again in the

Gospel history, and are led to contrast it with the tender way in which Jesus dealt with those who opposed him when upon earth.

It was when some inhabitants of a village in Samaria would not receive the Lord, "because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem," that James and John said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke ix. 52—55.)

We see, then, how exceedingly in error those must be who ever persecute men for religion's sake. You cannot drive men to become religious. The Gospel is a scheme for drawing with the cords of love.

But now pass on to the still later doings of Elijah, before he went up into heaven.

It seems that he was told by God that he was to be taken up, though he knew not the place where he should last stand upon earth. For some reasons, we find God sent him from Gilgal to Bethel, from thence to Jericho, and from thence to the banks of the

river Jordan. There seem to have been sons of the prophets living at these places. And it may have been to let them see Elijah, and know of his ascent, that he was thus sent from place to place. For the sons of the prophets, both at Bethel and Jericho, said to Elisha, "knowest thou that the Lord wilt take away thy master from thy head to-day?"

Moreover, by these successive journeys was the faith of Elisha tried, and his love proved. When Elijah said at each place, he must go, for the Lord sent him, Elisha was most determined not to leave him. "Elijah said to Elisha, tarry ye here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. He said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee : so they two went on." This happened three times, at three different places. Now, if Elisha had not followed Elijah, he had not had his last prayers and parting blessings, nor would he have seen him go up into heaven. But if he had been faint-hearted, lukewarm, or worldly, he would have tarried, and not have clung to Elijah as he did.

They now cross the Jordan together. But not in a boat or swimming in the waters, but dry shod. This is the last miracle

Elijah did. "He took his mantle and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground."

Then came Elisha's opportunity. He had clung to his master to the last. His master in leaving him, would not leave him destitute. So it came to pass, "when they were gone over, Elijah said unto Elisha, ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee. And he said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

Thus you see Elisha knew well how to use this gracious opportunity. He asked not for worldly blessings; he asked not for gold, or clothes, or provision. He asked for spiritual blessings. He asked for that which would benefit others more than himself. See his faith too, in asking largely for what he desired. Not only Elijah's spirit, but a double portion of it.

Elijah said it was a hard thing he had asked for. Not hard for God to give. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" But, probably, he felt God had endued him with a large measure of the Spirit, more than those prophets before him had had; it might therefore be beyond the purpose and plan of God to give to another man, more than,



even double, what he himself had had. Yet he had faith God would even grant this prayer. So he gave Elisha a sign. If he should see him, as he went up into heaven, it should be so. He saw him, and it was so. Henceforth Elisha was endued with the wonder-working power which Elijah had had. From that time he worked many and many more miracles than Elijah had. He begun with parting the waters of the Jordan. He took up Elijah's mantle, which dropped from him as he went into that glory where he would have no need of such clothing. And with it, Elisha smote the waters, and they divided. The power was not in the mantle. The power was in the spirit of faith that Elisha had received from above. He had seen Elijah do the same. He believed he had greater power than his master, he doubted not therefore.—“He smote the waters, and said, Where is the God of Elijah?” And he had a dry path before him.

And now are there not some blessed lessons to be learned from this history! Do we not see some resemblance between the ascent of Elijah, and the ascent of a greater than Elijah. And some likeness in the blessings bestowed in the one case, and in the other! First, as in the case of Elijah,

when our blessed Lord went up into heaven, His departure procured greater blessings for His people than His bodily presence had done. He told His disciples who were sorrowing because they were going to lose him, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come, but if I depart I will send him unto you." (John xvi. 7.) Moreover, He told them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (xiv. 12, 13.)

And so it proved indeed. The mantle of Christ fell upon the apostles. The same kind of miracles that Christ did, Peter did, and St. Paul did also. They healed diseases. They even raised from the dead. And what was still more wonderful, they healed souls, and raised those dead in trespasses and sins. Not indeed in their own strength or names. But in the name of Jesus, and by the power of His Spirit. So that more souls were converted on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost was sent down by Jesus, than had been during all the

ministry and by all the teaching of Jesus. Yet of course not a word had Jesus spoken in vain. What Jesus had said, and what Jesus had done, were the foundation of that preaching which the Holy Ghost blessed to the conversion of souls. Yet so it pleased God it should be, that a greater blessing came to the Church after Jesus had gone up into heaven. Jesus "ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious."

Observe also, as it was in answer to the prayers of Elijah, that Elisha received the Spirit of his master, so did the prayers of Christ prevail to obtain the Holy Ghost for His people. But herein see a vast difference. Elijah had some doubts whether so much as was asked by Elisha could be obtained by his intercession. He felt not confidence in the success of his prayers, perhaps from a deep sense of his own unworthiness. But not so in the intercession and prayers of our Great Intercessor, Jesus Christ. His merits are sufficient to obtain all that is wanted for every one of His people, their salvation, their happiness. There is no such thing as their asking too much. He promises to do all we ask. He undertakes to do far more than we ever should think to ask.

This intercession of Christ is thus spoken of by the Apostle to the Hebrews, "Christ is entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." And again, he says, "wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them, for such a high Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." (Hebrews vii. 25, 26.)

Observe another difference. Elijah's prayers only prevailed while on earth, and before he went up, but Jesus can pray now, and "ever liveth to make intercession for us." Not Elijah, nor any other saint, can receive our prayers now. But Christ the Son of God both hears and answers prayer.

Hence the last lesson. As Elisha's faith was put to the proof in the expecting and receiving his Master's blessings, so is ours.

Our gracious Master says to us, "Ask what you will and it shall be done unto you." We must ask, and ask in faith. Like Elisha we must believe that if we ask we shall receive. Like him we must ask boldly for that which we want.

Only let our desires, like Elisha's, be spiritual. Let us ask much for the Spirit

of Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." But God knows how to "give his Holy Spirit to them that ask." And "because we are sons, he will send forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." The Spirit of prayer, teaching us to pray, will be ours. The Spirit of truth, teaching us the truth, will be ours. The Spirit of holiness, making us holy in word thought and deed will be ours. The Spirit of love, making us love God, and love the brethren, and love souls for Christ's sake will be ours. All this we want. All this let us ask for. All this and much more will be given us. Let our prayers go up frequently and fervently to our risen and ascended Lord.

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### PRAYER.

O BLESSED Jesus! who art gone up into heaven, having died first for sinners! I beseech Thee, to send down Thy blessing upon me. Be Thou my Friend: my righteousness to cover all my sins; my strength that I may prevail over all enemies. Give me Thy Spirit to dwell in me and sanctify me, to shew me the deep things of God, and to shed abroad Thy love in my heart. Lord hear me. Lord have mercy on me. AMEN.

## MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

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*“So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.*

*“And he went up from thence unto Beth-el : and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald-head ; go up, thou bald head.*

*“And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord : and there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.”*

2 KINGS II. 22—24.

ELISHA did many miracles. More than any one else of whom we read in the Old Testament, unless we except those done by Moses before Pharaoh in the land of Egypt.

Now all these miracles done by Elisha, were the consequence of two things,—the one of his having asked for a double portion of the Spirit that was upon Elijah : and the other, his being a man with great faith. If he had not had great faith he would not have been able to do all these wonders. This is plain from the nature of the miracles, and the way they were done. And it reminds us how great things might be done

by the people of God, if only they had more faith. We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves.

Not indeed that we want to do such great wonders as these miracles of Elisha : but that there are great things quite beyond our own natural strength, which we do want done, and which more faith and more prayer would get for us. And it is concerning these our Lord speaks when He says, "Have faith in God, for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass ; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark xi. 22—24.)

We shall find Elisha very careful to give God the glory of these wonders. Thus the first wonderful thing he did after dividing the waters of Jordan, was to heal the bad waters at Jericho. (chap. ii. 19—22.) The men of the city applied to him, "Behold the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth ; but the water is naught and the ground barren." Elisha sent for a new cruse

with salt in it, and he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters ; there shall not be from thence any more dearth or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake."

See here, he does not say, "I have healed them," but "thus saith the Lord, I have healed them." Observe too his confidence : he says not "I hope," but "I have healed." As to the means used, "salt," this only increased the marvel, and showed more completely that the Lord's hand healed and nothing else. For the natural tendency of the salt would not have been to make the waters better, but worse.

Mark another thing,—how he applied the remedy to the head of the evil. It was the waters in the city that were bad, but Elisha "went forth unto the spring of the waters and cast the salt in there." It reminds us of St. James' question, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James iii. 11.) And also of our Lord's figure, "Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good also." So to sin in ourselves, which is as a "fountain sending



forth bitter water," defiling the soul, polluting our lives, and bringing us to perdition, we must apply the remedy in the proper place. We must go to the fountain head of the evil. We must begin at the heart. The salt of God's grace must be put there. It is not the change of a few outward actions that makes the Christian, it is the change of heart. We must begin here, and this will affect all our thoughts and desires, and these will affect our words and actions. Indifference to sin, and no sense of guilt, enmity to God and ignorance of Christ, are at the root of all evil in a man's life; whether that evil shows itself chiefly in the neglect of spiritual duties, or in the doing of outward crimes. It is when the Spirit convinces of sin, and faith in Christ reconciles to God, and Christ becomes the great object of life, that then the fountains of sin are changed, and the waters of holiness flow forth, sweetening both our life to ourselves, and our intercourse with others.

The next event recorded in Elisha's history is his cursing the children that mocked him. "As he was going by the way there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head." These were

godless children, making a mock both of sin and of holiness. Perhaps they were set on by others. Without doubt they encouraged one another. One, or even a few, will often fear to do what the countenance of a multitude makes easy to do.

They made a jest at the person of Elisha, laughing at his bald head. They ridiculed also the idea of Elijah's ascent into heaven. Having heard it said he was gone up, they jeeringly bid Elisha go up also into heaven after him, and then they should have a good riddance of them both.

Elisha "turned back and looked upon them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord, and there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." Such was their punishment for mocking God's servant. This was not the prophet's revenge, but God's judgment upon them. He pronounced a curse on them. Not as an angry wicked man might have done, cursing and swearing, but "in the name of the Lord," solemnly pronouncing a curse upon them. This was his part. God then took up the cause. He sent but two wild beasts, and they females, but yet they were equal to the work of judgment, forty and two of them were left

mangled and torn. A warning to all who thought lightly of God's servants and God's name. A judgment on parents who ill-taught their children. "Fools," says Solomon, "make a mock at sin ;" and fools too mock holy men ; for a hatred of sin, and reverence for holy men and holy things, always go together. "They that hate the righteous shall be desolate." But of the godly, it is said, "He maketh much of them that fear the Lord."

Another miracle of Elisha's (see chap. iv. 38—41.) was the curing the poisoned pottage. It was a time of famine. The sons of the prophets were sitting before him and seething pottage. One of them gathered wild gourds, and put pieces of them into the pot. They knew not their nature. They proved to be poisonous. They cried out and said, "O man of God, there is death in the pot." Elisha asked for meal ; poured it in and said, "Pour out for the people that they may eat, and there was no harm in the pot."

Another miracle was this. (see chap. vi.) "The sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, this place is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there where we may dwell."

He said to them, "go ye." But they wished him to go with them. Doubtless they felt the value of his presence. He went with them. One drops into the water an axe head. The axe had been borrowed, what should he do? He applied to the man of God, "who cut down a stick; and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, take it up to thee, and he put out his hand, and took it."

In both these miracles we see the sons of the prophets happy in the possession of a friend who could help them in a wonderful way in all their straits, and in the greatest difficulties. Thus when their food (and food was scarce, for it was a time of dearth) had become poisoned, one little exclamation, one short appeal to their master, was enough to remove the poison, and to make the food eatable.

Oh! that the sons of God had such faith in their Divine Master, who promises to be an ever present help in time of trouble. Elisha did his miracles by faith in the power of God, but Christ in His own power as God. Not one of the sons of men ever applied to Christ when upon earth in vain. Whatever it was he helped them. To turn water into wine; to cast out devils; to open

the eyes of one born blind ; to cure an incurable disease ; to make the deaf and dumb hear and speak ; to raise the dead ;— for all these things men had but to ask, and Christ spoke the word, and it was done. And why these few at that one time helped, but to show the people of God at all times how ready, how able to help Christ ever is. Shall the sons of the prophets apply to a man of God and expect and get help, and shall we be slow to apply to the Son of God for the help we want ! Elisha had but a little measure of the Spirit. Christ has it not by measure.

But you say, perhaps, will Christ work a miracle for me now ? If my axe drop into the water, will He make the iron head to swim ?

But let me ask, what is a miracle ? It is a great wonder. A making a new thing, different from what we are accustomed to see ; or, as we say, making a thing act contrary to its nature ; as to make iron swim. But now, suppose God makes things answer the end we want, in a way we could not see beforehand, yet without the use of uncommon means,—without an extraordinary exertion of His power, is not this as much a wonder and a miracle as if He made a new and un-

common thing, and something contrary to nature? Thus, if you are in a strait and difficulty, and you see no earthly way by which you can be helped, but you cry to God, and in a wonderful and unlooked for way God brings things round, and your difficulty vanishes,—is not this as good as a miracle? Is it not a wonder? Is it not a thing which only God “that ordereth all things in heaven and earth” could have done?

Thus we see it requires God’s power to help us, without what we call a miracle, as truly as by a miracle; and to make things work naturally for our good, as to make a new thing contrary to nature. We know that for wise reasons, it pleases God to work in this way, oftener than in that way. It is His rule to work simply, and after a natural order of things. It is the exception to His rule to work by extraordinary means, as He did at times by His prophets and apostles, and as did the Lord Jesus Christ. But at all times He works wonderfully in answer to prayer. The sons of the prophets had Elisha to help them. The sons of God have Christ. Let us ever apply to Him as they to Elisha. They went not to their work of building without him. So let us say to Jesus in every work we take in hand,

and every day we go forth to business, "Be content I pray thee, and go with thy servant." Then when troubles arise, He is near to help. Is the poison of this world's curse in our cup, He can remove it. The cup of sorrow we drink shall become the cup of joy and peace. The cup of suffering, the cup of health and blessing to the soul. Are we in trouble with the thoughts of a friend we have wronged, or through our fault are we injuring any one. He can set us right, supplying the wherewithal to restore what we owe, to repay what we have borrowed, or otherwise to prevent another suffering from our fault.

The feeding of the hundred with the twenty loaves, and the having fragments remaining, reminds us indeed of the still greater wonder performed by Jesus when He fed the five thousand with the five loaves, and there were twelve baskets-full over, and the four thousand with the seven and the seven baskets over. The wonder of the servitor, who said, "What! should I set this before a hundred men," reminds us of the surprise of those who said, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient," and who said of the five loaves, "What are they among so many!" The words of Elisha were,

“Give the people that they may eat, for thus saith the Lord, they shall eat and leave thereof,”—the words of Jesus, “Give ye them to eat;” His blessing and breaking being enough to work the miracle, for He wrought it by His own power. The result of the miracle on the people fed was no doubt to exalt Elisha as a prophet of the Lord. The result on the followers of Jesus was this, the “men who had seen the miracle said, this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” (John vi. 14.)

These miracles of feeding a multitude with a little, are to teach us the great lesson of trust in God for the provision of the body. Proofs they are of the great truth, “man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” That is, unless God wills it, much food will not nourish us. But if God wills it, little or no food shall be made sufficient to satisfy us. Thus, the multitude in the wilderness, who walked in the way God sent them, and who had God’s servant with them, were in no fear of starving or being left hungry, although a barren wilderness surrounded them, because God was with them, and would, as He did, create bread rather than break His promise.



So too with the prophets following Elisha. So then will God now in these days not fail to supply the wants of His people. "Trust in the Lord and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Psalm xxxvii. 3.) No word of God can fall to the ground. The difficulty of help can never be too great for Him. Let us not doubt Him who hath said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

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### PRAYER.

O LORD GOD, who didst show Thy power and Thy goodness by the hand of Thy servant Elisha, and didst enable him to do great wonders. Do thou assist me to believe more in Thy power to do all things, however impossible to man. May Jesus be my never-failing friend! May I trust Him for all things temporal and spiritual! May I never doubt His power to save me from sin ; to deliver me from the power of Satan and the world ; to give me all I need in this wilderness ; and at the last day to raise me up and cause me to inherit eternal glory. For Jesus sake, hear me, O my God! AMEN.

## ELISHA AND THE MOABITES.

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*“And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.*

*“For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain ; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.*

*“And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord : he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.”* 2 KINGS III. 16—18.

WICKED men will sometimes seek in their distress to that God, whom in their prosperity they have neglected. This was the case with many of the wicked kings of Israel. As Saul and Ahab, and this Jehoram of whom we read here. He was king of Israel, son of Ahab. He was not quite so bad as his father. So it is said, “He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord ; but not like his father and like his mother ; for he put away the image of Baal which his father had made.”

He put away the images of the false gods. But he kept and worshipped the images of the true God. (Chap. iii. 2, 3.) He went not into all the sins of Ahab, “nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of

Jeroboam, the son of Nebat." Yet perhaps he comforted himself in thinking that he was better than his father,—this made him right with God. But after all the difference of his guilt was but in degree. The father broke the first commandment, and had other gods. The son broke the second, and worshipped graven images. It will avail us little if while we can say, we are not so bad as others, we are still in such sins as prove we are at a distance from God, and in a state of condemnation.

This king Jehoram had to undertake a war to recover his right. Mesha, the king of Moab rebelled against him : and refused to pay his usual tribute of "an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool." (ver. 4, 5.)

The king seeks assistance in this warfare in two ways. First, from Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. Secondly, from Elisha the prophet ; though this second he would not have sought to had it not been for the king of Judah. (ver. 6, 7, 8.)

On their way through Edom, the king of Edom joins them ; but they are suddenly in a great difficulty from want of water. "There was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them." (ver. 9.)

Jehoram saw in this calamity nothing but a hopeless case. "The king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

Jehoshaphat bethought him of help from the Lord. He said, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" Yes! there was. Elisha the prophet had followed the armies. Perhaps he knew what was coming. One of the king of Israel's servants spoke slightly of Elisha, as having been merely the servant of Elijah, "which poured water on the hands of Elijah." But Jehoshaphat knew his divine authority and power, and said, "the word of the Lord is with him."

This made him valuable and worthy of seeking. He was God's mouth-piece for the time. God used him as His instrument. This also should be the ground on which we prize highly a Christian minister. "The word of the Lord is with him." If he be a man of God, taught of God, sent by God, speaking God's word, doing God's work, ministering, as God gives him gifts and grace, to God's people, we must esteem him highly in love for his work's sake. If we despise him, we despise Him that sent him.

Proud men are often humble in distress, and will stoop low to gain their end. So the king of Israel humbles himself to go and seek to Elisha, and the king of Judah leads him to him. The one prompted by selfishness, the other giving honour where honour was due. They sent not for Elisha to come to them, but the three kings go down to him. "So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went down to him."

The double Spirit of Elijah produced great boldness in Elisha. He stood on his high ground of a prophet and minister of God, and for a time left alone his condition as a subject of the king. "Elisha said unto the king of Israel, what have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." And then again, "as the Lord liveth before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee."

This answer, while very bold, would the more strike the king's conscience, as well deserved by him. Perhaps he thought Elisha would be flattered by his coming to him. Elisha would have him plainly see he could not lightly mock God, by first neglecting Him, and then lightly seeking to Him. Can

the sinner be surprised if when he cries to God only because driven by his fears, God should not be found of him, and if they that despise Him in prosperity shall be lightly esteemed in adversity. Yet this king was to benefit by the company of the good. For Jehoshaphat's sake deliverance was at hand for him.

Elisha said, "Bring me a minstrel." This was probably a Levite, who was accustomed to play sacred melody,—perhaps the songs of David, "the sweet Psalmist of Israel." Such of old seems to have been the custom. Prophets prophesied with the accompaniment of music. So we read in 1 Samuel x. 5., "A company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them: and they shall prophecy."

This soothed Elisha's spirit, and raised his mind heavenward. God sanctified it as a channel for the spirit of prophecy. "It came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him." Then he told them to dig trenches and ditches. For without wind and without rain, water should flow in those ditches. Themselves and their cattle should so be preserved. The same means too should give

them victory over their enemies. Who could have said how that should be! Who could have devised a plan by which water in trenches should destroy an army! Who could have said, the water shall do more than satisfy your thirst and your cattle, and so give you strength for the victory! But this was counted a light matter. "And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord; he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand."

And so it was. In the morning, at the hour of the morning sacrifice, "behold there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water."

The effect of this appearance of water was victory. For in the morning, "when the sun shone on the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side, red as blood: they said, this is blood, the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now therefore Moab to the spoil." Hence they rushed in confusion, and without order on the well prepared ranks of the three kings. The Israelites had an easy victory; "they smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country."

Thus did the kings learn how many ways

God has of accomplishing His purposes, and how ready He is to help those who seek His help.

And what great comfort there is in the thought of the many unthought-of ways God is able to bring help to those in want and difficulty. The unbelieving king Jehoram would have it, that the three kings were brought together only to deliver them into the hand of Moab. He felt they were strong enough, indeed, to overcome the Moabites in battle, but he considered that they would be overcome by the dearth of water before they came to fight. (See ver. 10, 13.) But events showed him that God could send water without rain and without fountains, and in the very road they had come by and found none,—the way of Edom. And God could make that same water answer another end,—that of victory.

So, would we but trust Him, God has many unthought-of and unknown ways of helping us. And would we but commit our ways to Him, the help we want is sure and ever near at hand, although we cannot see whence it can come.

The cruel deed of the king of Moab is next related. “When he saw the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven-



hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom ; but they could not. Then took he his eldest son, that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him up for a burnt offering upon the wall."

This was done probably with a view to obtain the favour and help of his god. Or possibly it may have been done, vainly hoping to obtain favor of the God of Israel whom Moab could now see was the God of victory.

There has been found amongst almost all heathen nations an idea that sacrifices of living animals would appease the gods they worshipped. No doubt the idea came from the sacrifices God taught men to offer from the earliest times, even the times of Abel and Cain. Man himself would not have first conceived this plan of worship. But when done without God's command, and not according to His direction, sacrifices became worthless, nay, sinful. Thus man perverted this mode of worship : originally appointed by God, and intended to foreshadow the great sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb of God, that alone taketh away sin. Men got, in their ignorance, to imagine that their false gods, or even God Himself, would really be pleased by victims slain.

Hence we find a heathen asking how to appease God in this language, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (See Micah vi. 6—8.) This was the language of "Balak, the king of Moab." Some hundreds of years after another king of Moab actually offers up his "eldest son for a burnt offering upon the wall."

Such is one instance of the cruel nature of the heathen religion. Many other such there are even in practice in the present day. Many heathen are putting themselves to torture, slaying little children, neglecting and starving sick and aged parents, thinking thus to appease their gods. "For the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

But while we see in these things the vain hopes of deceived and ignorant people, kept in darkness by the Prince of darkness, do we not also see a remarkable witness to man's want of a Saviour, such a Saviour as is provided in the Gospel?

What Moab wickedly and vainly did in his way for the good of his ownself and his people, God has mercifully and wisely ordained to be done in another way, for the salvation of man.

The idea of the way of getting good which the king of Moab had got hold of, was the dim shadow of a great reality, a real way of getting a blessing from the Most High. The favour and friendship, the help and blessing of the great King of kings are indeed obtained through a sacrifice. And that is the sacrifice of God's most dear Son! For this is the great truth to which all Scripture bears witness, and to which even the vain sacrifices of the heathen bear witness also, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Christ, the "desire of all nations," has come. He has done for His believing people what thousands of rams and goats, and thousands of rivers of oil, and all the first-born of all the kings of earth could never do. In all these things there is no merit; nothing to satisfy a righteous God, nothing to mend the law man has broken, nothing to pay the debt man has incurred, nothing to remove the

penalty of the broken law, or the curse the sinner's sins have brought upon his own head. But in Christ's sacrifice of Himself there is all that is wanted to do this. His merits are sufficient, for He is the Son of God. He can become the sinner's substitute, for He was able to bear and did bear the weight of all the sinner's curse upon Himself. He has endured the penalty. He has redeemed from the curse of a broken law. He has fulfilled all righteousness. And so He can and does become the "end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." He makes our peace with God, and if believers in Him, we are cleansed from all unrighteousness, we are reconciled to God, we are at peace with Him through Jesus Christ, in whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins.

In this world we see all things through a glass darkly, and so we never understand wholly why God has appointed this way and no other of salvation.—Salvation through the death and sufferings of another. But so it is. And this we do know, and must remember,—God is not only a God of mercy, who is ready to pardon, but a God of justice, who provides pardon in such a way that justice is satisfied and not slighted. Man's

laws can be set aside, and the judge of the land bestow pardon where yet the law requires punishment. But if God set aside His holy and just laws like that, He would not be a just God. Justice and mercy are met together in Christ. He by His obedience, His sufferings, His death, and His resurrection, does satisfy the justice of God for every believing sinner, so that mercy can flow freely, and fully, and everlastingly down to that sinner.

Is this the foundation on which rest our hopes of pardon and life? Are we thus through faith in this Mediator reconciled, and living in friendship with God? Does our heart as well as our head reply to this? Are we loving Him who thus first loved us? Are we hating and shunning the sins which required this sacrifice? Oh! let us remember, "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lusts." It is the love of Christ which breaks the bands of sin. And the love of Christ is seen in all He has done, is doing, and promises to do for the sinner, that has cast himself upon Him.

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## ELISHA AND THE SHUNAMMITE.

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*“ So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite :*

*“ Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.—2 KINGS IV. 25, 26.*

THIS chapter contains an account of two women who obtained help in time of trouble from Elisha, the servant and prophet of God.

The first is the case of a widow of one of the sons of the prophets. Her husband had died and left her in debt. The prophets were not rich people, probably only just gaining a livelihood from day to day. They were chiefly engaged in spiritual labours. And though that would not justify any one running into debt, it may in this case have been no great fault on his part, and but for his death, would not have happened. However that may be, we know it is wrong to incur debts we have no good reason to expect shortly to pay, and we cannot be

surprised if it bring ourselves or others into trouble.

But the widow was not to suffer. She took her case to the man of God, knowing he had power to help; which was all one with taking it to God. The bank Elisha drew upon for help was inexhaustible, for it was the Almighty Power of God. He cared not therefore what means were at hand. All things were possible to him, because all was possible to the God he trusted in. He at once took up the poor woman's cause. She came and said, "Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen." Her distress was great. She had lost a good husband. Cruel death, no respecter of persons, had claimed him. And now creditors, as cruelly, were ready to take her two sons.

But the Lord is a present help in trouble. He, who having redeemed her husband's soul, had only let death take his body to see corruption for a while, would now redeem her sons from the hand of the creditors.

"Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not

anything in the house, save a pot of oil." She is hereupon told to borrow all the empty vessels she can of her neighbours. She then was to pour into all those vessels from the one she had oil in. She did this, and it filled all the vessels she had got together. And it would have filled more. "She said to her son, Bring me yet a vessel, and he said unto her, There is not a vessel more, and the oil stayed." Thus showing that God did not put a limit to the supply, the limit was in her means to receive it. The oil was sold and her debts were paid, and her sons were safe, and she had wherewithal to live on besides.

An instance this is of the way God can and will help His people, who cry unto Him in their distress. He has as many ways of sending help now as then. His help is as abundant as ever. We are not straitened in Him, but in ourselves. We shall grow weary of praying, and seeking, and trusting, sooner than He will of supplying our wants. Whether troubles come then from our own faults, or otherwise, let us ever feel we have one greater than Elisha, who is both able and willing to help us in His own time and His own way, even Jesus, our Redeemer. He is greater than



Elisha. All power in heaven and earth is in His hands. Nothing is too hard for Him.

But, next, we have the case of the Shunammite woman. She is described as "a great woman." A woman of quality and substance perhaps. She was also probably a woman great in a better sense, fearing God and loving His people and His ways. She was one of those of whom David speaks, "He maketh much of them that fear the Lord." She and her husband made much of Elisha. They thought it an honour to have him at their house. "She constrained him to eat bread. And so it was as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread." Elisha could not be long or oft at their table without their discovering what sort of a man he was, and what was his real character. "She said to her husband, Behold now, I perceive this is an holy man of God which passeth by continually." True grace will always make itself known, as the lighted candle will give light to those in the room. If a man's aim be to glorify God, if a man's affection be really set on Christ, so that he desires to make Him known to others, and if a man's words be seasoned with grace, all this must in a little while proclaim to the company he is with, Whose he is and Whom

he serves. Men will either despise him or love and honour him, according to their own character. Now so it was with this Shunammite and her husband. They feared God, and therefore welcomed His messenger. And not content with a short sojourn from him for a time, they wished to keep him as a resident. They proposed to build him a room attached to their own house. "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed and a table, and a stool and a candlestick : and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither." This was doubtless kind. They not only gave him lodgings and charged nothing, but they furnished his room for him. There are many who would have done all this for a recompense, but alas, few for the love they bear to God's people.

But so it is Christian love is put to the test and brought into active exercise. And this is why it is said, "Even so hath the Lord also ordained, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." (1 Cor. ix. 14.) And again, "Let him that is taught in the word, minister unto him that teacheth in all good things." (Gal. v. 6.) And again, "If we have sown unto you spiritual

things, it is no great matter, if we shall reap your worldly things." (1 Cor. ix. 11.) They who bear love to Christ will show it in deeds of kindness to the brethren of Christ, for Christ's sake.

And now see how they were rewarded for this their kindness to God's servant. See the fulfilment of the promise, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord, and look, what he layeth out it shall be paid him again." (Prov. xix. 17.)

From thus making friends with Elisha, this woman obtained two great blessings of a temporal kind, besides all the spiritual good she got for her soul.

She obtained a son in her old age. And some years after, when there was a famine coming on in the land, she was forewarned of it by Elisha, who said to her, "Arise and go thou and thine household and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." (chap. viii. 1, 2.) Besides which, after those seven years, it was because she had had a son raised to life, and Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was telling the king of Israel of it, just at the time that she came and asked the king for her house and her land, which she had

left for seven years, that therefore the king was interested in doing her justice, and "appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was her's, and all the fruits of the field, since the day that she left the land even until now."

Thus, even supposing that to build Elisha's room and furnish it, these people had had to make a sacrifice of their own property, and give up much for that end, we see how they were more than re-paid, and in nothing were losers.

But now let us turn back to the account of God's dealings with this woman at the time of Elisha's visit: and see something of her spiritual state. To benefit her in this way was, after all, the chief reason Elisha was sent to sojourn with her.

Elisha's great faith in the power of prayer is much seen here. Nothing but very strong faith could have made him promise the woman should have a son at a particular time. "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." So astounded was the woman at the promise, that she said, "Nay my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid." But she soon found the man of God was not deceiving her. "She conceived and bare a son."

But some years after her faith was to be

tried in a different way. When God gives us a great blessing it is not seldom that He sends also a great trial. We receive His bounteous gifts and are apt to be elated. We need also His corrections to keep us humble. The same mercy that sends the one sends also the others. The same wisdom that apportions the measure of our joys, mixes also the bitter cup of trial and adapts it to our special wants. So as the mother of Jesus was highly honoured above women, by the birth of the Messiah, so also was it appointed that that very child should be the cause of a sword piercing her own bosom. And so it was with the Shunammite for whom Elisha obtained a son. The Lord gave, but the Lord took away. Great indeed must have been her joy when she really embraced a son. But accordingly great also must have been her grief and sorrow when that son fell sick and died.

And this is the next event related in her history. "When the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, my head, my head ; and he said to a lad carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died."

Thus was her faith sorely tried. But it was not found wanting. Many things in her conduct show this.

First, the place where she laid her son. "She laid it on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him and went out." And whither did she go? She went straight to seek Elisha. Her husband was surprised she should go. It was not one of the usual times for going to the Prophet. "And he said, wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon nor Sabbath. And she said, it shall be well."

See, also, the woman's great faith, in her reply to Gehazi, whom Elisha sent to meet her, and to ask, "Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, it is well." What could she mean by this, but that it was well with her to suffer what God appointed,—it was well, because she believed God would give her back her son.

She was surely one of those spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter xi, who did and suffered such great things "by faith." In verse 35 we read "women received their dead raised to life again." This faith gave her peace of mind in her trouble. She was kept in perfect peace, because her mind was

stayed on Jehovah's everlasting strength. And so when outwardly all was ill, she could yet by faith say with sincerity "all is well."

Her faith also shines out in her mode of supplication to the man of God. She said to him, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, do not deceive me?" As though she reasoned thus, "I did not specify this gift at thy hand, for then might I in the common course of things expect what I had asked for, might be taken from me. But the gift of a child was the particular blessing thou thyself didst choose for me, and if God meant me to have it, I may well believe, He means me to keep it, therefore come and raise it to life."

Then, next, her faith was seen in the way she cleaved to the man of God and would not leave him. She cast herself at his feet, and when Gehazi, Elisha's servant would have thrust her away, he said, let her alone; for her soul is vexed in her; and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me."

For some reason he sent Gehazi with his staff to raise the child. But though Elisha had faith to raise him, not so Gehazi. It was a fruitless attempt. "Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face

of the child : but there was neither voice nor hearing ; wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, the child is not awaked."

And now comes the triumph of the woman's persevering faith. Likewise Elisha's great trial of faith. "He shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord." And what faith must there not have been in that one prayer ! What a wrestling with God ! What a pleading with Him, for His name's sake, to exercise His power ! The prayer was heard. Seven sneezes from the child proclaimed the answer to the prophet's prayer : though not till after he had twice stretched himself upon the child. Then the flesh of the child waxed warm after he had first laid himself upon him, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, and hands to hands. Then the second time "the child sneezed seven times, and opened his eyes."

Thus was the woman's faith rewarded. Thus did she learn still more of God's power and love. And still more of the great things the prayer of faith can do.

This too is what we should learn from her history. Have we learnt to receive evil of the Lord as well as good ; to carry our cares



and sorrows with faith to a God of power and love ; so that in all our trials we can say, "It is well !"

All is well indeed, if we, like this woman, will but "have faith in God ;" and believe that in all His dealings with His children, "he doeth all things well." Then indeed when things are contrary to our fleshly inclinations, but fraught with spiritual mercies, we can say, though not without a struggle of the weak flesh, "all is well." Then indeed, if a trouble comes upon us, however great, and we are for a time in the furnace of affliction, however hot, yet, amidst tears of grief, there are with us prayers of faith ; we believe God both can and will send us help. And we can say with this Shunammite, "It is well."

It is well to be in a loving Father's hands, whether he appoint us a cup of suffering, or a cup running over with mercies. It is well, if He be dealing with us, as with sons. It is well, if thus by any means we be led onward in the path-way of holiness, and of life everlasting.

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## NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.

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*“And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?”*

*“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”* 2 KINGS v. 13, 14.

OUR Lord makes one use of this history. We read in St. Luke iv., He said to the Jews, “Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus (Elisha) the prophet: and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.” He said this in the city of Nazareth, which was in Galilee of the Gentiles. The Jews were offended with Him on this very account, that He had to do with Gentiles.

Our Lord reminds them that Elisha, an acknowledged prophet of God, was sent to a Gentile, and that though there were many persons afflicted with leprosy in his days, yet the only one cured by him was this Naaman, who was a Gentile. Showing, as

St. Paul says, "He hath mercy on whom He will." (Rom. ix. 18.)

It was truly remarkable that this man should have been thus the one to experience God's mercy in a cure of his leprosy ; because not only he was one of the Gentiles who knew not the God of Israel, but because he was at that very time captain in an army which was engaged in war against the Israelites. He was an idolater, and a professed enemy to God's people. Yet, for wise reasons, and in a remarkable way, he was led to seek to God's prophet for a cure for his disease, and from that he learned to believe in that God he had been ignorant of.

The way in which he was led to the Prophet, is also instructive, as also the manner in which he was cured.

We read, he was a great man with his master, "but he was a leper." The leprosy was a most loathsome and disagreeable disease. Here therefore you see was an instance of how all worldly greatness may be marred and spoilt by one single circumstance which is beyond the power of man to help. His master might load him with favours and honours, but he could not remove a single spot or scar caused by this loathsome disease on his body. And so it often happens.

Those who have honours and riches, and fame and power among men, will have some one infirmity, or some drawback to their happiness, which is beyond their power to remove. So that it may be said, Such an one is a great man, but he has this one thing which mars his happiness and the enjoyment of all his greatness.

And this is God's way of teaching men the insufficiency of this world to give perfect satisfaction, and of leading them to look beyond it and above it for true peace, and complete satisfaction.

But mark the peculiar way this captain was led to hear of Elisha. He had been to war against Israel. One prize he had taken was a captive girl, whom he had given to be a maid to his wife. She was the instrument used. She told her mistress the wonders performed by Elisha. She said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy." This report quickly reaches him whom it chiefly concerned.

The king of Syria, Naaman's master, writes to the king of Israel, asking him to cure his servant. He was greatly in error. But he supposed that if any one could cure the leprosy in the kingdom, the power to do

so would either be in the king's hand, or in one under the king's power. Thus he looked not to God as the source of the power. Now the leprosy was not curable by man. The king therefore replied, "Am I God to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" And thus Naaman could have found no cure, had not the prophet himself taken up the matter, and said, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Thus you see how the humblest means is sometimes used to bring about the greatest ends. This little maid-servant was more impressed with Elisha's power than was Jehoram the king of Israel. And going into a family where Elisha's God was not known, she was able to bear witness of Him, and bring great blessings to the family she dwelt with.

So should all young people remember, however lowly their circumstances in life, they may have knowledge of God and spiritual things, and of the way to be cured of the disease of sin, which those they live with have not. They should bear witness to the power of God's grace, and so hope to lead others to the knowledge of that grace.

But notice, in the next place, the peculiar way in which the man was to be cured. Not the way he expected, not the way he desired for himself, not the way he wished ; but in the way the prophet of God appointed for him. Naaman drove to the prophet's door. The prophet did not even come out to him. "Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean." Thus the river was God's appointed river, the number of washings, God's number, seven. And then came the promise, only so obtained, of perfect cleansing.

And now because it was contrary to Naaman's expectations, and because he did not see why he should be cured in this one particular way, therefore he was angry, and turned from it altogether. "Naaman was wrath and went away, and said, Behold I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, may I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." He thought the

rivers of his own country better than the little river of Jordan,—in fact he was wanting in faith in the special way proposed for his cure ; and therefore rejected it. Had it not been for his servants' persuasion he might have remained a leper. On their recommendation he went and did as Elisha had told him. "Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan..... and he was clean."

Then it was he saw the wisdom of complying with God's directions, even though he might not understand the reason of them. And now as he felt himself delivered from the fearful bodily plague he had been tormented with ; he was also delivered from the greater evil of ignorance of the God of Israel. Hence, his conviction on this point, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." And hence his wish to give some great gift to the prophet, which, however, Elisha perseveringly refused, because he wished God, and not himself, to be glorified. And hence also it was Naaman declared his intention of henceforth offering no sacrifices to any other gods, but unto the Lord : and as he thought there was a special virtue in the waters of Israel, so he thought the altars of sacrifice for the

God of Israel should be made of the earth of that land. One thing more before parting with the prophet, he asked whether he should be pardoned, if, when standing with his master in the idol's house, he bowed before the idol.

The answer of the prophet was "Go in peace." This was merely like saying, Good bye. Therefore on this point we are not told whether the prophet gave any reply at all. It is evident that Naaman's conscience raised a question in his own mind how far he would be justified in thus seeming to join in an act of idolatry, even though his heart might never join in it. And if his knowledge of God increased, and he received more light and grace, he would soon be able to furnish himself with the right reply, and be led to disconnect himself with idols and idolaters altogether.

But the sad part of this history remains to be told. Elisha's servant had heard his master refusing to be enriched with all the good things the great man had offered. His heart at once coveted some of them. His mind speedily planned a device to obtain some of them. A lie was at hand. He follows after Naaman with this lie in his mouth, and returns laden with the en-



riching present he had coveted. He stows the talents and the clothes away : and stands again in his master's presence. But that master knew all. And another lie of the servant could not conceal the real fact. Elisha said, "went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

Thus did he drive a hard bargain with sin. A lie procured him the riches he coveted : but the riches brought a curse no riches could make up for. Dear bargains too are all those the sinner makes. He gives away his soul, he foregoes eternal happiness, and gets in return a few short years of mixed pleasure, uncertain and fleeting enjoyment!

But now both Naaman's cure and Gehazi's curse teach useful lessons.

For the first, what a common picture we have of what is taking place every day with respect to the cure of sin. The plague

spots are on all. Some, like Naaman sigh to be delivered from that sin which in God's eyes makes a man loathsome and offensive. Such are told by the Lord's messengers of a way to be cured. The Gospel plan is set before them. It is this, "wash and be clean." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all unrighteousness." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

But this in the eyes of many who are told it is too simple. It is not the way they should have expected. Salvation by works they could understand. To do something that would procure God's favour, they would like. "To submit" to God's appointed way of pardon and life is against their nature, to "go about to establish their own righteousness" is more congenial. Hence often they turn away in anger. The message is foolishness and a stumblingblock that offends them. "Some hard thing" to be done would be more in accordance with their views of how to become righteous and to be saved. But some are taught of God to think otherwise. When the Spirit has convinced very deeply of sin, a man is led to rejoice in the very simplicity of the Gospel cure.

Like the diseased Israelite in the wilderness, whom one look at the brazen serpent healed, so they feel, more than look they cannot do. Salvation must be free, or they can never earn it. What the law cannot do through the weakness of the flesh, they rejoice to find Christ has done for them. They wash through faith in His blood. They are at once restored to God's favour. They cease to be in condemnation. They are God's dear children, "accepted in the beloved." Their sins, like Naaman's leprosy, are departed. They go on their way rejoicing. Oh! happy souls to whom the Lord thus reveals Himself: and who rejoice in His voice, saying, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Alas! how slow are all of us, to lay hold of this blessed Gospel tidings! How apt to ask, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life? "What must I do to work the works of God?" How slow to understand, "this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent,"—and that "he that believeth on Him hath everlasting life!"

Yet surely, this is the only way to peace, and the only way to love and confidence!

But then, from Gehazi learn, how easy to

be every day in the way of good, and yet to be far from receiving any portion of it to oneself! How possible to be with a minister of holiness, and yet be without it. To be, like Judas, a constant hearer of Gospel truth, and a witness of miracles by the finger of God, and yet remain unfreed by the truth, a slave to a besetting sin, unawakened to need of conversion, or to any desires after God and His ways. Yea, how possible to be a ministerer of other's good, and to take part in procuring spiritual benefits to others, and all the while be utterly without one particle of those blessings themselves!

Oh! ever fear that hardness of heart which comes from constantly hearing with unmoved feelings and unawakened conscience those truths of God's word, which are the only means under God of ever working good in your soul. Fear, having light shining around you, on you, and in others, while all is darkness in your own soul. Fear, the state of hearing and not understanding, seeing and not perceiving, so that you are never converted, never healed.

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## PRAYER.

O GOD! who by the example of others dost teach thy people the things they must learn for their peace, give me grace to profit by these lessons. May a deep sense of sin lead me to value and to use thine appointed way of pardon. May I be able so to believe in the truths of thy Gospel, that I rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. May I evermore rejoice and glory in the privilege of free access to Thee, and in the liberty of the children of God. Save me from every sin that besets me. Save me from covetousness, and too great a love of this world. May I remember the time is short, and live in the world as using it aright, and not abusing it. Let the love of Jesus evermore constrain me to avoid every appearance of evil, and to cleave to that which is good. Grant this, for the same blessed Redeemer's sake. AMEN.

## THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA.

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*“Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord ; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.*

*“Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be ? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.”—2 KINGS VII. 1, 2.*

THE history of a siege is generally interesting. This siege of Samaria has many points of interest in it, and like all Scripture history has in it also matter of profitable instruction.

One of the things that makes it a memorable siege is that the prophet Elisha was in the city when it was being besieged ; and he uttered a remarkable prophecy concerning the way in which, in the middle of a great famine, there should suddenly be great plenty in the city.

The people of Syria were the besiegers of Samaria. They seem to have been the special enemies of the Israelites at this time.

And before this siege they planned attacks on Israel which were unsuccessful, because Elisha told the king of Israel of them.

We have an account of one of these just before the great siege. "The king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying in such and such a place shall be my camp." But as often as he thus planned a particular attack on Israel, so often did Elisha tell the king of Israel, "and the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice." The king of Syria was soon informed by his servants, who it was that did him this harm. And he then said, "Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him." On finding he was in a place called Dothan, the king sent a great host with horses and chariots to surround the city. When Elisha's servant was up early in the morning, the first thing he saw was all this host, and he said to his master, "Alas! my master, how shall we do? His master's answer was striking. He said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Elisha's faith made him see that he had God on his side and that he need fear nothing. To make his

servant see as he did he was unable, except by a miracle, which caused him actually to see Elisha surrounded by the Lord's host. Hence he prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw : and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

We may well be reminded here of the words of Christ so often told us in the Gospel history, as spoken to those whose fears were rising at the sight of danger, just as in the case of this young man. We often read that the Lord said to such, "Fear not," and always on this ground, "only believe." From which we learn that the opening of the eyes of faith will alone enable us to overcome fear. If we appeal to God in the time of our trouble, however great and many the causes may be, which seem to be against us, we may truly feel if God is on our side, if in Him be our trust, "they that be with us are more than they that be against us." "For if God be for us, who can be against us."

But the next thing Elisha did to overcome these enemies was to offer up another prayer to that God who never failed to hear



him. "He prayed unto the Lord and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness." This prayer was also answered. They were smitten with blindness. Probably not total blindness, so that they could not see to walk, but partial, so that they could not see the direction in which they went. For he led them straight to their enemy's city of Samaria. And thus they were in the power of the enemy they had come to attack. "The king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them, shall I smite them? And he answered, thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master."

This was the law of love prevailing. This was to "overcome evil with good." They were well dealt with; "he prepared great provision for them," and sent them home, and for a time Israel was left in peace by the Syrians. (verse 23.)

But it was some time after this, "Benhadad king of Syria, gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head

was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver." That is, as some suppose, half-a-pint of pulse or lentiles, for eleven or twelve shillings.

But another thing more than even this showed the straitness of the siege. A woman cries unto the king for help. He replies, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?" But what was the woman's trouble? She wanted justice done to her. But what a terrible act had she been driven to, that made her now ask for justice in this way, that another woman be made to keep her promise, and give up her son to be eaten. What dreadful words are these she spoke. "So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son." (verse 29.) But see here a wonderful fulfilment of God's awful threat pronounced by Moses five or six hundred years before this took place. (Deut. xxviii. 53.) "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, in the siege and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee." And so 54, 55, 56, and 57.

This was one of the occasions on which this prophecy was fulfilled, as it was also in the siege of Jerusalem afterwards.

But while things were in this state, and just at the very time, when there was nothing left to eat, save something unnatural, or which could only be procured at a great price ; when a few herbs cost many pieces of silver ; and when a mother could be in such a state as actually to give her child to be cooked and eaten : this was the moment at which the man of God gave forth the wonderful prophecy which he did. Not saying how it was to be, simply he foretold the fact, on the ground of God's word, "Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." That is, about a gallon and a half for about two shillings and four-pence ; which would be very cheap. This was a wonderful prophecy therefore. The very time of this cheapness was named, and that very near, "to-morrow about this time." Where could the help come from ? What should make such a mighty change in the state of things in the city in so short a time ? Was not the enemy close at hand, and gaining advantage

every day from the very famine the poor besieged ones were suffering from? Even under best circumstances too, how should there be a plenty in twenty-four hours? But it was to be so, for "Thus said the Lord."

King Jehoram could scarcely believe it, as we may suppose. He seems to have been on the point of giving up the city, when he said, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord, what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" But another expressed very plainly his unbelief in the prophet's declaration, "a lord on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" His punishment for unbelief was then also foretold. "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." He should live to see God's word fulfilled, but should not live to enjoy the promise of plenty which he had doubted. One prophecy believed would have made him happy, but now the fulfilment of two prophecies shall end in his death. So does God hate unbelief in His Word.

And now how was this all accomplished? The seventh chapter relates the events. The wonderful plenty was brought into the city in this way. Four men who were

lepers, keeping together, but separated from others by law and by persons' dislike to them, are the instruments chosen to be the bearers of the good tidings of the plenty. Reduced to great want, they were led to think it could scarcely fare worse with them if they went over to the enemy's camp. (See verses 3, 4, 5, and 6.)

How great their surprise when they got there to find the enemy gone, "having left their tents, and their horses, and asses, and the camp as it was." And this was the Lord's doing. "God had made the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us, wherefore they arose and fled for their life."

The lepers began by eating and drinking and enriching themselves with spoils. But this selfish enjoyment could not last long. "They said one to another, we do not well; this day is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us; now, therefore, come that we may go and tell the king's household." It was soon known through-

out the city. And though the king at first sent men on horses to see if the Syrians were not seeking by this plot to entrap them, instead of Syrians these men discovered "all the way full of garments and vessels which the Syrians had cast away in their haste ; and the messengers returned and told the king, and the people went out and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord."

Thus, was God's word by Elisha fulfilled to the letter.

So, too, with respect to the unbelieving lord. Perhaps he forgot his own unbelief when he saw the facts before his eyes. But God's word never falls to the ground. "The king appointed him to have the charge of the gate : and the people trod upon him in the gate, and he died as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him."

And now what does all this teach us ? Does it not forcibly remind us that God can and will help us in the most extreme circumstances, and when we appear to be in the most hopeless condition as regards any human plan of deliverance ? And does it

not show how He requires us to believe that He can thus help us according to His promises? Whenever, therefore, it is written of any thing we want, "Thus saith the Lord, if you wait upon me I will do it for you," then must we believe His power to help us, whatever may be the difficulties in the way. We are specially taught here that God chooses the most unlikely and often the weakest means for bringing to pass great and important events. He can do what He chooses by the means that He chooses. And oftentimes God will work with the humblest and least powerful means, on purpose to show that it is not by might or by power, but according to His word that things shall take place; and for the purpose of preventing boasting on the part of man, and to lead us to look unto Him. So it is written by the apostle with regard to the way it pleases God to save them that believe. "God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things, and things which are despised hath God chosen.....that no flesh should glory in his presence." (1 Cor. i. 27—29.)

Jesus Christ was despised and rejected of men, and set at nought, and through weakness crucified, but He is the appointed Saviour of sinners, the mighty God, the Exalted Prince to give repentance and remission of sins.

The apostles were chosen from among the fishermen of Galilee, but they became mighty messengers of peace, ambassadors for Christ, and by their doctrine turned the world upside down.

So in the bringing to pass the great plenty in the famished city of Samaria, and conveying the good news of that plenty just outside the gates, see what unlikely and what mean and humble methods were adopted. A sound drove the Syrians away, and brought all their mighty plans to nought. Four lepers, cast-outs, despised men were those who said, "this is a day of good tidings," and brought the news to the king.

God can never be at a loss for means to help us. If things have come to their worst, and there is no apparent possibility of deliverance—then is the very time likely to be chosen of God.

Away, then, with unbelief in the word of God that cannot lie. Hath He said, and



shall he not do it? Be not like the lord who believed not and perished, but be like those who "through faith have turned to flight" whole armies, "out of weakness have been made strong," and by patient waiting on the Lord have always obtained deliverance. Unbelief dishonours God. Being strong in faith gives glory to God.

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### PRAYER.

GREAT God of heaven and earth! God of all power and might! Thou hast in many ways, at different times, wrought great wonders for thy people! I pray Thee to give me faith in this Thy power. I know Thou art All-powerful: nothing is too hard for Thee, yet, Lord, I am often oppressed with cares and wants and troubles, because I do not enough believe in Thy power and will to help me. Lord! I would trust Thee more. I would remember Thy wonders of old. I would think of the great things Elisha did, because of Thy Spirit in him, and his faith in Thee. And henceforth I desire to believe all the promises of Thy word. I cast my cares on Thee. I lay my wants before Thee. Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief: for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

## JEZEBEL.

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*“And they went to bury her : but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands,*

*“Wherefore they came again, and told him, And he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel :*

*“And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel ; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.”*  
2 KINGS IX. 35—37.

NOTHING shows more the deceitfulness of sin than the history of Hazael, who cruelly murdered his master, and committed such cruelties on the children of Israel. He was a hardened sinner, no doubt, as this murder showed. Yet, when Elisha foretold him some of the cruelties of his future life, he was surprised and horrified at the very thought of such things.

How was this ! Let us enquire into this account of his interview with the Prophet. Elisha came to Damascus. Benhadad was there, the king of Syria, and he was sick. He sent Hazael to ask Elisha whether this

sickness was unto death or not. Hazael came to Elisha with a great present, and said, "Thy son Benhadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee ; saying, shall I recover of this disease?" Elisha's reply was remarkable. First, there was the answer from God to Benhadad, "Go and say, thou mayest certainly recover." Then there was Elisha's own knowledge of the fact that yet he would die. "Howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die." So that Elisha knew that Hazael meant to kill his master, although it may be as yet Hazael had not quite determined on the act. Perhaps he had only gone so far as to hope the sickness would carry him off. Probably he had turned in his mind how if the illness did not end in death, he would himself put an end to the life that stood between him and the throne he coveted.

But would not this prophecy of Elisha's in some degree urge him forward to the crime? This is by no means likely. Just as it did not alter the plans of Judas who betrayed Christ, the being told by Christ, he it was who would betray Him : so now, even if Elisha had told Hazael he was about to kill Benhadad, it would not have altered his purpose. But Elisha did not even say

how his death would be accomplished. We can imagine then that had Hazael this purpose in view, Elisha's statement would not have deterred him from it. Nor if he had not then formed the purpose, would he then begin to form it, but would rather have waited till the death he desired had come to pass in some other way.

But Elisha went further than this, telling Hazael what he knew of his future actions. "Elisha settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, why weepeth my lord? and he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds thou wilt set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword."

Thus he showed he knew a great deal more than Hazael did himself. All which he could only know as he was told by God. But Elisha showed also his deep feelings here. He saw so strongly all that the people of Israel would suffer at the hands of Hazael when he should become king, that he could not refrain his tears. Such strong faith had he in the word God had spoken to him, that it was to him just as if he saw the things taking place. And so

they hurt him, and caused him sorrow : and brought tears to his eyes.

Such is the nature of true faith in God's word. Reader ! have you such faith as this in God's plain declarations ? Search and see ; examine by this if you be in the faith. God has revealed to us in His word that awful sufferings are in store for the ungodly. Oh ! when we look around, and think how many thoughtless, godless people are walking heedlessly down the broad road that leadeth to "the fire that is never quenched, and to the worm that dieth not," we may well be grieved at our hearts, and weep for the evil they are bringing upon themselves. Faith in the wrath of God will thus first show itself in our own flight to the refuge set before us, and then in our deep anxiety for the escape of others. Like Rahab, we shall want a token that both we ourselves, and our family and friends, shall be saved from the destruction that is coming upon sinners.

But next, mark the effect on Hazael. He, the doer of these dark deeds, did not believe that he should do them. "And Hazael said, But what ! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ?" Yet went he straight home, and the next day began the

deeds of horror. He told the king, "Elisha told me that thou shouldest recover." For, had the disease been left to work its worst, it would not have killed him. But the very next day, we read, "on the morrow, he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died ;—and Hazael reigned in his stead." And afterwards, when as king he overcame Israel, he did those cruelties Elisha had foretold.

Thus we see how at one moment a man may be horrified at crimes which another day he himself is without compunction committing. And how is this to be accounted for, but by the deceitful workings of sin in the heart ! It shows how familiarity with lesser evils will by degrees make a man a ready doer of the greatest crimes.

This progress is step by step. There has never perhaps been the murderer who would not at one time have scorned the person who told him he should one day take the life of another. He would have said with Hazael, "But what ! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing ?" But gradually he was brought to make excuse to himself, for doing the very deed. One crime has led to another. First, perhaps, drinking, then cheating, and then lying to cover his frauds :

and then these crimes increasing upon him, blinding his eyes, and searing his conscience, till the blackest crime is but one little step beyond those with which he has become so familiar. Oh! how needful to watch against the first step in the downward progress: the first sign of the hardening and deceiving process of ungoverned sin in the heart! "Take heed, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. iii. 13.)

But this history next calls our attention to the certain way in which vengeance overtakes the murderer, when God hearkening to the cry of the blood spilled, brings the murderer to judgment even in this world.

We have now to see how the murderess Jezebel was visited with awful judgment for the blood she had spilled. We have read of the righteous sentence fulfilled against Ahab her husband. The dogs licked his blood on the same plot of ground where dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, whom he had let Jezebel his wife murder.

A sentence was then passed also against his posterity, that they should all be cut off. A sentence also against Jezebel, "of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." Now

came the time to fulfil it. An instrument is chosen by God. Jehu is that man. To him therefore is a prophet sent by Elisha, to anoint him king over Israel. (ix. 1—6.) And then the message is delivered him, “Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.” (ver. 7.) There was also this added, which is important to observe, when sentence against Jezebel was again pronounced, it was said, “and there shall be none to bury her.”

Let us see now how exactly all this was fulfilled. Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah go to fight against Jehu, who was no king, but a captain in the army. Surely we should have said the kings of the Lord’s people will be helped of the Lord. But no! God was not their God. God had given Jehu a command, and invested him with the authority and office of a king. He had been anointed by God’s servant on purpose to execute vengeance. In vain then are watchmen placed on the tower of Jezreel. In vain are messengers sent to ask Jehu, who is known by his furious driving, whether he be come peaceably.



One last cry from one despairing king to the other, "Joram turned his hands and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah!" proclaims their hopeless condition. Joram falls smitten by the swift arrow hurled from Jehu's bow. His body is cast on Naboth's field, according to God's word. (24—26.) Ahaziah also fled in vain. He was wounded also. He fled to Megiddo, and died there.

Then came the fate of Jezebel. "She painted her face and tired her head, and looked out of the window, and said to Jehu, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master!" Jehu had but to call, and he found many ready to serve him ; for such a sinful woman as Jezebel could have no real friends. Some of the very eunuchs in the room with her looked out on Jehu to listen to and obey his commands. "He said, Throw her down, and they threw her down : and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall."

Thus Jehu was fulfilling God's word. But when he sent to bury her, he was losing sight of an important part of God's prophecy. He said, "Go see now this cursed woman, and bury her ; for she is a king's daughter : but when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than her

skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands." Thus marvellously was fulfilled God's word to the letter, "there shall be none to bury her."

God depends not on man to carry out his word. It must and will be fulfilled. Man may forget it, man may oppose it: but sooner or later all shall be fulfilled: and those concerned therein shall glorify God for His power and truth. So must Jehu, and others, have been impressed and warned; "when they came again and told him, and he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah the Tishbite, saying, in the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: and the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel: so that they shall not say, this is Jezebel." (ix. 35—37.)

Thus, though much time had passed since these words had been spoken; though he who had spoken them was no longer on earth; though the person concerned had forgotten them, and even he who fulfilled part of them sought in his ignorance to hinder part of them; yet the words were fulfilled to the letter. Not one could possibly be forgotten by God, or be unfulfilled by the course of events.

And now let us ask, what good is this history to us? What end is it to answer in us who read it?

Surely we are to be impressed with the awful certainty there is in all the words that God has spoken, and especially His words against sinners! Surely we are to remember how it is said of the words of Jesus, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away till all be fulfilled." This is great comfort to those who are looking to the promises of God. It may often seem to them that those promises are put aside, or it may seem there are the greatest difficulties in the way of their fulfilment. There may seem much that obstructs their accomplishment, their own sinfulness, their own weakness, or a long interval of time, may all seem to make it look unlikely, nay sometimes impossible, they should be fulfilled.

But oh! let such remember, how different are the words which God has spoken, from any thing man has said. God's faithfulness is involved in their fulfilment. God's power can have no let or hinderance, therefore there wants nothing but God's time, and God's appointed way to bring them to pass. Therefore the great lesson we learn, is to

wait upon God. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord." (Psalm xxvii. 14.)

But what an awful thought this is to those who are walking in the ways of Jezebel or Ahab, or any other ungodly persons. People are very apt to lose sight of all those parts of Scripture which tell of the pains and torments which are to come upon the ungodly. They think, like Jezebel and Ahab, by forgetting to escape them. But it would be no excuse to any who have lived neglectfully of God, that they never knew of His threats. For if they have a Bible, if they live where the Word of God is preached, then these threats are spoken to them, and will have their accomplishment, whether they hear them or not. It is impossible that one single word of God should fall to the ground. The things He has said about hell, about fire not quenched, about the banishment of the wicked from His presence, all these, and many other like things, may be set aside, may be unread, may be unbelieved, may be forgotten,—so were the words concerning Jezebel,—but yet, as in her case, all will assuredly be fulfilled: and "the wicked will be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God."

These are solemn thoughts. May they awaken in us a desire to search and see all that God has said shall come to pass. Let us also search and see which concerns us most, His awful threats, or His glorious promises!

Are we among the people beloved of the Lord, for His Son's sake: redeemed, and so delivered from His threats of wrath? Are we those who are "waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith,"—waiting to be delivered from the bondage of corruption,—waiting for all those great and glorious things to be brought to pass when Jesus comes again, and appears unto salvation to all those that look for Him?

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### PRAYER.

O GOD, give me the heart to believe all the words thou hast spoken. May I so truly believe in the things not seen as yet, that I am moved with fear, and seek thy salvation. May all thy promises be words of truth to me, so that I venture all on Thy words; knowing Thou art able to perform them. May Thy faithful promises be the stay and support of my soul in all troubles and adversities, in the hour of death, and when I appear before Thee. O grant this, for Jesus's sake. AMEN.

## JEHU'S ZEAL FOR THE LORD.

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*“And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him; and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.*

*“And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord. So they made him ride in his chariot.*

*“And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah.” 2 KINGS x. 15—17.*

It was an awful sight which the people of Israel beheld when, as they entered through the gates of the city, on each side they saw a heap of human heads, in all seventy in number! A sight it was to teach them terrible lessons. They were the heads of king's sons. By their side stood Jehu, lately become king, and as the people passed by he sought to impress them with one of these lessons, namely, the certain fulfilment of

God's word, and the sure punishment of the ungodly. He said, "ye be righteous : behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him ; but who slew all these ?" As if he had said, you can form a just judgment on the subject, you are upright in your opinion, I confess that I have slain Joram in whose stead I reign, and you may think perhaps that I am only seeking my own welfare in these matters, but how comes it that some one has slain all these sons of king Ahab ? Must there not be some others interested and engaged in this work besides myself ? Yes ; assuredly, for this is all done in accordance with God's commandment, and " Know now, that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab : for the Lord hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah."

It is true Jehu had himself ordered these seventy to be killed, as we read in the beginning of the chapter, he told the timid rulers of the people in Samaria, to put them to death, (x. 1—8.) but what he meant to say, was, that all that was done proved that God's word would be carried out.

This then is one act of Jehu's zeal in

carrying out God's word. Does it strike us as sad and cruel work, we must remember to set it down to the account of the sad and cruel nature of sin, which calls down the terrible judgments of God upon sinners, and often causes the innocent to suffer. Sin is a mystery, and this is one of the ways in which it mysteriously works out terrible ends. These were all the sons, bastard sons of a wicked and idolatrous king. They were probably all partakers of their father's sins, for they lived in evil times, and evil company. God's word against Ahab was that all his children should be cut off, and God was now visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children of them that hated Him.

But other dreadful deeds were accomplished by Jehu in his zeal in carrying out God's word. Jehu was a strange character. He had a zeal of God. He did perform God's commands laid upon him, and God gave him a reward for it,—and yet Jehu was not a godly man, for though he avoided the sins of Ahab, he followed the sins of Jeroboam.

But his zeal is not the less instructive, and may well serve to remind us of a better zeal that godly people should seek to have.

Let us observe some further acts of Jehu's



zeal, although they be indeed deeds of horror. We see in them God's most terrible judgment against sinners, and especially idolaters, and murderers. Ahab and Jezebel had been murderers, not only of the innocent blood of Naboth, but also many of the Lord's prophets. God had visited both with violent deaths, and now follows the destruction of all worshippers of Baal, whom they had so sought to honour ; besides every remaining person among their posterity.

So next to the destruction of these seventy sons, Jehu slays some brethren of Ahaziah, whose only guilt appeared to be that they said, "We are the brethren of Ahaziah ; and we go down to salute the children of the king, and the children of the queen." They were all put to death. (13, 14.)

Jehu next meets "Jehonadab the son of Rechab, coming to meet him, and he saluted him, and said to him, is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart ? Jehonadab answered, it is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot." Then Jehu went on to show his zeal. This Jehonadab was on the Lord's side. Jehu probably had reason for supposing it. This is he of whom we

read in Jerem. xxxv., who left a commandment with his children, which God rewarded them for so strictly observing.—A commandment which forbade them drinking wine, sowing seed, planting vineyards, or building houses.

Then comes an account of Jehu's subtle way of finding out who were the worshippers of Baal, and collecting them as in a net for destruction.

He said, "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu shall serve him much. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal: whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal." Having thus collected them, having a dress for each, that they might be clearly distinguished, he gives the command, "Go in and slay them, let none come forth." Also all the images out of the house of Baal were brought forth, and burned, and the great image of Baal, and the house of Baal, and "thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

Had the history ended here, we should have said, Surely this man was wholly on God's side. But it is added in the next verse,

“Howbeit from the sins of Jereboam, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan.” These, we must remember, were set up to keep the people from going to Jerusalem, where they ought to have worshipped at the temple. They were not like Baal, false gods, but images intended to take the place of the true God as He revealed Himself in the temple.

It is also said of Jehu, “He took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart;” yet Jehu had a zeal toward God, and for this he was rewarded with temporal blessings. “The Lord said unto Jehu, because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab, according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.” Thus would be impressed on after ages, how God had rewarded those who were His instruments in punishing idolaters. Thus would men learn God’s hatred of the sin of idolatry, the certain vengeance which overtakes the shedders of innocent blood,—the sure accomplishment of every one of God’s words,—and the value God puts upon zeal in His service.

This last lesson let us now lay to heart. No one is called on to imitate Jehu in such unpleasant work as the slaughter of idolaters. No church could ever raise an argument on this history for the persecution of God's enemies. Before this is the duty of any one, he must have like Jehu, a direct and personal command from on High. Whereas now, the meek disciple of Christ may not even pray for the destruction of God's worst enemies. We may not call for fire to destroy them. (Luke ix. 54, 55.) Vengeance is God's. Judgment for all is reserved till the last day. Tares and wheat grow together now until the great day of separation.

Yet there is a zeal to be aimed at, a zeal in God's service that meets with reward here and hereafter.

First of all, there should be in every Christian a zeal in following after the things of God ; his own soul's salvation, his own personal holiness.

Men are zealous in pursuit of worldly objects, just according to the degree, their interest is excited, their tastes suited, or their desires gratified. So many are zealous in the pursuit of riches, or gains of any kind. Others are zealous in their pursuit of science. While others show zeal in the constant pursuit of pleasure.

Is not godliness the best and most enduring riches? And if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, shall we not crave after and desire strongly to know more of God's will, God's ways, and heavenly subjects? Is there not here indeed a cause for zeal? The root of zeal is love. The love of Christ must make us zealous. "It is good, says St. Paul, to be zealously affected always in a good thing." (Gal. iv. 18.) This is indeed a good thing, the best thing. Besides, God hates lukewarmness. As He says to the church of Laodicea, "I would thou wert cold or hot; so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. iii. 15, 16.) Lukewarmness in the things of God, shows a want of feeling in those matters which of all things are worthy of the deepest affection. He who never has felt hot in the pursuit of life eternal and holiness, may well question if he has ever been truly convinced of his sins, of his real need of a Saviour, and of the preciousness and goodness of that Saviour. A man who has not tasted food for a day, would be zealous in seeking to satisfy his hunger. They who have learnt to hate sin, and to love holiness, they hunger and thirst after righteousness. They are zealous in seeking for the bread of life.

Are we zealous, let us ask, in the pursuit of holiness? Do we take trouble, and ever deny ourselves, that we may obtain food for the soul, and grace and mercy for our need? Are we zealous in getting to a place of worship, not easily turned aside from the means of grace? Are we zealous in prayer, in reading God's word, getting time for these things, putting our whole heart into them?

But as Jehu's zeal was not altogether free from selfishness, and was the zeal of a man not in other respects a God-fearing man, so we do well to remember, there is a zeal of God, which yet brings us not nearer to God, nor proves our heart right in His sight.

Of such a zeal St. Paul speaks in the tenth of Romans. Certain Jews, he says, "have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."

Observe a "zeal of God;" but a zeal proceeding from ignorance, and ignorance of what? "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth."

Such persons appeared to be really zealous

for a "good thing," hungering after righteousness. Yes! but it was a righteousness hateful to God, as well as insufficient to justify them. It was and is the zeal of hearts too proud to submit to God's appointed way of salvation. Zeal it is of those who reject Christ as "the righteousness of God."

So now, not all zeal that seems to be godly is really toward God, or springing from a heart right in His sight. We have to take care that our's be a zeal on the right foundation. Zeal according to knowledge, —zeal grounded on entire submission to God's word, and God's will. Zeal springing from love to Christ, like St. Paul, who says of his and others zeal, (whom some thought to be mad,) "whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause, for the love of Christ constraineth us." (2 Cor. v. 13.)

Let us take care also, that this zeal do not die away in us. It is too apt to do so in many. Persons sometimes first brought to a sense of sin, and taught to look to, and love a Saviour hitherto neglected, are apt to be warm and zealous at first, and by degrees to get cooler, less lively in their feelings, less devoted in their exertions. Prayers are not as fervent as once. God's

word and God's people, not so eagerly sought to, not so delighted in. Formality takes the place of zeal. But this should not be. This is the first step in a backsliding course, which is sure to bring trouble and sorrow to every true child of God. Let us take care we have not "goodness like the morning cloud and early dew that goeth away."

A steady burning flame, should the Christian's zeal be ; and like Jehu's in this respect, it should be kept up till the Lord's work be done. And that will not be while we have a sinful heart within us, a sinful world around us ; and while there is a soul to be saved, and a crucified Redeemer to make known.

Lastly, let not our zeal be selfish. Besides our own soul to be zealous about, there is God's work in the world to be done. And as God chose Jehu for an instrument, though unworthy in himself, so does He choose us now to do His work. Let our's be a zeal to bear witness of Christ, to a world lying in wickedness. A zeal to win souls to Christ. A zeal to help poor sinners to find their way from Satan's cruel bondage, to God's free service. A zeal to make known far and wide, at home and abroad, in our family, in our own parish, in our own country, and in



heathen lands also, to those yet in darkness and ignorance, a Saviour who is a friend of sinners.

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### PRAYER.

O God! make me to be more zealous in Thy service. Give me an earnest desire to do Thy will above all things,—a burning love of Christ,—a longing desire for His glory and the salvation of souls. Save me from the sin of lukewarmness. Give me more of the Spirit of grace and supplication, that I may be more fervent and more earnest in my prayers. Give me deeper views of the hatefulness of sin, and the awful end of sinners, that I may anxiously desire and labour to snatch them from the fire, and to warn them to flee from the wrath to come. Grant me to be more deeply rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, that I may be more strongly and constantly inclined to bear witness of Him, and shew my zeal for Him wherever I am. May I ever be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that my labours shall not be in vain in the Lord, for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

## JOASH AND JEHOIADA.

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*“And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.*

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*“But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died.*

*“And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.*

*“Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them.*

*“And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass.” 2 CHRON. XXIV. 2, and 15—18.*

As we proceed in the history of the Jews, the accounts of blood-shedding and cruelties multiply. The reason is that the fear of God and true religion grew less and less among them. Thus their sins brought their own punishment, until at last they reached to that degree of wickedness, that the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost, and they were cast away.

We have seen how much blood had been

shed by Jehu, who executed God's wrath against the house of Ahab. We now have an account of the blood shed by a wicked queen, Athaliah. Her son was Ahaziah, a king of Judah, who was slain by Jehu. Whereupon she sat upon the throne, first endeavouring to kill all the heirs of the kingdom.

Sad indeed is the account of both mother and son. We read, "He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly." What shall we expect of the child when the mother leads it astray, and influence which is the greatest is also the worst? How dreadful will be the account such a parent will have to give of the influence she has used! And how awful must be the reflections of the mother, if not beyond all feeling, to whom the son will point at the last day, and say, it is from my mother's advice and evil influence, that my soul and body are lost to all eternity. By nature every child looks to its mother for guidance, how dreadful if that guidance is to hell and not heaven!

But this was not all the sin that Athaliah was guilty of. Except Jezebel we read of no worse character in Scripture. "When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that

her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah."

She was also the great patroness of idolatry and the great hinderer of God's worship.

"For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of God, did they bestow upon Baalim." (2 Chron. xxiv.)

But in all this let us observe how utterly vain are all men's attempts to hinder and obstruct God's purposes. Such "people imagine a vain thing," when they "take counsel against the Lord."

Thus, as we have seen, when God determined Ahab's posterity should all be destroyed, although he had seventy sons carefully guarded by the elders and rulers of the kingdom, yet not one escapes death. And now when God had determined there should yet be one descended from the loins of David to sit on his throne, in vain does this wicked queen plan the death of all the seed royal. She doubtless thought she had effected her purpose. But Jehoshabeath the wife of Jehoiada the priest, and daughter of the late king, stole Joash from among the king's sons that were slain, and hid him from Athaliah that she slew him not. And he was hid in the house of God six years.

So it was Moses was preserved, when Pharaoh was slaying all the men children born to the Israelites ; because God's purpose was that he should live.

So even with the Lord Jesus when a child, and Herod had aimed at his life. God's purposes must stand. The Lord reigneth and will perform His will, although "the kings of the earth and their rulers may take counsel against Him and His anointed."

When the young prince was seven years old, Jehoiada the priest thought it time to give him his rightful throne, and to bring to an end all the wickedness of Athaliah the unlawful queen. Hence we have an account of these two events, the anointing, crowning, and placing of Joash on the throne, and the slaying of Athaliah. (2 Kings xi.)

There were some good things happened in the reign of Joash, yet he was himself no good character, as his last years proved too plainly. His reign was remarkable for a partial restoration of the temple. Great sums of money were subscribed for this purpose ; and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders that wrought upon the house of the Lord. "So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it." (2 Chron. xxiv.)

This king's reign was also remarkable in another point of view ; namely, "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him."

His uncle's influence was over him for good from a child. But "Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days and died ; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died."

From this time there was a difference in Joash. Wicked men got hold of him, (ver. 17) and he hearkened to them. "And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols ; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass." He went on from worse to worse, and the crowning point of his guilt was the murder of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, who came by the Spirit of God, and warned the king and the people. "They conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord." "Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son." But when this prophet died, he said, "The Lord look upon it, and require it." Not, as we may suppose, in the

spirit of revenge, but in the spirit of prophecy.

It is to this prophet the Lord Jesus is supposed to refer, when he said, "upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." (Matt. xxiii. 35.) To hate those who tell them of their wickedness, has always been the way with the haters of the Lord. And to persecute them, even unto death, has often been the conduct of such persons when they have had the power. So it was with Asa king of Judah, who put the seer in prison for reprovng him. So Ahab hated and imprisoned Micaiah. So Herod imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. So the Jews crucified the Lord of glory.

Then how miserable was the end of this king. First, the army of the Syrians came, and "with a small company, executed judgment against Joash." And "when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed and he died."

These are sad and bloody tales to tell

and to hear. But they are written for us. And they seem to convey to us lessons and warnings, as it were written in letters of blood. Let us attend to them.

First, who would covet the high places and the high honours of this world? The bloodiest tales of history, whether ancient or modern, are connected with kings, and queens, and empires, and thrones. These are the slippery places of the earth, on which so few stand without falling. We see how hardly they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God. The gilded dust that blinds the eyes of the rich, and noble, and great, is more fatal in its effects than the dust of poverty. "Seekest thou great things for thyself, seek them not." Be content with your lot, if you are poor. For God who has so placed you, has removed from your reach many thousand temptations and difficulties, that are drowning others in eternal perdition.

Then, secondly, while we see how great a blessing it is to have the guidance and the good influence of a religious friend, we see also that if a person does not do what is right on other accounts than this, his religion is likely to come to nought. As it was with Joash, whose goodness lasted only the life-



time of the good priest Jehoiada. When he was gone, then all Joash's goodness went also. We see how persons may deceive themselves and others, by an outward goodness, which is only kept up by some outward cause, and which does not really spring out of a heart under the influence of divine grace. Who would not have said, Joash was a holy man, who would never fall away from God, when they saw all his great zeal in restoring the beauty of God's house, and setting up His worship again! Who would have thought the day would come, when this same man would take all the holy and dedicated things from the temple, and with them pay Hazael king of Syria, to buy him off from attacking Jerusalem, instead of trusting and praying for help from the God whose temple he first honoured and then robbed. Nay, who would have said this king would one day have been as zealous in promoting the worship of false gods and "serving groves and idols," as he was then in serving the true God! And who, above all, would have thought it a possible thing, that this same young man, who was so beholden to the priest his uncle, who so regarded him and followed his good advice, should yet one day give a commandment,

that the son of that priest should be stoned to death, only because he had been faithful and kind in warning him of his evil ways! Yet such was the case. The inward depravity of his heart was checked and restrained by the presence of his uncle, then afterwards under other and bad influence, it ripened into these evil actions.

Are there not such cases in the present day? Surely, it is no uncommon thing to find persons only serving God a little from some outward cause and influence, instead of loving and serving Him heartily, from the power of truth and grace in the heart. Must we not examine well the foundation on which we are built. We do many things right and proper, perhaps. We conform to the outward ordinances of religion. We are moral and respectable in our outward demeanour. We do no great crimes, and look on and speak with horror of those who do them. So far, this is well. But all the while, have we got the root of the matter in our hearts? Do we know what it is really to abhor that which is evil, and have we a real taste and relish for godly things, so that our prayers and attendance on God's service, are not things done from mere constraint, but from choice, and are therefore spiritual

and hearty, and bringing blessings to our souls? Do we feel any love to Christ, or is it a thing that sounds strange in our ears, having no experience of what it means? Do we desire nothing so much as to be entirely conformed to God's will in all things, and do we pant after that perfect freedom from sin, and conformity to Christ, which we feel in our hearts will be the only way to perfect happiness? In a word, let us look well into the inner part of our Christian profession. The building may look fair, and we may live in it peaceably for a time, but if the foundation be sand, it will surely be overthrown some day, and we shall perish in its ruins. "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Then a third lesson Joash teaches is this, how a sinner falls by little and little.

Who would have thought that innocent child, so meekly following the guidance of his godly uncle, should ever be steeped in the guilt of murder and idolatry! We are sure that at that time he would have shrunk with horror at the very mention of such things! He would have said with Hazeal, if told he would some day do these things,

“But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” But the secret of all is, that he got into this state of heart, step by step, little by little, till all became easy and natural. When his uncle died, then we read, “the princes of Judah came and made obeisance to the king : then the king hearkened unto them, and they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols.” Why did they come to him but to tempt him ? First, he only listened to them. Then he was flattered by their obeisance. Then he entertained their proposals. Then he by degrees lost the influence of his uncle, and came under that of the wicked princes. He was afraid and ashamed to stand out against them. Then he learned their ways. Then he followed them from choice. Then when told of his faults by the priest’s son, his conscience goaded him the more from once having known and followed what was right.

The next step was easy. The people were willing, if only he would give the command. This teller of faults, this rebuker of sin shall be got rid of : and so Joash signs his death warrant, and thereby involves himself irrecoverably in ruin.

So easy is it to be turned aside by evil

men, if we are not strong in our own principles, and standing by the power of God. A little persuasion, or a little laughter, or a little kindness will do it. And then when once the sinner's course is begun, it is as a stone rolling down a slope, it gains speed upon speed.

Oh ! for grace to be built, and to be building on the right foundation. What we want is a holy faith, a praying in the Holy Ghost, a keeping in the love of God, and a real looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20, 21.)

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## PRAYER.

O BLESSED Jesus ! Thou only Author and Finisher of true and saving faith ! I pray that I may be so rooted and grounded in Thy love, that I may never be drawn away from the hope of the Gospel or the paths of holiness. May no fears of wicked men, nor any pleasures of sin lead me away from following after Thee. May I never be ashamed of Thee before my fellow-men. May Thy reproach be to me greater riches than all the pleasures or treasures of this world.  
AMEN.

## A M A Z I A H.

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*“ He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver.*

*“ But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee : for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim.*

*“ But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle ; God shall make thee fall before the enemy : for God hath power to help, and to cast down.*

*“ And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel ? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.*

*“ Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again : wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.” 2 CHRON. XXV. 6—10.*

AMAZIAH is the next king that demands our attention. Like most before him, there is but little good recorded of him. And as before, so now, our chief instruction must be in the way of warning and not of example.

We see more in his character and doings to watch against and to avoid, than we do to admire and copy.

Amaziah was king of Judah twenty and nine years. His is a mixed character in a general way. It is said of him, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart." (2 Chron. xxv. 2.) This must mean either that when he did what was right he did it not with a right motive, his heart not influenced after a godly manner, but only his actions happened for some reasons to be sometimes on the side of right and not wrong : or it may mean, that while he did some things right, he did many wrong, and so he acted with a divided heart ; and perhaps both of these were the case. This we shall see as we proceed to study his actions.

From these we learn he was a man who loved war better than peace ; he was a cruel man ; he was an idolatrous man ; and as a necessary consequence, he hated reproof and despised God's servants who were sent to reprove him. He was moreover a very weak and a vain-glorious character, and because of all this he came to an untimely end, "he ate of the fruit of his own way and was filled with his own devices."

Thus, in the very outset of his reign, we read of his making large preparations for war. This may have been right. The war was against the Edomites. But in the latter part of his reign he invited the king of Israel to come and fight, "Come and let us see one another in the face," for no reason that we can see, but a love of war.

But in this first war against Edom, he got help from the kingdom of Israel. He had "three hundred thousand choice men able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield. He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver. But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim." Now came the trial of his faith. He had paid the hundred talents for the use of the army of Israel. He did not wish to lose this. Neither would it be pleasant to dismiss the hired army. So "Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, the Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

Amaziah acted on this. He sent away



the army of Israel he had hired. They went "home again," although "their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger."

Still of course Amaziah was right, and would never have reason to regret having thus obeyed God, although he did it at a sacrifice of a large sum. This is one of the few things he did which was right in the sight of the Lord.

In this he is an example. And the words of the man of God are such as should be impressed on our minds, when we are called to do anything which will make us losers. "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

How often it is, we hear persons plead an excuse for not conforming to some point of duty, that they are afraid if they do so, they shall be losers. When they are told they ought to give up some particular way of living or course of conduct, because these involve them in some sin, or cause them to neglect some part of God's service, they are apt to say, but what shall I do for the profit I shall lose thereby, or the situation, or the advantages of some kind : or when some persons are told they should attend the house of God and keep the Sunday altogether

holy, they are apt to say, but what shall I do for the situation I shall lose, or the profit I shall cease to make. To all such, the prophet's words are applicable, "God is able to give thee much more than this." Whatever it be you appear to lose by doing your duty, God is of course able to make it up to you, and much more besides. This is what you are called upon to believe He will do for you. This, indeed, is what faith is, and "without faith it is impossible to please" or to serve God. You are required to believe that it will be better in the end for you to suffer the loss which present duty brings. You must obey God at all costs. If obedience were always easy, and could be given without any loss of temporal and present interests, where were the trial of our faith, and the test of true allegiance to God? Self is to be denied in going after Christ. All Scripture tells us this. There is a yoke to be worn. But faith will make us feel it must be worn and self must be denied, and love will soon make it an easy work, for Jesus says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

When, then, we are thus called on to make such a sacrifice of any kind, whether it be great or small, much or little, let us

remember the words of the man of God, "the Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

It is remarked by Matthew Henry in his comment on this passage, that while "this king lost one hundred talents by his obedience, we find that sum given to his grandson Jotham as a present. Then, the principal was paid; and for interest, ten thousand measures of wheat, and as many of barley." (see chap. xxvii. 5.) But Amaziah was no loser in respect of the war which he now undertook with his own army. He overcame the enemy easily.

But here we see his cruelty. "He smote of the children of Seir ten thousand." So far was the ordinary course of warfare. But "other ten thousand left alive they carried captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces."

Was it not a judgment for this cruelty that we are told, "the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them and took much spoil."

We always find cruelty prevails in proportion to the degree God is unknown and unfeared. The heathen who know not God are cruel, their's are "the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty." And all heathen histories abound in cruelties. The men who carried on the dreadful cruelties in the French revolution were men who openly and avowedly disbelieved in God. The different treatment of the wounded and fallen in the late battles in the Crimea showed plainly enough which were the soldiers who knew anything of God, and which, though called Christians, were really in heathen darkness.

The Gospel of mercy will alone make men merciful as God is merciful.

But we may next observe of Amaziah, another instance wherein his heart was not perfect. He was an idolatrous man. Strange to say, from those he overcame in battle he learned this sin. "It came to pass after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense to them."

What did he see in their gods to admire? what to lead him thus to commit the im-

mense folly and the grievous sin of provoking God by idolatrous worship! Such departure from the living God does indeed bear witness to the depravity of fallen man! Of all sins this one of idol serving most shows this. And of all sins it is the one God most severely punishes.

So now we find from this time we may date Amaziah's decline and fall; to this we must attribute his miserable end.

But mark first, God's longsuffering in sending one to tell him of his sin and warn him. It shows also his hardened state. He was a man who despised God's messengers and God's messages. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thy hand? And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel."

What a contrast does this conduct present with that of David, to whom God sent a

prophet once to tell him of his sins. David confessed his guilt, was sorry, and asked for pardon. Amaziah refused to receive reproof, and even used his kingly power to silence God's minister.

It is easy to get rid of the voice of warning we do not like. It is easy to stifle conscience, and shut out the voice of friendly counsel, but what a dreadful state is that that ever leads men to do this! God says terribly of such, "Because ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." (Prov. i. 25, 26.)

Yet surely this conduct of Amaziah is not so very uncommon. God does not now send prophets to us, but He has His witnesses on earth. The faithful minister is one. His Holy word is one. If we reject these we reject God's messengers. Some persons there are indeed, who say in the very spirit of this king, to a minister who reproves him, "Art thou appointed my counsellor, what business is it of yours if I choose to do such things, what is it to you if I choose not to attend more to religious instruction!" Man's authority may indeed put to silence the authority and the voice of God. Man has

power to do this, but if he does it, he does it to his own hurt, and to his own everlasting injury.

Amaziah's end was miserable, and was all to be traced to departure from the Lord ; and "because he sought after the gods of Edom." So we read, "now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem : and he fled to Lachish ; but they sent to Lachish after him and slew him there."

Thus ended the reign and the days of a weak and worthless prince. "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Prov. xxix. 1.) Let not such warnings be lost upon us ! God visits not now a-days with such immediate judgments even upon those who sin worse than Amaziah. But God certainly does not take less notice of all sin. His judgments are reserved to the last great day. God keeps silence now. But it is written, "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence." (Psalm ii.) Sins under the law were often visited quickly and speedily ; shall not sins under the Gospel have more dreadful visitations some day. The apostle seems to say this,

when he writes, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses ; of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God.".....And again, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." (Heb. xii.)

We are apt to forget how often God is even now in these days speaking to us. His Son came from heaven and spoke in the flesh. His Spirit is in the world now, though the world receiveth Him not, because it seeth Him not. This Spirit speaks, "see that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

Lastly, see how God hates a divided heart. Amaziah's first failing and the cause of all after falls was, he served not with a perfect heart. There was no sincerity, no depth, no heart's affection in his service of God. Let us beware of this sin. It sounds a small matter, but it is really the test of a saving knowledge of God. Is the heart engaged, or is it only the outward life? Oh! beware of insulting God by a small and worthless offering, when He asks and is



worthy of the best we can give Him,—of what value is your friend's kindness, if his heart is not toward you ?

See, then, that there is this root of the matter in you,—a love to the Lord Jesus Christ. See that you serve Him heartily : that you pray to Him spiritually : and that "whatsoever you do, you are doing it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men." (Col. iii. 23.)

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## PRAYER.

O GOD, save me from the power of those sins which were the ruin of Amaziah. I am not better than he, in myself. My heart is corrupt and inclined to evil, and is not perfect towards Thee. Put Thy Spirit within me, and turn my heart towards Thee. Let the Saviour's love take possession of my heart and lead me to serve Thee heartily. Lord, I ask this for the same Saviour's sake.  
AMEN.

## THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL.

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*“And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight.*

*“For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin.*

*“For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them,*

*“Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. 2 KINGS XVII. 20—23.*

WE come now to the winding up of the history of the ten tribes which formed the kingdom of Israel. We are here told that the Lord rejected them, and that He did so on account of their sins. Their sins increased until the Lord would bear with them no longer. He had warned them often by His prophets, He had corrected and punished them, and then at last, He gave them over to their enemies: and the king of Assyria came and besieged them, and took them

captive ; and sent people from Babylon and other places to go and live in Samaria, the city of Israel, instead of the Israelites.

It may be well now to look a little into these last days of Israel, and inquire into some of the events which took place just before their final ruin. We will also consider what were the special sins which brought about that ruin.

Towards the end they had many kings in a short time. For their own sins and God's judgments generally shortened the reign of each one.

Of each of these kings something is related, but of none of them, can it be said they were good kings. Of Jehoahaz it is related that when distressed by his enemy, "Jehoahaz besought the Lord ; and the Lord hearkened unto him ; for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. And the Lord gave Israel a Saviour."

May we take the encouragement here given to prayer. This is one of many instances of the prayers of men being answered, who yet have only sought the Lord when driven by their fears. Let us never discourage any from praying, even though they are ungodly men.

The next king, Joash, is remarkable for his interview with Elisha the prophet in his last days. Here is the last act related of that great prophet and remarkable man of God. Joash went to see Elisha on his sick bed. Though Elisha was a man of God, yet he was not exempt from the failings of human nature, and though he had the double spirit of Elijah, it could not save him from the curse on our nature that the body must return to dust. However much the Spirit of God may do for us here, He will not quicken our mortal bodies till Christ the Redeemer appears at the last day.

Joash lamented over him. (2 Kings xiii.) He said, "O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" He might well feel the loss of one who had been better to Israel than many chariots and many horsemen. Elisha was desirous of showing him that he should after his death overcome the Syrians. He first made him shoot an arrow guided by his own hand, which was a token of victory, and he called it "the arrow of deliverance from Syria." He then made him strike the ground with the arrows as a token of how often he should conquer the Syrians. The king smote three times and then stopped. Elisha would fain

have had him strike oftener, for then could he have foretold of more victories than three over the Syrians. Perhaps it was a want of faith that staid the hand of the king. He thought it was no use thus smiting on the ground. It is often our own fault when God's mercies stop short. We are straitened in ourselves the receivers, not in Him the Giver.

One more event connected with Elisha is likewise recorded. It was after his death. In the hurry of burying, from fear of certain enemies at hand, a man's body was put into the prophet's sepulchre. Wonderful to say, no sooner had the corpse touched the prophet's bones, than "the man revived and stood upon his feet." The bones of the servant of God were sacred. Yet was there no virtue in them to give life. But God wrought this wonder by them to let the testimony of Elisha be revived among the people to whom in life-time he had prophesied; and to bear witness, it may be also, to the fact of the resurrection of all the dead one day. The man thus raised again would be a witness recalling the words and works of Elisha to the memory of the nation, and he would also be a living witness to the power of God to raise the dead.

Jereboam, the next king, and the second king of that name, was remarkable for a short deliverance which God gave the Israelites by his hand. "For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter; for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helpers for Israel. And the Lord said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but he saved them by the hand of Jereboam the son of Joash."

Zachariah, the last king, descended from Jehu, had but a short reign of six months. He did that which was evil. His reign was long enough to fulfil God's word to him as a descendant of Jehu, and then his sins brought ruin on his head. He was slain by Shallum, who reigned in his stead.

The next reigns are soon told. God's blessing was being withdrawn. And men who reigned without it, ruled badly and had many enemies. Thus it was with Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and the last king of Israel, Hoshea.

In the days of Pekah, came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took many cities of Israel, and many of the people he carried captive into Assyria.

Then, in the reign of Hoshea, another

king of Assyria, Shalmaneser, came and took Samaria the chief city of Israel. He besieged it three years before he took it. Then we read, "in the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and had feared other gods."

This is an important event in the history of Israel. It took place about 724 years before our Saviour's birth. From this time the ten tribes were scattered abroad and have never been gathered together again.

There are very many important lessons to be learned from their history, lessons for nations and lessons for persons ; but in a short space we can only just notice some few of the chief.

There are many prophecies upon the subject. Some foretold the things that came upon them. Some are full of lamentations for their sad end. And some contain the lessons of warning and instruction we speak of. Thus we may read much con-

cerning them in the prophecies of Amos, who prophesied concerning Israel in the days of Jereboam the son of Joash.

He foretold their fall. "Hear this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. The Virgin of Israel is fallen ; she shall rise no more ; she is forsaken upon her land ; there is none to raise her up. For thus saith the Lord God, the city that went out by a thousand, shall leave an hundred, and that which went forth by a hundred, shall leave ten to the house of Israel." (Amos v. 1, 2, 3.)

Then another prophecy, "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth : therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos iii. 1, 2.)

We learn from this that Israel's sins were the more grievous because of their special privileges. God had chosen them for His people, as the children of Abraham. God had spoken to them, sent them prophets, given them the law, and therefore their sins would be visited with more punishment than the heathen nations to whom God had not thus spoken.



So of ourselves now as a nation. The greater our privileges, the greater our responsibility, and the worse our judgments, should we cast God off, or dishonour Him by our negligences and sins.

And so of individuals who compose a nation. To whom much is given, of him much is required. And "that servant who knew his Master's will, and did it not, will be beaten with many stripes." Our punishment will indeed be great if we are neglecting "the great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." For many are the nations who have not the Gospel we have, nor the knowledge of God, nor the Sabbath, nor the ministers to preach.

Another prophecy tells us that one of their great crimes was the not profiting by the corrections of the Lord. It is said, "God gave them want of bread in their places," and "yet ye have not returned unto me." Again, "I have withholden from you rain, and yet ye have not returned unto me." Again, "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew, and yet ye have not returned unto me." And again, "I have sent you pestilences after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword, ...

and yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." (Amos iv.)

This is again, a warning both to nations and persons. God does correct for iniquities still. And great is the sin of those who shut their eyes and ears to the judgments of God. And when famine, pestilence, or war are sent among us, we do not trace them to God, or acknowledge them as judgments.

Bad too is the case of him, on whom God's personal corrections fall in vain. Evil, like Israel, is that person's case of whom God can say, I sent you a sickness, I sent you a trouble, I sent you affliction, bereavements, and trials, and yet you have not returned unto me saith the Lord. Trials are to bring us first to ourselves, and then to God. But if judgments here do us no good, but drive us further from God, then indeed there are judgments yet to come which will banish us to the utmost distance from God ; and that without hope of return.

One other prophecy reminds us of Israel's sins, and Israel's punishment as at present endured by them. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land ; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord ; and they shall wander

from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east ; they shall run to and fro and seek the word of God and shall not find it." (Amos viii. 11. 12.)

An utter absence of God's word, His worship and service in the land, and at the same time a desire on the part of some to hear that word, and to know that service, this has mostly been the state of that once favored people since those days.

Many a time was this its state before the Lord Jesus came and visited it. And when He came and proclaimed Himself to be the Bread of life, and Himself offered the living waters of the Spirit, there were many suffering in the land from spiritual famine. For there were but few faithful teachers in the land. There were but blind leaders of the blind ; and law-readers who neither went in themselves, nor opened the door for others to go into heaven.

Often too, since then, has it been the case. Men have sought in vain for the word of the Lord, in a land trodden under foot by Turks and infidels. It is but of late years any have gone with the word of God and the Gospel of Christ to satisfy any hungering souls among the ancient people of God, in what once was and one day will again be their own land.

And all this is because of their neglect of that word of God when they might have fed upon it, and been nourished unto life.

So it is charged upon them in this history. (2 Kings xvii.) "The Lord testified against Israel and against Judah by all the prophets ...notwithstanding they would not hear. And they rejected his statutes and his covenants that he made with their fathers and his testimonies...and they left all the commandments of the Lord their God,... therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only."

Such is the end of Israel. Such their punishment to this day. Yet they are not destroyed. So says the prophet, "Behold the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will utterly destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord. For lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." And the same prophet goes on to declare that in the latter days God will bring again the captivity of Israel, and will plant them in their own land. (See Amos ix.)

Thus then should we look with holy awe at this great sight, the bush, the tree of God's planting, burning, but not consumed. And should we not fear? See the severity of God on them that fell. Be not high-minded, but fear. We have great privileges, do we use them aright? We have more than prophet's words, more than tabernacle worship, more than the law of Moses. We have the living Spirit among us, the words of Jesus and inspired apostles, the spiritual service of the Gospel ordinances, have we not much to answer for? Are we brought near to God by the blood of Christ? Are we living near God by faith in His Son? Are we the people of God and disciples of Christ, not in name only, but in deed and in truth?

Be assured the judgments against those that have set at nought all these privileges, will be far more dreadful than these which Israel endured and suffers now. "Our God is a consuming fire, let us have grace whereby we may serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. xii. 28. 29.)

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## HEZEKIAH'S GOOD REIGN.

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*“And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God.*

*“And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.”* 2 CHRONICLES XXXI. 20, 21.

It is very refreshing, amidst such a number of bad kings, to come upon one who really served and feared the Lord, and did what was right. And such was Hezekiah. Although the son of a bad king, Ahaz, and the follower of many wicked kings, Hezekiah shines forth as a bright exception to the others. And he was, no doubt, one great means of preventing for a little while longer the hastening ruin of the kingdom of Judah.

That ruin was being helped forward by each king who came to the throne ; and the state of things was very bad when Hezekiah became king. Uzziah was one of those who went before him, and, though he was not quite so bad as others, yet he himself personally offended against God and was punished. He had a long reign of fifty two

years : and yet there is not so much to tell of in it, as in the shorter reign of nine and twenty years of Hezekiah.

Uzziah did indeed restore many cities to Judah which had been taken by enemies. He was indeed "helped by the Lord against the Philistines." He built towns and dug wells and "loved husbandry," increased his army very greatly, prepared for them shields and spears and other arms, and made engines, invented by cunning men, to be on towers and upon the bulwarks to shoot arrows and great stones withal : and his name spread far abroad, for he was marvellously helped till he was strong." And yet, for all this, he was not so great a man as Hezekiah, nor was his reign so important in its results on the nation.

And why ! because Hezekiah paid attention to the spiritual part of his kingdom, to the outward ordinances and the inward life of the living Church of God, and the service of the Temple. But Uzziah only regarded the temporal greatness of his people. Uzziah was not sound at heart. And one chief event brought out the real evil of his heart and its pride and rebellion against God. This was his going into the temple of the Lord and burning incense on

the altar, which only was lawful for the priests to do. They withstood him, but he was angry and there and then before the altar, the leprosy rose up into his forehead. "They looked upon him, he was leprous, he was thrust out, yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him." (2 Chron. xxvi.)

Hezekiah's reformation was real, because it began at the right end, at the religious state of his people: and this because he was a man that knew and served God.

The state of the kingdom after the reign of his father Ahaz is thus described. "For the Lord brought Judah very low because of Ahaz king of Israel, (i. e. Judah); for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord."

Let us now observe some good points in Hezekiah's character and some of the things he did in his reign.

For one thing, we see he began to do good directly he began his reign. He was only five and twenty when he did, but he lost no time, but set about directly to do what he could for the good of his kingdom and the worship of God. Thus we read, "He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house



of the Lord and repaired them." He then called together the priests and Levites, and bid them sanctify themselves and sanctify the house of God.

He reminded them that the wrath of God had been upon their fathers for neglecting all these things, and he said, "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us." (chap. xxix.)

This was the great secret of his future prosperity. Had he waited, or gone slowly to work,—had he said, as some would, we must not be hasty to bring about such a change in the kingdom, it will make people angry: or had he said, as some would, I must first attend to my own comfort and get settled on my throne, and then I will attend to these other duties and the public service of God, no doubt he would never have found the right time come, and these good things would never have been done. There is nothing like prompt acting in the path of duty. If a thing is wrong, and is to be given up, never lose a moment in doing it, or it will become less and less likely to be done. It is far easier to do it at first. Every moment of delay is a moment of guilt. "They that seek me early shall find me." Thus did Hezekiah.

Another good point in Hezekiah's character was, that he made the right worship of God according to the law of Moses, the uppermost object of his reign. In fact, he took God's word for his guide in all his conduct. "So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order." Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel." We read too, "For they had not done it of a long time, in such sort as it was written."

He was indeed a "preacher of righteousness." He exhorted the people himself. And, though many laughed him to scorn, and mocked the priests who brought invitations to them, yet he persevered in his good work. The Passover was kept in due order. "Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord, and they did eat throughout the feast, seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests and

the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven." How much good may one person do! How much depends on each individual's example and influence! Here was a whole kingdom and a large mass of people, brought together to the service of God, and brought under the influence of the good knowledge of God: all by one young man of the age of twenty five.

It is true he had great influence, because he was a king. Yet, let us remember we all have influence to use, and we all can set an example. In whatever station or rank of life we may be, we are thus capable of doing good in the circle we move. Never let us think that it does not signify how we think or act, because we move in a humble sphere, or because we are only one among many. For good or evil our example is sure to tell on those around us. And there is no saying how vast an amount of good may be done by one person, though humble, though poor, though young, if they will only let their light shine in such a way as to glorify God.

If Hezekiah had more power for good, because a king, you at least have less danger

from the temptations which riches, and honor, and grandeur, in this world always bring.

But Hezekiah was also a man of private prayer and faith in God. This, indeed, was the root and mainspring of all the outward good that appeared. It is ever so. No one ever did good outwardly and publicly, who did not in private prayer and waiting upon God, thus gain strength and grace.

Hezekiah had trials, and these bring to light his faith and prayerful spirit. "After these things and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities and thought to win them to himself."

We might have thought, perhaps, that as Hezekiah was different from other kings of Judah, in that he served and feared the Lord, so God would have made a difference and not suffered enemies to come against him.

But, then, we should be forgetting that God no where promises His people freedom from trials of the very same kind that the ungodly have. For it is thus the difference between God's people and the world is seen

in the very way in which the same trial is met by them.

We must remember too, that God has an eye to the spiritual improvement of His people, and that nothing tends to that more than the trials He sends them. The trials which come upon the ungodly will drive them further from God, because they do not learn righteousness by them. The same trials will send others to a throne of grace, to prayer and self-examination, and teach them more than they knew before of God's ways and their own hearts. So it was with Hezekiah.

This trial was no small one. He found his city surrounded by more than a hundred and eighty thousand soldiers. A mighty monarch had sent his chief men and officers with this great army against Jerusalem. Rabshakeh, the chief of them, was told to address the people of Jerusalem in the Jew's language : and to use strong arguments to persuade the people to give in to his master, the king of Assyria. He told them no city had stood before him. He told them God had sent him and his army to take Jerusalem. That Hezekiah's confidence was vain, "for he shall not be able to deliver you." And that if they staid in the city they would be

driven to the most dreadful extent of famine, but if they agreed to surrender, and give up a present to the king of Assyria, he would take them into a fruitful and pleasant land, "a land like your own, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive, and honey, that ye may live and not die." He reminded the people of the fall of Samaria, and many other cities, and that the God who they trusted had not been able to deliver these out of the king of Assyria's hand.

Now all these would sound powerful reasons with the common people shut up in a city, many of them dreading the enemy without, and the sufferings from a siege within.

But Hezekiah's influence was good over the people, and therefore strong. "The people held their peace and answered him not a word ; for the king's commandment was, saying, answer him not a word."

And now, what did he do in this time of trouble ? He did two things, he prayed himself, and he sent to ask the prayers of a righteous man.

He went to the house of the Lord. That was "the house of prayer." He sent to

Isaiah the prophet, and asked him "to lift up his prayer for the remnant that was left." (2 Kings xix.) Immediate was the answer. "I will send a blast upon him, he shall hear a rumour, and shall return into his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah."

Yet, the trouble was not all over. A letter was sent to Hezekiah, in which he was again threatened with invasion. He received it, read it, and went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord, and Hezekiah prayed before the Lord." (See his prayer, 2 Kings xix. 15—19.) A speedy and full answer came from the Lord. Not an arrow should the king of Assyria shoot against the city. "For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass at night that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred and four-score and five thousand." Sennacherib departed, and soon after was slain with the sword. (See xix. chap.)

Thus ended Hezekiah's great trial. It

ended well and speedily, because he trusted in the Lord, praying himself, and engaging the prayers of Isaiah.

Let us learn the lesson of trust also from this. Can our trials be greater! Can the difficulties we may be placed in be more trying than this of Hezekiah's! According to sense and sight there was every thing against him, and no evident way of deliverance.

Our trial may be very different, but it is not greater. Where, then, is our faith? Have we learned like him to do these two things at such times? Do we carry our troubles and spread them before the Lord? Do we ask the righteous to pray for us?

Oh! whatever your trouble be, try this plan. Spread your case before the Lord. As a client lays his case before the counsel who is to plead for him, so do you go to the best and greatest Advocate; the only Intercessor between man and God, tell Him your case, although He knows it. He will plead for you. His merits are all-prevailing. And if the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man like Isaiah prevail, how much more the prayer of Him the appointed Mediator, the perfectly righteous One, in whom the



Father is well pleased, and who promises, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the father in my name, he will give it you." (John xvi. 23.)

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## PRAYER.

O GOD ! who didst hear the prayers of Hezekiah when he was in trouble, and didst say to Thy servant who prayed, "that which thou hast prayed, I have heard!" Wilt Thou not even now hear the prayer of a worthless sinner, who prays to Thee in the name of Jesus.

Lord ! may I know Thee more as a very present help in trouble, and One whose ear is ever open to the cries of Thy people.

May I have more faith to seek Thee in all my trials. I would spread every matter before Thee. I would spread all my sins, to be washed away in the blood of the Lamb. I would spread all my weakness, and ask for strength from Thee. I would spread all my cares, for Thou carest for me. O keep me, guide me, and bless me for the Redeemer's sake. AMEN.

## HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND PRAYER.

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*“Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side.*

*“And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.*

*“In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign.*

*“But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.*

*“Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, (both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,) so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” 2 CHRON. XXXII. 22—26.*

IN the foregoing number we have seen Hezekiah, king of Judah, shining forth as a righteous king and one who feared God. We have seen his public character,—how he governed in the fear of God, and restored the service of God's temple. We have seen

the secret of this was, that he was in private a man of prayer. And we have seen that when a great trial came upon him, he was able to trust in God, and taking his troubles to the Lord, how he obtained wonderful deliverance. All his enemies were slain in one night.

In what remains for us to consider of his life, we have to see how he acted in another trial God sent him. And we have also to see how like other good men, he had infirmities and failings, and these when "God left him to try him," led him to the sins of pride, and, for the time, forgetfulness of his God. In all which there is abundance of food for meditation, and matter of instruction.

We have three separate places in Scripture which relate these things concerning Hezekiah. For besides the book of Kings and the book of Chronicles, the book of Isaiah also gives us some account of them, and gives us the Psalm of praise which he wrote when recovered from his sickness. This threefold account would seem to add weight to the importance of this history.

Hezekiah's next trial, was not merely a sickness, but what seemed to be a sickness unto death. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death, and Isaiah the prophet, the

son of Amoz, came unto him and said unto him, thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."

We are not surprised to find that this message was very unwelcome to the king. It found him clinging to life, and unwilling to face death.

We are not surprised, for we all cling to life, and few are found welcoming a sickness unto death, except it be indeed the aged Christian, or those in whom grace has been actively at work, raising them far above the general tone of most Christian lives, and so weaning them from this world, and uniting them with the unseen world, that they are really feeling it is better to depart and be with Christ. This, though not common, is certainly a state to be desired and aimed at.

We do well to ask ourselves now, how would such a message find us ; and we can judge of our state in the sight of God by this. It is very certain that such a message ought not to find us wholly unprepared for death. It ought not to come on us like a terrible call from the Judge to come to judgment, and so fill our minds with awful forebodings and fears. If it does this, we have not yet found the "Gospel of Christ the power of God to our salvation." We

are not yet delivered by Christ, as we should be, from that bondage to the fear of death to which by nature we are subject. (Heb. ii. 15.) We have not yet attained to the liberty of the children for whom, as death has no sting, it should have no terrors. •

We may well ask, when will the grace of God do these things for us! We do wrong in waiting for the time of death to prepare for death.

Hezekiah, for some reasons, desired life. And what a gracious exhibition of God's tender mercy have we here, in the way He entered into and listened to his fears, and saw his tears, and heard his prayers. Hezekiah, we read, "turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord." He also "wept sore." In his prayers, he reminded God that he had not made an ill use of the life already bestowed upon him. "Remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which was good in thy sight." We need not regard this as a self-righteous plea. It was quite true Hezekiah had done much for the spiritual welfare of his nation,—had abstained, unlike others before him, from idolatry, and so served God with an undivided, and, in this sense, "perfect" heart.

God promised blessings to those who did so in the law. Hezekiah was right in asking God to consider these things. And it is an instance on record on purpose to remind us that even in this world God does "reward every man according to his works." It was for God's glory therefore to show a difference in His dealings with this good king. He therefore did so, and sent a message at once to say his prayer was heard. His life was spared. "I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears, behold, I will heal thee."

Gracious condescension! And does not our Redeemer know now all our infirmities, and have pity on us! He who went through death Himself, knows how we shrink from the struggle. He who felt the temptations of the flesh, pities the weakness it causes to even the willing spirit. He who wept on earth, feels for those who weep now. Do we fear death's struggle,—do we shrink from appointed sufferings, like Hezekiah?—let us turn to the wall and pray. It shall not be in vain. If He removes not the trial, He will give strength to go through it. Many a one of God's dear children has shrunk from the thoughts of death, while at a distance, who have found no fears, no disquietude, but perfect peace in that dark valley.

But there was still more condescension on God's part towards Hezekiah. A sign was given him according to his request, that he should rise from his bed, and on the third day have strength to go to the house of the Lord. "Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord; and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down."

All this mercy would doubtless tell favorably on the spiritual state of the king. He again saw God's wonderful power and love in answering prayer. Prayer against his enemies led to their slaughter in one night. Prayer against another enemy, death, led to the driving away of death. He would also be struck with His power and love in the miracle of the going back of the shadow, caused by the sun. He would be reminded "with God nothing is impossible."

No doubt the very unwillingness to die was a proof Hezekiah needed this further instruction from the Lord. Thus does God school His children, and by gracious and wise appointments of mercies and trials, prepare them for glory.

But this leads us on to another not less instructive part of this king's history. An account we next have of a great failing on his part.

His fault is thus described in one place, "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him ; for his heart was lifted up."

The cause of it is also told us, "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." His fault was this, that after his wondrous recovery, and the great wonder of the sun-dial, "many brought presents to Hezekiah," and the king of Babylon sent letters and a present, and Hezekiah was glad of them, not that he might testify of the wonders God had done for him, but to increase their ideas of his worldly greatness and honour. He, in fact, for the time, acted as a man of the world, proud of his riches and greatness, and not as a man of God. "He showed them his precious things, the silver and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures ; there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah showed them not." Many would have seen no sin in this. We all like others to see our greatness, or our riches, if we have them. But



that it was sin in Hezekiah is most certain. Isaiah was sent to tell him of his sin, and of his punishment. (See Isaiah xxxix.) His punishment was to know that the days were soon coming when all the things he was so proudly showing to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon would be carried to Babylon, and nothing left; and also that his sons would be servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.

The sin, you see, was great, for such was its punishment. Hezekiah saw his sin, for he thought it a light punishment compared with his deserts, for "he said, Good is the word of the Lord, for there shall be peace and truth in my days." God might have made these evils to come in his days, instead of his sons' days. He submitted, and was resigned.

See, then, what his sin was. It was a sin the world is apt to overlook, nay, the world cannot see sin here. It was sin of the heart, it was pride and forgetfulness of God. He gloried in his riches and his honours, instead of glorying in his God, and the mercies He had shown him. Thus he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him. His heart was lifted up.

It is well we read, "Notwithstanding

Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah." He saw his sin, and was humbled for it. And thus we see how God was more and more teaching him and leading him in the paths of righteousness, by the pathway of humility. And this was the cause of the trial, as it is said in this matter, "God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart."

In taking this history home to ourselves, let us ask how far and how often are we chargeable with this guilt of "not rendering again according to the benefit done to us?" Every benefit God bestows on us may be said to bring with it a corresponding debt and duty to God. A return equal to His benefits we can never make Him. But a return "according to" them, that is, the return they seem specially to demand of us, we ought to make. Alas! how many who know how to call upon God for mercy and life in the day of sickness, and under fear of death, yet know not how even to return thanks for the mercy, when their life has been spared and the sickness is gone. They thank the doctor, or they think lighter

of the disease than they did in their fears. They forget their special return of thanksgiving and praise due to the Giver of life. This indeed is to come far below Hezekiah. He did return thanks. He did go up to the house of the Lord to praise. We have on record the thanksgiving composed and sung on the occasion. (Isaiah xxxviii. 9—20.)

Let us at least be like him, in that we render thanks for the benefits done to us,—or can we expect those benefits to be continued! Are we not denying God as the Giver of them?

But more than this is required of us. If we have received special benefit, God looks for a special rendering again.

The opposite to this is, alas! too common. The benefits received are often, as in the case before us, used for selfish purposes, without a thought of the glory of the Giver of them. Are health and strength given, how often only used to live more in worldly pursuits of gain and pleasure, and less to God and His service! Are riches bestowed, increasing from a prosperous business, or what is called "lucky hits:" how often are they expended on selfish luxury and pleasure-seeking, while none is given to God, none

for His sake to the poor, none for the preaching of Christ's Gospel, none employed in His service. In fact, the very benefits are the very cause why God is forgotten and neglected. The heart is engrossed in their use. The heart is lifted up in their possession. Such, like Hezekiah, will suffer punishment and correction in this world. Unless indeed they are altogether worldly, and repent not like him, and then they are storing up evil against the day of judgment and just retribution of God.

But see, lastly, what are the best men, if in such trials they be left to themselves, for however short a time. "God left him to try him." Oh! if God do but leave us, what are we! If thus He leaves His children, it is because they have yet to learn their dependence on Him. They think they can stand and walk alone. They are like Peter in the prospect of temptation. They are ready to say they will "never" deny Christ. It looks easy to stand some trials.

Some temptations seem trifles to resist. Yet when they come, we cannot stand before the very least of the devil's snares and plots. To be left to ourselves is then to be left in utter weakness. Like Hezekiah, to be left only for a little while in the company of

worldly people, may lead to our fall through pride of heart,—or like Peter, even to a denial of our Lord and Master. So true it is, “without Christ we can do nothing.”

Let this then ever be our prayer, that God will not leave us to ourselves,—that God will uphold us, that our footsteps slip not. That we may know without such painful experience as Hezekiah’s, or David’s, or Peter’s, what weakness is in us, what pride is natural to us, and will surely show itself, if it has opportunity, and if God do not graciously restrain it, and remove temptation.

Thus let our safety be in the Lord’s strength. Let our prayer be, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.”

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### PRAYER.

O LORD GOD! who art often pleased to send afflictions to Thy people to do them good, and to make them partakers of Thy holiness; I beseech Thee to bless and sanctify to me all my troubles and sorrows. May they humble me, and make me go softly all my days. And when Thou art pleased to send me prosperity, may my heart never be lifted up, but may I render again unto Thee for all Thy mercies, for Jesus’ sake. AMEN.

## MANASSEH.

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*“So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.*

*“And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.*

*“Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.*

*“And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,*

*“And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.”*

2 CHRON. xxxiii. 9—13.

IT is certain that we find both in Scripture history and in our own observation, instances of the children of pious parents turning out badly, and dishonouring God by their lives as much as it had been the aim of their parents to honour Him. Eli had such sons. Samuel also. Yet we cannot doubt that such parents had been in the habit of pray-

ing for their children : have dedicated them to God, and have desired and asked of God that their children might know Him and serve Him. For in this way, among others, true piety would show itself.

Surely this is very instructive to us. It may indeed be said by some, Is not this very discouraging to persons of piety? May they not be tempted to say, It is of little use my offering up prayers for my childrens' souls. It may be God will not hear, and at the least I cannot be sure of it.

But before we thus gather any discouragement from this fact, let us mark one thing. God teaches us that it is not enough that a parent pray for a child. Nor is it enough to commend the child to God, or to dedicate the child at baptism, praying it may receive the Holy Ghost.

We are, besides this, to do our utmost to lead a child to God and in God's ways. And if we do not this, prayers become presumption. And this is sometimes neglected, and sometimes done very imperfectly by those who yet would not for the world omit to pray for their children. This was the case with Eli. A foolish, over-indulgent fondness for his sons made him think but lightly of the most grievous failings in them. And

hence, instead of acting vigorously to restrain them, he contented himself with speaking mildly.

So, too, it may often be the case, while prayer is not neglected for a child, right means for keeping from evil and bringing it to Christ are, from some failing in the parent, not adopted.

At any rate there is much to encourage parents, and to comfort those who do their duty in this respect. Let them remember the cases of parents who took their children to Jesus, and how He blessed them and healed them. Let them remember how all things are promised to those who ask in faith. And though we know, and learn specially from such cases, that the grace of God is not hereditary, not transmitted from parent to child, as is our evil nature; and although not the best example, or influence, or education, will of themselves work a work which must be God's work in the soul, yet this which every true Christian parent so earnestly desires, is one of those things we must wait upon God for, and we may be sure, faith, leading to persevering prayer, cannot be without its blessing in God's time and God's way.

Mark another source of encouragement.



How often those who go astray at first are afterwards brought back to God, even though not in their parents' life-time, yet in answer to their parents' prayers. The seed is cast upon waters and seems to disappear, but when the waters subside, the seed is seen to be springing up.

Now this was the case with Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, the good king of Judah. No doubt Manasseh was a child prayed for and taught the right way by his father. But he was young when his father died and left him to succeed him on the throne. He was only twelve years old. The father was spared an aching heart in not living to see his son grow up to manhood, for never did son turn out worse than this one did. Yet in his latter days he was brought back to God, and became quite a different character.

His history is therefore very remarkable. There is not the like to it in all the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. Nor is it often we meet with such cases of decided conversion to God after so many years of desperate wickedness.

The case of Manasseh is therefore encouraging both to praying parents, and to all who are themselves feeling the kindlings of repentance, even after years of gross iniquity.

First of all, Manasseh did those sins which are most hateful to God. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen,—he built again the high places which his father had broken down,—reared up altars for Baal, made groves, and worshipped the host of heaven, and served them." He actually put altars in the house of God. He caused his children to pass through the fire. He observed times, used enchantments, used witch-crafts, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and wizards. "So Manasseh made Judah to err, and to do worse than the heathen." (2 Chron. xxxiii.)

He closed his ears against the warning voice of God. "The Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken."

He was a murderer, and as some think of the prophet of his day, Isaiah, who was "sawn asunder." At any rate, it is said of him, "he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another."

Add to all this, his sins were all the blacker, because he knew better. He had his father's example to look back upon, his father's good deeds around him, and there-

fore his condemnation was still greater. Here was a depth of wickedness scarcely to be equalled in the history of sinners. The "grace of God that bringeth salvation" to such sinners, shines out all the more vividly and wondrously against this dark background of abominable iniquity. Surely here is a pattern of long-suffering we may well be amazed at. A wonderful proof too, of the power of grace to change the heart, to which sin has by habit become a second nature, and which therefore, in the language of men, is so much less likely to be changed.

Strong measures were employed by God to produce great results. The outward instrument used by God, was a great affliction. The inward we know was the subduing and leading of the Holy Spirit,—without this even his affliction would never have humbled Manasseh.

But so we read, "The Lord brought upon him the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his

supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom."

We are not, you see, here told, what the secondary causes of this deliverance were, that is, how, and why the king of Assyria let him go back, or any of the circumstances attending his liberation. In a short history of a reign of more than fifty years, the chief and most important points are dwelt on. And this is the one of all the most important, that God caused this deliverance to take place in answer to Manasseh's prayer; and in order to show mercy and favor to a returning, penitent sinner.

God knew that the change was real, and so God heard and answered his prayer. The change was real, for as we have seen, it was not a change wrought only by the affliction. This will not always bring men to themselves. Some persons are only the more hardened in their sins, when "the hand of God presseth them sore." Thus it is recorded of Ahaz, the grand-father of Manasseh, "In the time of his distress did he trespass, yet more against the Lord." But with the grandson it was different, for "he humbled himself greatly before the Lord."

It is true that affliction for the most part has a humbling effect, but it does not al-

ways produce a godly sorrow, or hatred to the sins it has found a man engaged in. It may soften the heart and make it more open to impression. But it does not always humble it to receive impression from God, and to submit to the walk of godliness. After all, affliction does not change the tastes, or alter the turn of affections. Nothing but divine power does this. Nothing less than the Spirit producing a new heart.

But observe next, three principal proofs of the soundness of Manasseh's conversion. One was great abasement of soul, "he humbled himself greatly." There was a cause indeed, if he only looked back on the vast amount of evil he had done. How many had he driven from God! How many encouraged in sin! How much of his father's good in the kingdom he had undone and destroyed! These, and like thoughts, might well humble him.

And has not every sinner some grounds for self-abasement! Yes! truly in all cases there will be humility where there is grace, — "Behold I am vile," will be the unfeigned language of the heart. "I abhor myself and repent," will be the genuine feeling. There is always a cause, even where the life has been raised far above the base

wickedness of Manasseh,—even where the character will bear the description of Job's, "an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil." The tendency to sinful departure from God, besides the actual sins in heart, thought, word and deed, against a sin-hating but long-suffering Father, this is enough to humble, and will do so where the work of grace is really taking place, and the conversion is real. No real conversion without self-abasement.

Another mark in Manasseh of real alteration and lasting change, was his prayer. No short, or passing cry for mercy was his, or it would not thus be mentioned. Not only it is said, "he prayed and God was entreated," but "his prayer" among other things, "was written among the sayings of the seer." (v. 19.)

Many a man in trouble cries out for mercy, who when the trouble is gone is silent, and proves his repentance hollow. "Behold, he prayeth," will ever be as it has ever been, a true mark of a penitent child returned to a forgiving Father. And that not as a passing effort from a troubled mind, not an anxious cry, lasting only while the trouble lasts, but a settled habit, a constant practice,—the result of a new relation to God; the

effect of the Spirit within. As it is written, "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." (Gal. iv. 6.)

A third mark of true penitence, was his ardent desire to make restitution. To undo some of the vast evils he had done. To do some of the great amount of good he had left undone. He "took away the strange gods, the idols and the altars, and cast them out of the city. He repaired the altar of the Lord and sacrificed thereon peace offerings, and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel."

Such a desire to make restitution will be strong in the person that has been convinced of sin and converted to God, because his past failings will be a matter of deep regret and bitter remorse.

It is not that we are to doubt the completeness of our pardon ; much more is it not any feeling of being able to do away with one atom of guilt, by any good thing we can do, —one look of faith to the Redeemer's sacrifice does this completely and entirely, —but it is the debt we feel we owe to those we have injured by our evil example, and our hurtful influence.

We want to do them some good for all

the evil we have done them. We want to bear witness to them of the new way we look at the sins we led them into, and the holiness we taught them to neglect. In fact, we want to pay our debts to God and man. We are debtors not to the flesh, but to the Spirit. And an eager desire to pay that debt, even though it cost us loss, or a struggle, or bring shame from our fellow men, is one fruit of real repentance.

Thus it was with Zacchæus, once a lost but a recovered sheep of the house of Israel. A new creature in Christ, he stood forth and said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." (Luke xix. 8.) Such a desire to repair evil done in our days of ignorance and folly, is a proof of "repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."

Let us then admire this wondrous display of love, in the recovery of this king of Judah. Let it encourage us to hope, to pray, and to labor for the like great change, even in the chief of sinners. We are too apt to despair of those we see far gone in the ways of sin. Let us not limit the grace of God.

And have we ever ourselves our moments



of struggles against unbelief in the promises of mercy applied to ourselves? Are we at times ready to think our sins were too black, and the list too long, and the days of slighted grace too many to obtain entire remission unto life. Oh! then let us also remember the acceptance which Manasseh found; and applying to the same God, the same sacrifice of the one great Redeemer, we shall find the same pardon and peace that he found. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah i. 18.)

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### PRAYER.

O LORD GOD! whose property is always to have mercy, and who dost delight to receive penitent sinners returning to Thee through Thy dear Son; Give me, I pray Thee, the marks of true repentance, and show me tokens of Thy forgiving love. Deepen my sorrow for, and hatred of all sin. Make me truly humble. I ask also for more of the Spirit of adoption, that I may call Thee my Father, and confide in Thy love to me, through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

## JOSIAH.

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*“Moreover, the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah, and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law, which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.*

*“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses : neither after him arose there any like him.” 2 KINGS XXIII. 24, 25.*

JOSIAH'S reign presents the rare spectacle of a good king reigning in Jerusalem, in the fear of God, and in strict obedience to the laws of Moses.

Hezekiah was a godly king, and a man of much faith, a man of prayer, a destroyer of false worship, and a great restorer of God's service; but in many points Josiah went beyond him; so that it is said, “Like unto him there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, with

all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses ; neither after him arose there any like him."

We shall find there were two chief causes of this great zeal and steadfast devotion in Josiah. One was, that he began to seek God while young, and the other, that in the early part of his reign he discovered the long-lost Book of God's law, and that he took this for his future guide.

Of course we must trace his goodness still higher. What made him seek God young ? What inclined him to submit to, to read and follow the Book of God, but that grace which was in him exceeding abundant.

Let us inquire now what in his reign there is for us to admire and to copy. Perhaps it is not too late for us to follow him in the first point of all,—his early seeking God. Happy for us if it be our blessedness to follow him in this. Alas ! such cases are by no means very common. "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father." And it was as early as the twelfth year of his reign, that he began to act vigorously in purifying the sanctuary, and the service of God. We need not conclude from this that he did not seek God till

he had reigned eight years. This seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, refers more to his public life, and public acts of religious devotion. We may well suppose he was pious while very young and tender in age. "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years, and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand nor to the left."

His temptations as a young king were of course very great, his passions strong, and his opportunities and means of gratifying all the lusts of the flesh were abundant. Yet had he strength given him to resist all these, and to make God's service, his people's holiness, and his own personal piety, his first objects.

Yet, how common is the excuse for young people not seeking the Lord earnestly and devotedly, that they are young, and therefore cannot be expected to give themselves wholly to the Lord. It is said by themselves, and sometimes their friends and advisers, they are young now, and we cannot expect them to be different from other young people around them : perhaps later

in life they will see things differently, and live more seriously. But this is a very awful mistake. It is a great mistake to think it will be easier to serve God when you are older. Verily the difficulty may be said to increase with years in those who have not turned to the Lord. Persons converted late often carry to the grave with them, some hindrances and some disadvantages, which youthful negligence contracted, and even grace cannot wholly overcome and get the better of. It is a great mistake to think that to seek God while yet young will at all interfere with real happiness, and the best enjoyment of this life. Godliness has the promise of both lives. Josiah did not the less, but the more enjoy his kingdom and royalty, and honours, and riches, because unlike others before him he sought the Lord while he was yet young. Pleasures sanctified are pleasures doubled.

Again, it is a great mistake to think of serving God with the refuse and dregs of your days, instead of the best and freshest and most vigorous. What a fearful thing to say to God, "I must enjoy life first, and when I have had my fill, and have less keen enjoyment of this world, I will turn my thoughts to Thy service, and preparation for

eternity." Yet this is really what many young people say. Will God honor them in old age who so despised Him in youth? Oh! that there were more like Josiah, "seeking the Lord while yet young." How well would it be for themselves to find out by happy experience that God's service is the happiest service, and that giving God the first and best days, will add immensely to their after happiness, and to their usefulness in their generation.

The next remarkable point in Josiah's reign was the discovery of God's book of the law. While engaged in searching the temple with a view to repair it, Hilkiyah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord, given by Moses. It was carried to the king. It was read to the king. And after this the king acted upon it, governing his kingdom and establishing God's worship all from what he read in that Book.

Now, here you see how God meets and blesses those who seek him. Josiah began without the law to serve God as well as he knew from the light he possessed, and God causes him to find this book which gave more light and more knowledge. And thus it ever is and will be. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteous-

ness: those that remember thee in thy ways." (Isaiah lxiv. 5.) Use the light you have got, and you will get more. Seek God according to your knowledge, and He will soon give you more knowledge and more grace.

Observe next the use this king made of the Book of God. He honoured it greatly, and put it above himself in the kingdom. He did not keep it to himself, he took measures that all his people should hear it and know it. Yea, he himself went into "the house of God, and read in the ears of the people all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord."

He used it to guide him in governing his people. He used it, to bind them and himself by, to a covenant to serve the Lord henceforth. (2 Kings xxiii. 3.) It was, probably, from reading this Book, he was led to fulfil a remarkable prophecy which had been spoken near four hundred years before, in the days of Jeroboam, by that man of God whom the old prophet of Bethel deceived and led astray, so that he was punished for his disobedience.

This man had cried against the altar, which Jeroboam had sinfully raised, "O

altar, altar, thus saith the Lord ; behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." (1 Kings xiii. 1, 2.) So now we read, "Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down." Then, "as he turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed." The only bones he let alone were those of that very man of God, and the bones of the old prophet who had asked his sons to bury him by his side. (See ver. 15—18 of chap. xxiii. of 2 Kings.)

Furthermore, it was from the word of God that Josiah was led to observe the ordinance of the passover. "He commanded the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of



the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah, but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem." We have an account of how this feast was kept. How many animals were offered in sacrifice, and many other particulars. (2 Chron. xxxv.) It is added, "And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands." Very important was all this, and therefore it is related at length. The great truth it was to teach was, "without shedding of blood there is no remission." It was the great testimony to Christ. It was by virtue of this ordinance Josiah himself was seeking and finding the Saviour, and by it he wished his people also to know the only way of pardon.

Another good result of Josiah's thus knowing God's word, was that his destruction of idolatry was far more complete than that of any one before him. We have just seen how he went back to the days of Jeroboam, and undid some of the evil that evil king had done; but he went further back than this, and did what no other king had done,—he undid some of the evil king Solomon had done. "The high places which

Solomon had builded for Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom, the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile."

Thus was Josiah zealous in doing God's work. Had he no faults? Are there no faults recorded of him? Doubtless he had many faults. And had more of his private life been written we should have seen some of the miserable failings which are to be found in the best of saints. But his life was remarkable for being free from those blemishes and great failings which marked the lives of most of the kings of Judah before him. And as such he is set before us; an instance of the grace of God triumphing over the strongest temptations to which nature is exposed. Yet, that we may not think too highly of Josiah, or think that he was nearer perfection than it is within reach of man by grace to attain to, one instance of weakness, if not an act of sinful disobedience to God is recorded, and it was that act which cost him his life. Necho, king of Egypt, came up to fight against Charchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. He was warned not to go. Necho told him God had sent him, and God

was with him. But we read, "Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo." He was wounded and died. "And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah, and Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and behold they are written in the Lamentations." Thus ended the reign of king Josiah, the last who made any attempt at reviving and reforming the kingdom of Judah, fast hastening to a dissolution. He was a great man, and did much good, and his praise is in the Scriptures, and wherever the Scriptures are read. Let us not forget the two points at the foundation of his greatness. How young he was when he began, and how he honoured and acted on God's word. Imagine a little boy of only eight years of age,—he is told he is king of a great people, is surrounded by many flatterers, and has great riches at his command, and all possible sources of amusement and pleasure. So far gone in idolatry and ignorance are his people, that while altars, and idols, and groves, and high places, and false priests were abounding on

all sides of him, the Book of the law of Moses was not known of. Yet that little boy it was who was to be the great means of inducing a whole kingdom to break all altars and idols, to cut down groves, and to banish false worship, and to gather together to observe the ordinances of the Lord, in a way that had not been done for hundreds of years. Here is encouragement for those who begin to serve the Lord early, and who may have a thousand obstacles in the way, and may be beset with numerous and, as they think, insurmountable difficulties.

Let them begin as Josiah, and let them go on as Josiah did. His strength came from God's Word.

Let us ever exalt that Word. It is, alas! the custom with many to cry it down, to throw doubt on its inspiration, and its authority. But it will always be found that according as that Word is honoured, studied, and acted on, God gives His blessing. Our country's greatness, and the strength of the kingdom, depend on the honour put on God's Word by those who make laws and govern the country.

The good which a church and ministry will do among people, whether at home or in foreign parts, or among the heathen, just

depends on the place the Bible occupies in the ministrations of that church, and the preaching of its ministers.

And our own spiritual life, health, and growth depend also, on our reading, hearing, receiving, and praying over God's holy word. The words of Christ are "spirit and life,"—"as new-born babes we must desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby." They are "all given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy iii. 16.)

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## PRAYER.

O GOD, I beseech Thee open Thou mine eyes that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law. May I prize Thy Book greatly. May I hide its commandments in my heart that I may not sin against Thee. May I treasure up its promises that I may get comfort. Sanctify me by Thy truth. Thy Word is truth. Grant this for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

## THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

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*“And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending ; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place :*

*“But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.*

*“Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age : he gave them all into his hand.*

*“And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes : all these he brought to Babylon.*

*“And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.” 2. CHRON. XXXVI. 15—19.*

SUCH is the melancholy account of the end of the kingdom of Judah. After the prosperous reign of Josiah, the history soon comes to a close. A few more kings sat

upon the throne for a short time each. Their names are, first, Jehoahaz, a son of Josiah. He only reigned three months. The king of Egypt put him down, and made next Eliakim, his brother, king in his room. He turned his name into Jehoiakim. He reigned eleven years, and did evil in the sight of the Lord. "Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon." Jehoiachin or Jeconiah his son, reigned in his stead. He was also a wicked man. And "Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him also to Babylon ; and made Zedekiah, his brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem." Zedekiah also did evil and "humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, from the mouth of the Lord." He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, "who had made him swear by God." Then it was God yet further warned him and the people of Judah, as in the verses before us. And as they regarded Him not, they were given over completely to their enemies. Many were slain. The treasures of the temple, and riches of the nation, were carried to Babylon. The house of God was burnt, and those that escaped the sword were taken for slaves. Only some of the poor of the land were left to be vine-dressers and hus-

bandmen. This was 588 years before the Lord Jesus came into the world.

There was a partial restoration of some Jews to the land seventy years after this ; in the days of Cyrus, king of Persia. But they never attained to any thing like their former glory. Their temple was indeed rebuilt, as had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah. (chap. xliv. 28.) Their government was partially restored under Ezra and Nehemiah, who were sent from Persia for this end. But still from that time till they were finally dispersed again under the Romans, they had no regular government of their own ; being under the Persians, or Grecians, or Egyptians, or Syrians, or Romans, until our Lord came. And when He came, He foretold that terrible destruction which came upon them by the hands of the Romans, who destroyed their city, and burned up their temple : leaving not one stone upon another, even as it is unto this very day.

Very affecting and very instructive is the history of this wonderful people. In drawing to a close this commentary on their history, it is only a few of such reflections can be made. The best commentary on their fall, are the Lamentations of Jeremiah. These are a very affecting part of Scripture,



written by one who was deeply affected by their sad history. Observe the opening of that song. "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! She that was great among nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!" Again, "Judah is gone into captivity, because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest."

But a greater than Jeremiah hath uttered the voice of lamentation over this wondrous city and nation. It is said of Jesus, "When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it." St. Matthew tells us His words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

But in looking at this people, let us not overlook the most extraordinary part of their history, namely, how amidst all they have gone through of warfare, and captivity, suffering, and persecution, they are still preserved a people distinct from other nations upon earth. Their history differs from all other histories of nations and king-

doms. They were God's chosen people, and He said they should "not be reckoned among the nations." They are therefore like the burning bush that Moses looked upon, which burned, but was not consumed. So there is still a people of the Jews, scattered among all nations, yet dwelling alone. And in the midst of all that has been done to dishonour, to destroy, and to extirpate them, they are still preserved distinct. As says the prophet Malachi iii. 6, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Because they are God's chosen seed, and because God is faithful to keep His word, therefore, though He has punished them, they have not been destroyed or wholly cast away. He has said, "Behold the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth." This is fulfilled, for there is no kingdom of Judah. But it is added, "saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord; for lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as *corn* is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." (Amos ix. 8, 9.) This also has been fulfilled. There is not a civilized nation where

Jews may not be found. Many precious grains were gathered at the first preaching of the Gospel from among them, showing, as St. Paul says, "God hath not cast away His people, for I also am an Israelite."—"God hath not cast away his people, whom he foreknew." (Rom. xi.) And so, now and then at this time, in our own country and on the continent, the labours of a Society for promoting the knowledge of Christ among the Jews are blessed of God, and other grains are gathered in to Christ.

Must we not also remember that the most wonderful part of their history is yet to be fulfilled. Why are they kept distinct? Why preserved separate from others? That God may yet prove He is faithful to keep His promises, and His covenant that He has made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Prophecy upon prophecy foretells this wonderful event. However difficult of fulfilment, we must honour God, by believing it. Thus we are told, "I will cause the captivity of Judah, and the captivity of Israel to return, and I will build them as at the first: and I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me,.....and it shall be to me a name of joy, and praise, and an honour before all the

nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I shall do unto them." (Jerem. xxxiii. 7, 8.) Or again, when it is said they "shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim." This is their state truly now. For one lesson they have learnt in their affliction,—they are no longer idolaters, and though they have no sacrifice, because no temple, they have no images, and no false gods. Then their future state is foretold: "Afterwards shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." (Hosea iii.)

Note one more such promise of a "God that cannot lie,"—"At that time I will bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all the people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord." And above in the same prophecy it is said, "I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame." (Zephaniah iii. 19, 20.)

Herein then will the great power, and the never-failing faithfulness of God be seen in

their restoration and conversion, as many other Scriptures foretell.

And all this is written for our learning. Behold the wonderful wisdom and love of God, "through their fall salvation is come unto us Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness." And "if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead." (Rom. xi. 12—15.) But let not us exult over their fall. Let us not be highminded, but fear. Can the sins which were their ruin be found among us? According to our privileges and light, so is our responsibility. What are we doing with our Sabbaths? What with the Word of God? Are we honouring God by our trust in Jesus, as our Priest over the true house of God? Are we acting as God's witnesses to others? Does our light so shine, that men who see our lives, know our characters, and hear our words, glorify God in us?

