

# The Shunamite

2 Kings 4

J. G. Bellett.

Article 27 of 47 **Short Meditations**

(Cavenagh, 1866.)

In the Old Testament times we find the Lord bringing out fresh resources on repeated failures, and faith ever ready to adopt them, nay, and at times to calculate upon them and to look for them. Failure of everything under man's hand, or as in his stewardship, is witnessed again and again, but God's resources are unexhausted, and faith is undismayed and undistracted.

When Israel in the wilderness make the Golden Calf, and thus break the very first article of the Covenant under which all was then set, Moses acts as one that counted on finding something in God to meet the catastrophe. (Ex. 33)

When the nation, brought into the land under Joshua, again break the Covenant, as they do oftentimes, the Lord, in the energy of His Spirit, calls forth the Judges for their deliverance, and faith in them is ready for the occasion.

When the Priesthood ruined itself afterwards, and Ichabod was written on the forehead of Israel, God has a Prophet (a new and strange provision) in the secret place of His counsel and resources, and Samuel, as such, in faith leads on to Ebenezer, or God's help, for this fallen people.

When the Kingdom, in time, ruins itself, as the people in the wilderness had done, and as the nation under the Judges had done, and the throne and house of David are in the dust, and Israel a captive, faith still waits in the certainty that God had not failed, though all beside had. The Temple may be a desolation, the Ark may have disappeared, all that was sacred have been lost, the land itself the property of the uncircumcised, and the people of God the slaves of the Gentile — still a Daniel, a Nehemiah, and an Esther, and other kindred hearts, can maintain their Nazaritism, and look for days of fresh discoveries of what God is and has for Israel.

God's resources are thus unexhausted by man's failures, and faith undistracted.

But in the present New Testament days, we have somewhat of another thing to mark — and it is this — the full satisfaction that faith takes in what God has already provided it with, and the jealousy and care of the Spirit, that we use that, and hold by it, in the perfect satisfaction of its being equal to all new and rising exigencies.

The difference is, therefore, this — in other days, faith calculated on what it was still to get; in these present days, it is faithful to, and abides by, that which it has already got. For it has got Christ, the end of all Divine provisions.

We have only to read the Epistles to perceive this. Christ, the Christ of God, and Scripture, the word of His grace, become our standing provision. How does the Spirit there, keep all the boast of the heart in that which is thus already with us! And surely faith takes up the mind of the Spirit. How do the Epistles speak of Christ as being all to us, exhorting us to go on with Him as we have begun with Him, to be built up in Him as we have been rooted in Him, to hold fast, to continue in the things we have learnt already, and to be still refusing all but Christ and the Word. "I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace," is Apostolic language.

Here is a difference. But there is kindredness in past and present, Old Testament and New Testament days, in this; that failure on man's part and consequent confusion in the scene around us, have alike given character to both. And faith is the same, knowing and using God's resources in the face of the confusion; only, again I say, with this difference, that the resource, in past, Old Testament days, was something *new*; now, it is *ever one and the same*; that is, God and the word of His grace, Christ and Scripture.

Of old, faith acted in *that* way, now faith acts in *this* way.

When, of old, as we have seen, the Golden Calf was made, faith looked for a new revelation of God's Name. When the nation in the land forfeited their place under the wing of Jehovah, faith found its object in the freshly-awakened Judge or Deliverer. When the priesthood was defiled, faith used the Prophet. When the kingdom was a ruin, faith still waited in hope of sure and certain sovereign relief in new ways suited to new conditions — as Mordecai at such a time said, "Enlargement and deliverance shall arise to the Jews from another place." But now, in the face of failure and confusion, take it what form it may, faith has God and His Word, Christ and Scripture, standing and abiding resources known alike at every moment of New Testament times, nothing fresh, nothing new, but that which is given in grace faith uses, and remains calm and undistracted, however grieved and humbled. For "the ends of the world" are come upon us. (1 Cor. 10: 11) We look not for further exhibitions, but we use what we have, let Church ruins and Christendom confusion be what they may. Faith holds the beginning of its confidence steadfast unto the end. Faith is prepared for failure in God's Stewards; but having reached Himself, rests at ease and is satisfied.

The Shunamite, in 2 Kings 4, illustrates these beautiful ways of faith, and does so beautifully. She was not dismayed or distracted by a day of failure and confusion; she is prepared for such under man's hand; but having apprehended and reached God and His resources, she is satisfied, and abides there.

This finely shows itself in her history. At the beginning of it, she *apprehends* Elisha justly. Without introduction she perceives him to be "a man of God," and as such she welcomes and entertains him. She can count on God having His resources at command, though the kingdom be reprobate. And this she does in the due manner. She knows his *character* as well as his *person*. If he be a man of God, she will trust him as having the tastes and sympathies of such, and as such she prepares for him. A little chamber on the wall, and then the necessary furniture, a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick. Not to display the treasures of her house, but to meet him in character, is her thought; and this is *communion*. Her instincts are fine, as her faith is strong and intelligent.

The scenery was heavenly. I mean, all about that chamber bespoke heavenly strangers on the earth in the days of corruption and apostasy. Things were then in utter moral ruin. Ahab's family, the house of Omri, was on the throne, and nothing in the kingdom then was worthy of God. Little things do, and alone do, for God's people then. In Solomon-days it shall be otherwise. Now, a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick, is enough — then, servants and their apparel and their sitting, with all beside, shall set out earthly, worldly greatness.

All this is full of beauty and of meaning. This dear woman apprehends God's witness in this evil day. She knows that God is true, though every man a liar. She knows that if foundations be destroyed, God is still in His holy temple. In this evil day, she sees God's resources in this vessel. He is a stranger, a lonely man, a kind of Jonah in Nineveh, un-introduced, un-accredited. But she apprehends him — and having accepted him, she holds fast by him. The husband may talk of new moons and sabbaths; Elisha himself may talk of the servant and the staff — but with her, God's vessel is everything. He had been

the beginning of her confidence, and she will have him as such steadfast to the end.

For faith, in those days as well as in these days, hold to God's resources. Faith looked again and again, as I have said, for new resources, as new exigencies sprang forth; but while these resources were in God's hand for

His people, until they had given place, through fresh corruption, to new ones, faith clung to them. So, this Shunamite to the Prophet, when all in the Kingdom of the Ten Tribes, whether on the Throne or in the Sanctuary, was in ruins.