

Lectures Introductory to the Books of Kings

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1 Kings 1 - 8.

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

It is clear that the Books of Kings are the natural consequence and successors, if I may so say, of the Books of Samuel; so much so that they are, in some copies of the scriptures, all classed as Books of Kings. But here we have David approaching his end; and the eldest of his sons that then survived —

Adonijah — takes advantage of the king's infirmity for his own ambitious purpose. There was no fear of God in this. For it was well known in the house of David, and in the land of Israel, that as God chose David from the midst of his brethren, so He had been pleased also to designate Solomon for the throne of Israel. Hence, therefore, it was not only human ambition, but we learn this very serious lesson for our souls — that the indulgence of what is fleshly assumes a graver character in us than in the people of God in their measure, of old; in us still more now. It was not mere ambition in Adonijah. In one totally ignorant of the word of God and the will of Jehovah for Israel, it would have been ambition. But if we have an incomparable blessing in the word of God, we have a greatly increased responsibility, and further, sin acquires a new character. The sin of Adonijah was not merely therefore ambition; not merely, even, rebellion against the king, against David; it was rebellion against Jehovah. It was a direct act of setting himself in contradiction of the declared and revealed purpose of God.

Now it is always of the greatest importance that we should bear this in mind, because we are so apt to look at things merely as they lie on the surface. When, for instance, Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of their sad sin in the church of God, how does the apostle Peter treat it? Not merely as a lie. They had lied to God. Why was this? Why was there in that lie something altogether beyond an ordinary lie, bad as a lie always is in a Christian; indeed, in any one? But why was it so especially and emphatically a lying to God? Because Peter, at any rate, believed that God was there; that it was not merely therefore the general moral feeling against a person saying what was false and deceiving another, nay, not merely that it was against God's will and word, but it was an affront done in the very presence of God. And consequently, as the sense of the presence of God was so fresh and strong in the minds of all of them — in, Peter above all — he, in the power of that Spirit who manifested God's presence, pronounced the judgment — no doubt according to God's guidance — on the sin; and Ananias at first, his wife shortly after, breathed their last; a sin manifestly unto death. So that in the very earliest days of the church of God, we may say, the solemn truth had this voucher before them all, that God will not tolerate sin in that which bears the name of the Lord Jesus upon the earth. The very object of the church of God is to be an expression of the judgment of sin. We begin with that; we begin with Christ our Passover sacrificed for us; consequently, the lump must be a new one, as ye are unleavened — as ye rare unleavened — not that ye may be unleavened, but ye are unleavened, and, therefore, the old leaven is to be purged out. Whatever might be the natural tendency, whatever might be the special wickedness (for what will not Satan attempt?) just because God has wrought in the might of His own grace, this furnishes further occasion to the devil. He takes advantage of the goodness of God to bring a fresh slight upon Him and to dishonour Him the more because of the greatness of His love. Accordingly, therefore, God showed on this very occasion, by His servant, His deep resentment of the dishonour that was done Him, and, as the consequence, the judgment of the man and his wife that had been guilty of this great offence.

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

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

Now David had failed greatly at home as well as abroad on particular occasions. Alas! at home in this very respect; he had a tender and a soft heart. He was one that greatly enjoyed the grace of God towards his own soul; he felt the need of it, but, instead of making him careful for the Lord, grace is very apt, if we are not watchful, to be severed from truth. In Christ they were perfectly combined; in the Christian they should be. It is what God looks for, expects from us. In David there was a failure, and there was a failure at home — very often a critical place for any of us. It was so, at any rate, with king David. This son of his seems to have been a special favourite — as bad a thing for the son as for the father. His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, "Why hast thou done so?" And if his father had not displeased him he must reap the bitter fruit; he must be displeased himself. The son would certainly displease the father if the father had not displeased the son. There was no greater failure in jealous care and in loving care, too; for, after all, to have been displeased for his good, for his reproof, would have been a deeper love — not so showy, not so apparently gracious. But we must distinguish between grace and graciousness. There was a deal of graciousness in David in all this. I do not think there was much grace, for it is all a mistake to suppose that grace is not watchful. It was just the want of grace. It was a father's kindness, a father's tenderness, but it was not grace. Had there been grace there would have been truth. Real grace always maintains the truth. The truth was not maintained in the relationship of David towards his son Adonijah. Adonijah lives therefore to be the shame and grief of his father. This was not merely to manifest his father's fault before all Israel, to manifest his father's failure before all the saints, all the people of God of all times, but, beloved brethren, for our profit, if we are wise.

Now it takes then a public shape. The son — the failure at least (to speak of it by the mildest name) — the failure that had long gone on at home bursts out abroad. Adonijah therefore confers with a suitable person. He confers with Joab, the man that had constantly used David for his own purpose. Joab reckoned now that David would be of very little use to him any longer. The opportunity seemed fair; he embraced it. Policy is always ruinous work in the end, at any rate among God's people. There was no faith in Joab. He was a wise man after the flesh; he was an extremely political individual. Joab was a person who saw directly what could turn to his own profit, what offered an opportunity for his talents, for he was a man of great ability; and Joab now made up his mind. Adonijah was the man for him, so that they suited each other. Joab was remarkably adapted to Adonijah's object, and at the same time Adonijah suited Joab's policy. Had there been faith Joab had resisted Adonijah far more sternly than he once did David. This was the man that reprov'd David's numbering the house of Israel, for a man that has not faith is sharp enough to see the failure even of a man of faith when he steps out of his own proper line. Joab well knew that the day was when David single-handed fought the battle of Israel. He, after the Lord's most signal exaltation and blessing, *he* to be guilty of that which would have been poor work in any man of Israel, but most of all in David! *he* to be merely numbering the hosts of Israel as if *they* were the strength of the people, and not the Lord God! Therefore it was that Joab considered that the danger was too great for the result. He would not have minded the sin; he was afraid of the punishment, he was afraid of what it would involve. He had a sort of instinctive sense that the thing

was wrong; that it was peculiarly wrong in David. He warned him therefore as we know. David would not be warned, and he fell into the snare completely.

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

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

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

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

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

But now a word upon the great object of the Spirit of God in this book generally, and more particularly what has come before us. For this is particularly what I desire, not merely to draw your attention to great moral lessons, which would detain us too much with the detail of the chapters, but to give simply a wide and general sketch which you may fill up in your own reading of this book — I trust with some moral suggestions to profit and help. My purpose now is to gather the great object of the Spirit of God — that which is not so easily seen and laid hold of by souls, unless someone shows it; but that which if true you will prove to be true, and which you will enjoy so much the more, the more simply you receive it. But it is the word of God that will either confirm wherever one is true, or set aside wherever there is a mistake.

I say then that the grand point here is the establishment of the son of David, not merely man's kingdom set up in Saul and God's kingdom set up in king David, but now it is the son of David. And inasmuch as there were many sons this was the question. The devil was quite willing to make use of a son of David against *the* son of David. This was precisely the question now, and God was pleased to

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

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

And this is of great moment, beloved friends, for us to be clear about, for we are apt to be taken up by our own special blessings; yet the knowledge of the church of God ought not to hinder our interest in the kingdom of God, nor should the shape that the kingdom of God takes now at all obliterate that which God has given in the kingdom of old. It is not a proof of great faith to be only occupied with what concerns ourselves, but rather of little faith. I grant you that people who do not, first of all, and as the great lesson to learn, seek to know their own place are mere theorists, but when we have found our place in Christ — when we have got our need supplied, our relationship defined, ourselves in the enjoyment of what grace has brought us into — what is the great practical object of God? Free for all He has to tell us, and free for all He bids us do, it is no longer a question of what touches ourselves. If so, then we shall enjoy each thing in the word of God because it is what interests God; it is what concerns Him; and there is no one thing which ought to be so dear to us now as that God means to have a kingdom — not merely a kingdom spiritually enjoyed as now; for "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink"; it is not eating and drinking, "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." All that no doubt is spiritually enjoyed, and into that call we are brought now. We see that kingdom; we enter that kingdom now. We are in the kingdom of God now in that sense.

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

land. The land and the people, I repeat, are both in the charter. Well then that will be when the Lord Jesus is no longer in heaven, but comes again and takes the kingdom.

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

The kingdom then is of very great moment, and particularly so. For if we do not understand the nature of the kingdom we shall be exposed to those that confound it with the church. There is no more common error at this present time than to make out that the kingdom and the church are the same. Allow me to tell you that that is one of the great roots of popery. The papists think that the kingdom and the church are the same, and their great ground of assumption is that very identification for the simple reason that the kingdom supposes power applied to compel subjection. Hence, therefore, they ground upon that their title to put down kings, because what are the kings of the earth compared to those that have got a heavenly kingdom? They use, therefore, the title of the heavenly kingdom to put down earthly kings and to make a priest a far more important person really than the earthly king. Hence, again, their vain dream is founded upon this great confusion. Well, but you will find the same thing among most Protestants. I will just give you one or two examples to show you how very prevalent this delusion is, and how very important it is that we should distinguish in this matter.

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

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

Well now there was a grand fundamental error made by all of them. Thus Protestants are just as guilty in another way as the Romanists, for although they do not use the title of Christ to exalt themselves against the powers that be, habitually they do use it when the powers that be fail (as they consider) to behave themselves quite right. Then they think they are perfectly entitled to call them to account, and, if necessary, to put them down, or even send them to the block. Now all this you see is a complete inversion of the right relationship of a Christian man to the powers of the world, and all founded upon the very plausible idea that whether you call Him Head of the church or call Him King of

the church, it is all one and the same thing. They say that it is only "hair-splitting brethren" that see anything different; that it is only persons who continually put themselves disagreeably forward and tell people that they do not understand the scriptures; that it is only persons that have that rather quarrelsome, disagreeable style of convicting persons of not knowing the word of God.

Now, beloved friends, I say that however disagreeable it may be to be proved guilty of not knowing the word of God, this is the very thing that we do affirm; this is the very thing that we do assert now, that this is a subject of the greatest possible moment, that is, that our true relationship to Christ is not King of the church — that He is never so treated — nay, that He is not even called "King of saints" except in a passage in the Revelation which every scholar knows to be a mistaken translation, the true meaning in that case being, "King of nations," and not "King of saints," or King of the church at all. In short, there is no such thought, and the fact is very important. It is no mere idea, and it is no litigious objection to people's dogmas. It is a vital point, not for salvation, but for the true place of the church — the true relationship of the church — and you must remember our duties always depend upon our relationships. If I am wrong about my relationship, I am certain to be wrong about my duty. I am certain to make a duty of what is wrong, and that is exactly what the effect was to one or other of the different classes that I have referred to. That is what they have done. I need not repeat it, but I say that the opposite of the relationship is a fatal thing. The way it works is this. If my relationship to Christ is that of a member of the body to the head, my relationship is of the most intimate kind; my relationship is of the closest nature, and the Head loves me as He loves Himself, for no man ever yet hated his own flesh. Such is the relationship of Christ to the church. It is so intimate that you can have no person between you and the Head — none whatever. You see all depends upon it. The principle of the clergy depends upon it, because if that is the relationship the clergy are at an end. There is no such thing; it is only an imaginary class of beings as far as the truth is concerned. That is, they have no real title in the word of God. There is no such being in the word of God. There is no such position at all. It is only a thing that has been conjured up by persons who do not know the relationship of the church of God to the Head. So exactly that of which I am speaking now — the relationship of the members to the Head — excludes all dealing of the church with the world. The world is nothing to the church. The church is a thing separate from the world — not controlling the world — not punishing the world, not putting the world under force to compel it to render unwilling subjection. All this is a total confusion between the kingdom and the church — the kingdom as it will be by and by with this only difference, that then, as we know, the obedience will be real except only in a certain set who afterwards become rebellious and are so judged and punished.

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

no oneness more absolute. You are put, therefore, as a part of Himself before God, and instead of its being too high or presumptuous, or anything of the kind, on the contrary, it is merely faith in the truth — it is merely appreciation of the grace that He has shown you; for it would be perfect nonsense for the body not to share the blessing of the Head; it could not be, and therefore you must deny the fact — you must deny the relationship — not to enjoy this blessedness which you have in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God.

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

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

Well, the thing is now established, and the very effort to destroy it brings out, as I have already said, the speedy establishment of the will of God. Solomon is caused to ride upon the king's mule. The trumpet is sounded. The real men that had fought the battles of the kingdom and that had guided the counsels of the king, and the king himself above all, put their seal upon this great transaction, and Solomon is fairly seated as the king on the throne of Jehovah in Israel. Such then is the introduction of this book.

In the second chapter we have David's death, and the charge that was given before he died to king Solomon to judge righteously, for David evidently feels that, for his own word's sake, he had spared more than one wicked man. This lay upon his conscience. He could not but deliver it over to king Solomon. It is wrong to call this vindictiveness; there was no vindictiveness in it whatever. It was

really a burden upon the king's mind. It was not because of their personal opposition to himself, but that it was so grave a sin against Jehovah's anointed was what filled the king's heart. He tells it to his successor Solomon, and, accordingly, the day comes when these sins rise up and call for judgment, but all in God's time. There was no hurry. Adonijah, however, is the first to bring on his judgment upon him. The king had treated him kindly, had pardoned his offence and rebellion; but now he asks for a request which inevitably suggests the idea of a second and subtle effort after the kingdom. He sought the one that had been the youthful companion of the aged king. He sought — and this, too, through Bathsheba — "Adonijah, the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on men that I should reign; howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the Lord. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king (for he will not say thee nay) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife."

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

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

and as Joab suffered the due reward of his deeds, Shimei broke a decided fresh lease, if I may so say, which the king gave him. He violated the terms of it, and came under judgment by his own manifest transgression. Thus, righteous judgment executed by the king on the throne of David is the evident intimation of this second chapter.

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

Now, I do not mean to say that that had the same flagrant character that it had afterwards. We must always remember that it was where Jehovah had placed His name that they were there, and there only, to sacrifice to the Lord. But that was not yet fully, or, at any rate, publicly established; it was about to be. There was to be the house of Jehovah. This would be the public witness of that great truth before all Israel; but that house was not yet built. Therefore, although it might have been a failure, still it was a failure for which the Lord showed His tender mercy and compassion to His people until His own power had established the visible memorials of His worship; and then to depart to the high places became a matter that at once drew down the judgment of the Lord. Now here is an important thing to consider, because it looks plausible in an after day to say, "Well, here you observe people sacrificing in the high places without any condemnation; and, therefore, evidently the Lord had pity for His people at this time, and did not treat it at all in the same way as afterwards." Thus the wicked heart turns the mercy of God — His forbearance in a day of difficulty and of trial — into an excuse for sin, when there is no excuse possible. So it is that men habitually divorce the word of God from God's object. The king, it is said, "loved Jehovah, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places." His father had not done so. "And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar."

We have noticed elsewhere, I am sure, most of us, how remarkably David showed his sense of what was due to God, because he is found before the ark. The ark was what attracted. This was the more remarkable, because the ark is not at all the public link with God like the great altar. The great altar was in the court; the great altar was before every eye; the great altar was the place where offerings were. The ark was, comparatively, a little thing, and it was unseen. It was purposely behind the curtain veils. It was a matter, simply and purely, for faith, as far as that could be for an Israelite. It was his confidence that there was where Jehovah's glory was most of all concerned. That was what drew king David. Not so much king Solomon — not so characteristically. We are told this particularly in contrast with his father. This you observe in the chapter where the tendencies to departure first begin to be perceived. Affinity with Pharaoh's daughter is one; sacrifice at the high places is another.

With his father it was not so. In Gibeon, however, Jehovah appeared. And how great the grace of God — that although it is here put in contrast with his father's deeper and higher faith — in Gibeon Jehovah appears! What a God was He! He appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and asked what

He was to give him — nay, told him to ask — and Solomon answers with great beauty to the call of the Lord, for he asks what would enable him to govern His people rightly. He asks neither length of days, nor wealth, nor honour; but wisdom, and wisdom that he might govern Israel; and the God that gave him this wisdom, more than to any man that ever reigned, failed not in any other thing, for, as we know, there was none outwardly so blest as the king, none outwardly so renowned as this very king Solomon. I do not say that there was not a very deep and painful departure, as indeed the spirit that overlooked the ark and that went to the high places, must have its fruit in the latter end. For, beloved friends, the failure that is found at the beginning of our Christian career — to apply it now to our circumstances — does not fail to show itself still more as time passes over, unless it be thoroughly judged and departed from. A little seed of evil bears no small crop. I speak now of the seed as buried. The seed that is sown, not merely that exists, but what is allowed and covered up will another day rise up and bear bitter fruit.

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

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

In 1 Kings 5 we see the action, not by affinity, but by alliance, with the Gentiles, and how they become the servant of his purposes; nay, we can say even God's purposes for the earth, as far as Solomon was the servant of them. This is given in a very interesting manner in this fifth chapter.

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

In 1 Kings 7 we have the house. "He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon." We have the difference between what was connected with Solomon in contrast with that which was for Jehovah; and we find one remarkable fact, too, that long as he was upon Jehovah's house, he spent nearly twice as long time upon his own. It is quite evident, therefore, what Solomon was coming to. It might be slow, but the fruit was yet to appear — bitter fruit of self. Further, we find that Solomon assembles all the elders of Israel, and the heads of the tribes, and the temple is consecrated. And here we have what is incomparably better and deeper than all — the manifest accompanying proof of God's presence. It was not merely that Jehovah's throne was filled by a man — by king Solomon — His throne upon the earth, as He deigns to call it, but Jehovah took a dwelling-place. Jehovah deigned to come down in a manifest way to dwell in the house that Solomon built. There was no greater act now known in Israel, and this is

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

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

One thing, however, I must say a word upon. Even he puts it entirely on a conditional ground. He does not fall back upon unconditional grace. He falls back simply upon government. I do not doubt that this was all according to God. It would have been presumptuous, and, indeed, it would have been beyond his measure, to have pleaded unconditional grace. This is only done fully when Christ Himself is seen. When we know Christ and have Christ, we dare not ask any other ground than unconditional grace for our souls. For our walk we must own and bow to the righteous government of the Lord; but for our souls for eternity we dare not have any other foundation than the absolute, sovereign, unconditional grace of God.

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

It is connected with himself; and even more, too, we find. He drove, as we saw, an unfaithful priest out of the priest's office. He takes the superior place over the priest. "The same day did the king hallow." It is all connected with the king now. It is not the priest that hallows. The priest might be the instrument; I am not denying that for a moment, but it is all connected with the king. "The same day

did the king hallow the middle court that was before the house of Jehovah" (as he had dedicated the house of Jehovah) "for there he offered burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings: because the brazen altar that was before Jehovah was too little to receive the burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings. And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation" — the type of the great gathering of the latter day when the Lord Jesus, as the true Son of David, will more than accomplish all that is given here. He did so seven days and seven days, that in the mouth of these two witnesses every word should be accomplished — the duplicate witness of perfectness. "On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that Jehovah had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people."

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

1 Kings 9 - 15.

Solomon was now at the height of his glory, a vivid type of a greater than Solomon. And it is only when we see that he really does thus prefigure the Lord Jesus as King that we can understand the importance that God attaches to the history of such as David in one light and Solomon in another. David as the warrior-king who puts down the enemies actively, Solomon as the man of peace who will reign over the subjugated nations and kingdoms, more particularly Israel; but in point of fact, at the same time, the glorious Son of man that will have all kingdoms and nations and tribes and tongues then. Now I am persuaded that every one's faith has something lacking who does not leave room for this glorious future. I do not mean now in the smallest degree as a question of one's soul with God, but I am speaking of the intelligence of a Christian man. And I repeat, that he who does not look for the kingdom of God to be established by and by in this world has neither a key to the Bible nor, in point of fact, can he understand why God permits the present confusion. There is nothing more likely to fill the soul with perplexity than leaving out the future. Bring it in and we can understand why God exercises such amazing forbearance. The present is but a revolutionary time, and so it has been for ages, marked by the solemn fact that even the very people of God are the most dispersed of all nations upon the earth. I speak, of course, of Israel now, and I say that if there be a people that are no people, Israel is the one that comes up before our view. The devil may have a kind of imitation of it in some other races that are scattered over the ends of the earth, but then the man that could confound Israelites with, for instance, the Egyptians would be evidently doing the greatest injustice to one of the most remarkable people even as a race, as a nation, that has ever lived upon the earth. The other is only a kind of Satanic imitation of it; but no man can wisely despise Israel, even as a man. Still more, when our hearts take in the real truth of God and remember that God Himself in the person of His own Son deigned to become an Israelite, was in truth the Messiah, the Anointed, was the born King of the Jews. He who takes this in can understand the great place that Israel has in the mind of God, and that it is a proof of very little faith and of great occupation about ourselves when we do not relish what God has given us about His ancient people.

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

exercised on that which God has given us here, and what is God's thought, God's lesson, God's intention, for our souls in it.

This I shall endeavour to gather, not by forcing it to speak Christian language, not by what I may call "gospelling" the different parts of Scripture, which is really very often a perversion; not even by taking profitable hints from it that are most just and true and concern the grand living principles of divine truth, most important as all these are. But still there is another thing that we ought all with jealousy to care for, and that is to seek the real mind of God — what is intended by the scripture that comes before us. This leaves perfect freedom for every other application, but we ought to have first and foremost what God intends us to understand by His word. The time will come when we shall require to know how far any application is just. Because, needless to say, the divine purpose in the scripture necessarily has the first place for him that respects God, and who is not uneasy and anxious, and who is not coming to scripture always asking, "Is there anything about me here?" or, "Is there anything for me?" The great point is this, Is there anything about Christ there, and what is it that God is teaching us about Christ there? I am supposing now that the soul's want has been already met.

What then is it that God is showing us here? Why, clearly He is bringing once more the man of peace, Solomon, the type of Christ Himself when reigning in peaceful glory. But, alas! it was not Christ yet; it was only a shadow and not the substance, and the consequence is that although God has written the scripture very especially to keep up the type and to exclude what would be inconsistent with it, nevertheless, we have the truth; and God intimates here the danger that was before Solomon and his family. He intimates the conditional ground which he must take until Christ brought in sovereign, unconditional grace. It is impossible not to speak in the way of condition except in view of Christ, of Christ personally. It is there alone that we get the full mind of God and heart of God, and whenever that is the case it is no question of conditions but of perfect love that works for His own name's sake, and that can do it righteously through the Lord Jesus. But this gives me reason to speak of a very important principle that I shall have many opportunities of illustrating; what might seem a very strange thing in setting up the kingdom in Israel. Of all things in Israel there was nothing that illustrated the principle of one master so much as the king. Even the high priest did not in the same way, though he also did in another form. But the king determined the lot of the people in this way: if the king went right there was a ground for God's blessing the people, simply and solely for that very reason. On the other hand, if the king went wrong judgment fell upon the people. Alas! as we know, a king might go right, and it did not follow that the people would; if the king went wrong, the people were sure to, follow. Such is the inevitable history of man now. Well, this principle would seem very strange, and always does appear so till we see Christ. Then how blessed! God always meant to make Christ, and Christ alone, the ground of blessing. For any other — for any of the children of Adam to be the pillar, so to speak, on which the blessing should repose, would be a most precarious principle. We know well what Adam's sons are. We ought to know by ourselves, but when we see God looking onward to the Second man — the last Adam — then we understand the principle.

Well now, it is for this reason that, whether you look at David or Solomon, they have a very peculiar place as being personal types of the Lord Jesus as King. In a way, that is not true of others. Others might be in part, but they far more fully; but the principle is most true of the kingdom in Israel. That is, that there was one person now on whom depended the blessing of the people, or, alas! who involved the people in his own ruin, and this is the great principle of the kingdom of Israel. Miserable! till we come to Christ. How blessed! when Christ comes to reign. Then all the blessing of all the world hangs upon that one Man, and that one Man will make it all good. Such is God's intention, and He will never give it up. Now anyone who takes this in has a wholly different view from the history of the

world — from the gloom that must settle upon any man's heart that looks upon the earth apart from Christ. That God should have aught to say to such a world, that God should take an interest in it, that God should own such a state of things — how difficult otherwise to understand! The more you know of God, and the more you know of man, the more the wonder increases. But when we see that all is merely suffered till that one Man come, God meanwhile working out other purposes, as we know now, in Christianity, that as far as regards the earth and man upon it, it is all in view of Christ's coming again, and coming to reign; that is, coming to take the world into His own hands in the way of power — not merely to work in it by grace, but to take the reins of the world under His government, banishing him who is the fertile source of all the difficulty and contention and rebellion against God, that has filled it now, and indeed ever since sin came into it — the difficulty is solved.

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

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

In short, whatever might be the object, it was a transgression of the distinct and direct word of the

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

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

"Jehovah stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom. For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom (for six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom), that Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad being yet a little child" (vers. 14-17). Now he comes forward. God is wise, and that young prince was kept to be a sting to king Solomon. But this is a little comfort to us, and indeed, I may say, almost the only comfort that we have in the history that is given us of king Solomon — that God chastised him. He chastised him, not merely allowed the fruit of his evil, the results of his folly, to appear in his family, but chastised himself in his own lifetime. This is

His way with His own people, and indeed in some cases it is almost the only hope that you have that a person is a child of God, namely, that God does not allow the evil to pass, but deals with it now in this world. Those that God passes over in spite of evil are persons who are evidently waiting to be condemned with the world, but those who, being guilty, are dealt with now are objects of God's fatherly care. He is dealing with them, rebuking them, judging them, but after all, they are chastened that they should not be condemned with the world. Solomon, at any rate, most clearly comes under the chastening of the Lord. As the Lord had said to his father and implied to Solomon himself, He would not take His mercy from him, but He should chastise him with stripes, and this He does. But it is Solomon. It is not merely the house generally, the family generally, or their offspring, but Solomon himself.

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

I do not mean that the mischievousness of either Hadad or of Rezon was only when Solomon became an idolater, but I do draw attention to the fact that the Holy Ghost reserves the account of the vexation they caused the king till then. It is put by the Spirit Himself as a direct chastening of his idolatry. And these were, not the only ones. They were external. Solomon might say, "Well, we cannot expect anything better. They have private grudges, or national grudges, against our family." But "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite," was no foreigner, nor was it a question of avenging the supposed wrongs that were done to his family or his race. Not so; he was "Solomon's servant whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king; Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they, two were alone in the field; And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces; and he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee."

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

put my name there."

What mercy! "a light always." Reduced greatly — reduced in the extent and glory of the kingdom, but with this most marked difference, compared with the ten tribes — the much larger part that passed to the other — they would shift their loads from time to time, and after having continual changes in the family that governed they had one after another rising up. If it was a rebellious servant that it began with, it would not end with him, but many a rebellious servant would rise up against the king of Israel, and so the dynasty would be changed over and over and over again. Not so with Judah. Even though reduced to what God calls but one tribe, in order to put in the strongest possible way this utter diminution of their glory, nevertheless there the light shall be always. Such was the merciful, but at the same time, most righteous dealing of the Jehovah God of Israel.

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

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

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

Now it was not so with Rehoboam. "He went to Shechem, for all Israel were come to Shechem to

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

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

His days were numbered — the days of the kingdom of Rehoboam. "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day." He was in the plot, he was the one that well knew what the prophecy was, and now there was an opportunity of taking advantage of it. This is not the only connection you will find of Rehoboam with Shechem. "And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from Jehovah, that he might perform his saying, which Jehovah spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat." Did that excuse Jeroboam? This is a very important principle that you will find constantly in the word of God. A prophecy is in no way a sanction of what is predicted. Prophecy takes in the most abominable acts that have ever been done by the proud, corrupt, or murderous, will of man.

Prophecy therefore is in no wise a sanction of what is predicted, but nevertheless to a crafty and ambitious man as Jeroboam was, it gave the hint, and it gave him confidence to go on according to what was in his own heart. He therefore soon gives the word. "So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of

Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them, Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute." But this only became the overt occasion for the rebellion to display itself. "And all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day." And that rebellion was never healed. Alas we shall find greater abominations than this, but thus the bitter fruits of evil were beginning to show themselves; and he that had sown the wind must reap the whirlwind.

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

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

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

"Jeroboam said in heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah." He was afraid that if he allowed his subjects to go up to Jerusalem they would bethink themselves of their old king — bethink themselves of the grand purposes of God connected with Jerusalem. What does he do then? He devises a religion out of his own head. "Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

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

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

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

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

But God was not wanting to give a testimony even to this wicked king (1 Kings 13). "And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of Jehovah unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of Jehovah, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" — the grand vindication of God against the wicked religion of Jeroboam! "And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which Jehovah hath spoken." That prophecy might await its accomplishment in due time, but there is a present sign given, as God constantly does — a present pledge of a future accomplishment. "Behold the altar shall be rent and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out." The moment Jeroboam hears this he wants the man arrested. He puts forth his hand from the altar, saying, "Lay hold of him," but the power of God was with the word of God. "And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of Jehovah. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of Jehovah thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again."

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

This brings out a principle of the deepest moment for you and for me, beloved friends. "And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest." And no wonder. Here was Jehovah slighted. Where? Among the Gentiles? That were no wonder. Among His own people — direct apostasy from the Lord God of Israel. Here was a man that went forth in the strength of the word of the Lord. Absolute separation was therefore enjoined, and eating and drinking in all ages have been most justly regarded as the sign of fellowship. It may be as in the most solemn way fellowship between God's people and the Lord Himself at His own table; but even in other lesser ways eating and drinking are not so slight as man supposes. "With such an one no not to eat." Who? A man that is called a brother. If an unbeliever bid you, even supposing the unbeliever might be the worst man in the world,

you are free to go, provided you believe that God has a mission for you — an object. Supposing it was the man's soul — nothing more important in its way — you are free to go to the very worst on the face of the earth if you can serve God by going. You had better be sure of that first. But there is another thing, and that is, suppose a man that is called a brother is living in wickedness, "with such an one no not to eat." This does not mean the Lord's table; it means the common ordinary table. It means that there is not to be a sign of such fellowship as this — fellowship in ordinary life — because one of the most important means of dealing with the conscience of one that is called a brother is not merely separation from him at the table of the Lord, but it is intended to govern all one's ordinary social life with him. Not with the world; there is no greater folly than putting the world under discipline; but there is nothing more important in the church of God than walking in holy discipline, not merely at the table of the Lord, but at all other times.

I know that the world makes light of this, and counts it extremely uncharitable; and I am aware, too, that it has been so abominably perverted by popery that one can understand why most Protestants are rather alarmed at anything that is so close and trenchant; but nevertheless it does not become those that value the word of the Lord to shrink from the danger, and I think that there cannot be a doubt that what I am saying is correct as to the 5th of the 1st Corinthians. I know that some apply it to the Lord's table. I will just give one or two reasons that are decisive. First, there would be no sense in speaking of a man that is called a brother only; no sense in saying that he is not a man of the world because there could not be a question about eating the Lord's Supper with him. The question might arise with a brother, no doubt. But in speaking of an erring Christian "no not to eat" means that fellowship is not to take place in so little a thing as to eat. "Not so much as to eat," meaning that it was a very small thing, and so it is a small thing to take an ordinary meal. Who could suppose the Holy Ghost treating the Lord's Supper as a very little thing? Why there is nothing of more importance on earth, so that I am perfectly persuaded "no not to eat" means so small a thing as to eat, which at once shows that the meaning is in no way the Lord's Supper. The Spirit of God never could treat that as a small matter. No, it means an ordinary meal.

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

So, then, the man of God was put upon this as the point of honour for a man of faith. He was not to eat bread or drink water, or even to go the way he came. He was evidently to pass through the land, not to be as one that was even repeating his footprints in the path which he had trodden before, but he was to go through it as one that had a mission to perform, and to have done with it. This was God's purpose in it. It was a most marked and solemn token, too, because it was meant to be a testimony, and therefore he was not to repeat it merely to the same persons who had seen it, but it was that others should see it too. This man of God was to pass through the land that was now apostate. And this, beloved friends, is of very great moment to us to bear in mind, as we have to do now with a most guilty state of Christendom. A very large part of Christendom is in a state of idolatry. Perhaps we do not see so much of it in these lands, yet it is increasing habitually, and it takes the shape of apostasy more

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

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

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

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

He does not now come in the same power. When he came it was not merely so. It is a stronger

expression. But, however, I will not dwell upon that now. "Thou shalt eat no bread," he repeats as before, "nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest." "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of Jehovah saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water." And there his testimony was broken — his sword utterly broken in his hand — for it was not merely a word that he was called to, but to deeds, and men will care little for your word if you do not show them by deed that you feel that word which you would fain press upon them. There is nothing that men will not bear you to say if you do not act it out; for this it is that always troubles, not only the world, but still more the old prophets — for they are the people that feel. The old prophet could not bear the fact, for if this was the case with the man of God where was the old prophet? And it is not said that he was a false prophet; and the issue of the story would rather seem to show the contrary. But the old prophet was determined to try the man of God and see whether he could not make him as unfaithful as himself, for that is what would have been a miserable salve to a bad conscience. There is nothing that so troubles Christians that are not walking with God as when there are any that do; and there is nothing so important as not merely the testimony, but the living testimony, the walking in what you say.

Accordingly, this was the point that he assailed. "Can I not get him to eat bread and drink water?" So he pretends that he has a fresh message from God. What was the man of God about? Does God say and unsay? If it were so we should have no standard whatever, no certainty, and what would become of the poor children if there were such a thing. I know that unbelief constantly says it, and tries to make the Bible contradict itself, but then those who do so are guilty; and so the old prophet was guilty of lying — "he lied unto him." Nevertheless, the man of God listened. He had sat under the oak and was found by the old prophet there. He listened to the old prophet, and parleyed with him. The mischief takes effect. The man of God returns, breaking the word of the Lord in his own person, but not without the hand of God stretched out against him. If the man of God was false to God, God would be true to the man of God and true in a most painful way; and mark, beloved friends, most righteously; but it is a righteousness according to God, for we in our folly would have thought, "Surely the old prophet is the man that is going to die for this." Not so, but the man of God. For it is those who ought to know best, if they fail, that God chastises most. Do not wonder if the same things are done elsewhere and pass, apparently, without a chastening from God, or without any very direct exposure. These things cannot be done where the word of the Lord is the rule.

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

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

What a testimony! It is not so that the lions usually behave. It was in itself a wonder. The body of the man of God lay there, the ass beside it, the lion on the other side, all perfectly peaceful. The work

was done. God was just in it, and accomplished what He pleased, but the lion had no mission to do more, and there in the face of all men it was evident that the hand of God was there according to the word of God. "And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God." He knew right well whose carcass was there. "It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of Jehovah: therefore Jehovah hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of Jehovah, which he spake unto him."

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

What a history! How true and how full of instruction, but how, solemn — solemn to think of the man of God, but, oh! what can we say of the old prophet? What can we say of those that tempt the men that are of God and that have been faithful in their mission, to depart from the word of the Lord, and draw a miserable consolation to themselves for the moment to countenance their own living in habitual disobedience, in habitual ease where the man of God was forbidden to eat of the bread or drink of the water? There is nothing that so hardens the heart, and there is nothing that so destroys the conscience, as habitual disobedience to the word of the Lord — not in gross sins, but in religious indifference. That was what marked the old prophet. He consoled himself that he had respect for the Lord — respect for the man of God. He was put to the proof. He was Satan's instrument, and he brought out, no doubt, the weakness of the very vessel that God had made so strong against king Jeroboam. He knew he was utterly weak before the seductions of the old prophet. Oh, beware of such! Beware of those who use their age or their position, or anything else, to weaken the children of God in their obedience to the word of the Lord.

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

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

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

Ahijah could not see for his eyes were set; they were fixed by reason of his age, but God gave him to hear and gave him to see, too, what was unseen. "And Jehovah said unto Ahijah, Behold the wife of Jeroboam cometh." What was the folly of men! There was a man that could trust the prophet to tell him the future, and not to see through the disguise of his wife. How great is the folly of the wise,

for Jeroboam was a wise man after this world. But the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, even as God's wisdom is foolishness in their eyes. "And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came in at the door that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another?" What a humiliation! "For I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; but hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam."

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

"And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Jehovah did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Judah did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also sodomites in the land; and they did according to all the abominations of the nations." And, accordingly, God let loose the king of Egypt against Rehoboam, He came up "and he took away the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all; and he took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made," so that Rehoboam was driven at last to shields of brass.

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

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

And Asa succeeds, who reigns a long while in Jerusalem, and he does what was right in the eyes of Jehovah as did David his father. He took away the sodomites out of the land. "Asa's heart was

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

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

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

1 KINGS 17 - 22.

The days were very dark in Israel. Not only rebellion. And rebellion, always serious, was peculiarly so in Israel, for there it was insubordination in a direct manner against not only God's providence, but God's government. That government, as no other, was the direct action through the family that God Himself had chosen to govern His people, and therefore the very fact of their being the people of God made their insubordination to be so much the more grievous. For there cannot be a more false maxim than to bring in the question of whether people are God's children — to apply it to present circumstances — in order to mitigate the judgment of any evil thing that is done by them. In fact, the very thought is a pollution, and shows that souls must have departed from God, whenever the fact of the grace of God towards any person could be used in order to mitigate the gravity of their guilt against God. It is evident that if sin be always sin, the aggravation of the sin is the favour that God has shown the person that is guilty of it, and the nearer the relationship of the person that is guilty the greater the sin. Hence, even in Israel, God did not require the same sacrifice from one of the common people that

He did from the ruler, nor did He look for that from a ruler which He did from the congregation as a whole; and the high priest, although he was only one man — the high priest's guilt as being that of (in early days at any rate) the representative of Jehovah on the earth in Israel as king, became Israel's guilt. The high priest's sin had precisely this same effect, that is, it damaged the communion of the whole people, just as the whole people's guilt would have interfered with, or affected, him. But now we see the very darkness and evil of the people of God — for here we have to do not with a family, not with His children in the true and Christian sense of the word; but we have to do with a people under the government of Jehovah — in having now set up, not the fullest form of apostasy from God, but that which was verging towards it — the first great departure from God, religiously as well as politically.

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

But this remarkable planting of prophecy on miracle is found, not in Judah, but in Israel. The reason is manifest. Judah maintained still, however guiltily, the word of the Lord. Israel had virtually cast it off. Accordingly, therefore, having sunk into the place of the faithless they would have signs offered to them, as the apostle Paul shows that miracles are for the unbelieving. Prophecy, in the Christian sense of the word, no doubt as such when compared and contrasted with miracles — prophecy is for the church. Thus you see we find that the double character remarkably suits the case. On the one hand it was Israel, and, consequently, there is prophecy; on the other hand it was Israel faithless or unbelieving, and consequently there were miracles, that is, there were signs to unbelievers at the same time that there was prophecy planted with them. So that the perfect wisdom and harmony of the dealings of God with the grand principles of truth that are found throughout the word of God, I think, must be apparent to any person who will consider what has been just brought before him.

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

The word of Jehovah, then, bids him flee. He has been bold in telling the king — the guilty king. But now that his testimony has been rendered, and that the fearful calamity — that the restraint of dew or rain for years must be particularly in the east — that this was about to fall upon the people and to be

connected indeed in a measure with the prophetic, and not merely with God, would have at once exposed him to the resentment of a wicked people and their king. God therefore bids His servant — for it must not be a mere resource, still less a question of timidity, but according to the word of Jehovah — to flee and hide himself by the brook Cherith. Yet even in this hiding-place he brings out the illustrious power of God, and His care for His servant, for God had many ways of watching over him. He chose one that suited His own glory. He says, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there" — birds which, as we all know, are remarkable for their voracity. These were the birds that were ordered to feed the prophet. "So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord, for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening."

Undoubtedly, it was a solemn sign to Israel when it came to be known by them — that is, that the unclean should be rather the instruments of the action of God, the medium of caring for His prophet. It was, I say, a witness to them that they were even below what God had commanded to feed His prophet. It was not to be some particular person. Yet at this very time we know that there was one that God employed. But no, God would prove before all Israel how little His sympathies were with the people — how completely He was independent of all such action. He would care for His prophet Himself, and in a way suitable to His own glory. So after a season the brook dries up, but not before God had another purpose in hand. He sends him now to a place outside the land, to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon. And how important this is, our Lord Himself teaches us, for in Luke 4 the Saviour particularly selects this fact, as well as another that will come before us in the Second Book of Kings, as the witness of grace to the Gentile when the Jew had accounted himself unworthy of the government of Jehovah. Grace must work somewhere or other if the chosen people cast it out from them and will have none of it. God will not permit that brook to dry up, for the waters shall only flow in a fuller volume for the refreshment of weary souls elsewhere. And thus it is that God is always above the evil of man, and that the deeper the evil, God's goodness only shines the more.

So the widow of Zarephath, or Sarepta, as it is called in the New Testament, becomes the favoured one. She is met in great desolation. She is reduced to the lowest state. The prophet makes no small demands upon her pity, he puts her faith thoroughly to the test, and says what, if he had not been a prophet, and if it had not been a trial of faith, would have been a most cruel and selfish word, for with what face could a man, as a man, have asked her out of her little — her last meal — to provide first for him and then for herself and her son? But this was exactly the trial of it. God, when He gives a trial of faith, does not pare it down so as to spoil the very force of His blessing; but contrariwise. The greater the faith the more He tries, and if any one makes up his mind for slighting the practical cross in this world — the sense of what it is to have the dying of the Lord Jesus — that man will be tried in that very way. So this poor woman. She was in circumstances next door to death, and it is evident that God was far from giving her by the prophet, as He could easily have done, a barrel of meal to encourage her and the cruse to begin marvelously supplying oil. This would have spoiled the whole teaching of the Lord. Not so. Everything adds to the difficulty. This stranger-prophet that she never saw, never heard of before, is entirely unnoticed, and indeed, I think, we are warranted rather to gather that it was her first sight, and it may be, the first sound even of the prophet Elijah.

But still there is that, as in the word of God, so also in the prophet of God — in a man of God — that gives confidence where there is faith. Very likely it will shock and provoke the flesh; very likely it will give ground for unbelief there, for you will find this to be most true that the very same things which are a support to faith are the stumbling-block to unbelief; but however that may be, God in no wise softened the trial, but brought it out to her in all its apparent harshness and difficulty. But He

strengthens the heart to meet the trial, and we must never leave out this, which does not appear, and it is one of the beautiful features of the Old Testament.

Here we get the facts. The New Testament shows us the key that is behind. The New Testament lets us see every now and then, as, for instance, in this very case. There was the electing grace of God that wrought in this widow just as in the case of Naaman the Syrian. There were many widows in Israel; God chose this one outside Israel. There were many lepers; it was not there that the grace of God was running, but it was towards the Syrian — towards the great captain of their great enemy, for Syria was, at this time, perhaps their greatest foe. But if grace works God will prove that it is grace. He will show that there is no ground for acceptancy which indeed would deprive it of its character of grace — if there was any ground to look for it. Well then, the widow acts upon the word of the prophet, and not without a solemn word which he received. "For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days."

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

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

In the next chapter (1 Kings 18), however, we have Elijah called to show himself to Ahab, and now comes the great testimony to the guilt of the people. The restraint of all that would refresh the earth from the heavens had passed over the people — a most solemn sign, for it was not merely water turned into blood, or various blows which fell upon the earth, but the very heavens were withdrawn from all the kindness of which they are the medium — from all the refreshment that God is pleased to

give this earth. This was a far more solemn thing than anything that had been done in previous days, even with a stranger-people — with an enemy. But now the time was come for God to terminate this chastisement, and Elijah comes to show himself to the king.

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

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

So Obadiah, with this pledge of the prophet, goes and tells his master; and Ahab meets Elijah. He meets him as wicked men do. He throws the blame of all the trouble not upon the sinner, but upon the denouncer of the sin; not upon himself, the most guilty man in Israel, but upon the servant of Jehovah. And Elijah answers, "I have not troubled Israel" — answers the king of Israel who taxes him with it "but thou" — for this was the truth — "but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." It was a challenge given — a fair and open challenge by the prophet. It was to be a question between God and Baal, and this was to be decided by Elijah on the one hand and these prophets on the other. So Ahab sends to all, and all gather together. "And Elijah came unto all the people and said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well

spoken."

And so it was done. Elijah tells the prophets to choose the bullock, and dress it first; and so they do. "And they called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice" — for Elijah would make them feel their folly and their wickedness — "that there was neither voice nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of Jehovah that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones," for there must be the testimony always of the full people of God. No surer mark will you find throughout the whole of the Old Testament of the line and direction which the Spirit of God gives of what is according to Himself than this, that even though it were a man isolated as no man ever more felt himself to be than Elijah, nevertheless, that man's heart was with the whole people of God. Therefore it was not merely ten stones to represent the actual number of the tribes that he was immediately concerned with, but twelve. That is, his soul took in the people of God in their whole twelve-tribe nationality as God's people, for faith never can do less than that. Never can it content itself with a part; it must have all God's people for God. This is what, at any rate, his soul desired, and this is what his faith contemplated, and on this the judgment was to take its course.

"And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob unto whom the word of Jehovah came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of Jehovah; and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood." There must be the fullest proof here that, if on the one hand, in trying the poor Gentile widow there was no weakening of the trial, so still less where God's own honour was concerned, and the disproof of Baal's pretensions. Therefore it was not anything that would feed the fire, but rather put it out if it were fire from man. "Fill four barrels with water and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time." There was therefore the fullest witness on his part.

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

"Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that thou art Jehovah God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them

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

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

But there is more than this. Elijah now says to Ahab, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." Yes, but no ear of man on earth heard that sound but Elijah's. "The secret of Jehovah is with them that fear him." And Elijah goes up, as well as the king, and casts himself down upon the earth, puts his face between his knees and sends his servant to look. He had heard the sound, but he wanted to get the testimony of the sight from his servant. His servant goes, and looks, but sees nothing. "And he said, Go again, seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time" — patience must have its perfect work in every case — "that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." It was enough. Elijah said, "Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of Jehovah was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

Now that the judgment had taken its course, he was willing and ready to be a servant of the king. But if Elijah was willing to serve the king, and did so as no man could have served him without the

power of God strengthening him — running and keeping up with his chariot at full speed — Ahab was not prepared to serve the Lord one wit the more. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had, done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there" (1 Kings 19).

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

He went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree, and he requested for himself that he might die. It is not but what we see the man of God, but still the man who was tired of life. That was not a feeling of faith. There is very often much more faith in being willing to live than in wishing to die. Wishing to die is not the proof of faith at all. I grant you that no man that knows what death is, that knows what judgment is, that knows what sin is, that knows what God is, could wish to die unless he knew the Saviour. But having known the Saviour we may wince under the trial to which we are exposed in this world. Elijah did, and he wished to die, wished to get out of the trial — certainly a most unbelieving wish. The Lord never did. And there was the perfection of it. If the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane had wished to die it would have been the same failure. It could not be, and God forbid such a thought, but on the contrary the perfection of the Lord Jesus was that He did not wish to die — "Not my will, but thine be done." On the contrary, He felt death, and He felt the gravity. I grant you, there was all the difference between the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and that of any other. In any other case death is a gain. Death to a believer is gain, but still we ought not to wish to gain till the Lord's time comes for it. We ought to wish to do His will, the only right wish for a saint. He said, "It is enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life." He was impatient. "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." Yet he was running away from Jezebel. He was vexed; he was unhappy. He now fails after his testimony. He, was miserable now, but after all he wanted not to die when Jezebel wanted to take his life, and now that he is here he wants to die.

So "as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of Jehovah came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights." There are those that would try to throw a question upon this one transaction on the ground of its similarity to Moses, and even to the blessed Lord; but I meet all that in the face and say they are not similar — not one of them. They are each of them different. They are each exactly constituted to the

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

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

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

And now Elijah's trial comes, and, "What doest thou here?" brings out the state of his heart. "I have been very jealous." "I have been very jealous." There was the point. It was Elijah. Elijah was full of Elijah. "I have been very jealous for the Jehovah God of hosts — for the children of Israel" — that was his first thought. It was not that God was not in his thoughts. He was a true saint, and I trust that no soul will admit such a thought as that I wish to lower him. But I do wish to exalt the Lord; and I do wish to draw out the profit and the blessing of the word of the Lord; and I say, beloved friends, rather than that He should not have His glory, let every man be a liar. "I have been very jealous for Jehovah God of hosts; for the children of Israel have, forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I, even I, only am left." It was not true. It was not "I, even I, only." He was wrong. It was not that what he said was the smallest approach to deceit. There was no deceit about Elijah — none. But it was the blinding power of self even in a most true saint of God, for self always blinds, and the one and only thing that gives us to see clearly is when self is judged. "When thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light." Now singleness of eye means that — instead of having self as the centre which is occupied with every object around, or, at any rate, with such objects as engage me for the moment — one object fills me. The eye is single then, and then only.

That was not the case with Elijah. God was not his first thought. Self was possessing his mind as well as God. It was not what God was for Elijah, but what Elijah was for God. After he was grieved and wounded this is what it came to — "I, even I, only." "And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before Jehovah. And behold Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains,

and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but Jehovah was not in the earthquake." The Lord was not there either. "And after the earthquake a fire, but Jehovah was not in the fire." He was not in any of these exertions of judicial power. The time will come for wind, and earthquake, and fire, but not yet. It was the due testimony. It was the testimony for the prophet to bring in God, for that is the very business of the prophet — to bring in God, as we see in 1 Cor. 14 — that where there is prophecy, the man, if he were an unbeliever, is smitten in his conscience and falls down and says, "God is in you of a truth." That is the effect of it — the sense of the presence of God being there, not merely in the person that prophesies. It is not that God is in the prophet, but God is in you, the people of God — in the assembly of God — a much more important thing than even in the prophet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

first bury his father. Christ first, and not even the burial of one's father!

In the next chapter (1 Kings 20) — and on this I shall not dwell long — we are in the presence, for the most part, of the national place of Israel with their enemies, but yet we have the singular fact that even when judgment was approaching on the people, still when evil was judged, when the Lord was owned, He owns His people, a thing which people often wonder at. Look, for instance, at the religious world now. Well, does any one of us who understands the nature of the church of God doubt what God thinks of that which is going on under the name of the Lord Jesus there? Does any one of us doubt how horrible is the system of clergy? I am not speaking of any particular body, but of all, for to me it makes no difference whether it is clergy of Rome or clergy of anything else. It is all the same principle, for it is the direct dishonour of the Holy Ghost, and yet, beloved friends, does not God own the preaching of His word and of His gospel there? I am never surprised if there should be, apparently, ten times more effect produced in that which is flagrantly contrary to God than in that which is according to Him, and I will tell you why. If you are come out to see wonders wrought and to see great things done you have made a great mistake; and if you are caught by such things you will fall into a serious error, and you will lose the place of blessing to which you are called. Do not be deceived; we are come out to the word of the Lord. We are come out to that Person that was sent down from heaven to represent the Lord Jesus Christ here, and it is no question of what results; it is no question of great things done. On the contrary, wherever anything on our part becomes great, or becomes an object, or becomes something for us, depend upon it there is something human in it undiscovered; there is something of nature that is unjudged — infallibly so. We are called to the despised One, we are called to the rejected One, and it is not merely so, but we are called out of what is broken or ruined, and anything that would gainsay the breach and the ruin is not true in the sight of God; and if so I say that unless our souls are prepared to cleave to the Spirit of God and the word of God, apart from all appearances, we are unworthy of the place that God has given us.

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

So it was here. The Lord had partially dealt with the evil in Israel. He had smitten down, and Ahab was there and had seen it, and these prophets had been destroyed by the mere prophet of God,

Elijah himself, and God was free therefore to give an apparent blessing and a real blessing, as far as it went.

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

Well, one might have thought to look at the outside, "What a good state Ahab was in now," or, "The children of Israel." Not at all. They are going to be thoroughly judged, but inasmuch as there was a measure of the outward holding of the true God — a measure of truth and of honesty — so far the king was a party. He was in the presence of the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. God did, so far, grant this outward mercy from His hand. The enemies of Israel were utterly put to nought, and yet, for all that, there was no soundness in the king. And this became apparent from another circumstance deeply to be considered by us. When Ben-hadad now fled, a man that had been so bold and vaunting, his servants said unto him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother. Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities which my father took from thy father I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away."

But God had seen and God had heard. "And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of Jehovah, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of Jehovah, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee." And so it was. He found another man. He said the same. The man smote him and wounded him. Now he could be a sign — a sign to king Ahab — and he goes. "And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. And he hastened, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria."

Mercy is not always of God. There are times when God's honour is concerned, when mercy is a curse, when mercy is purely human and purely according to self-will, and the more deceitful because it seems so fair. There are times when to spare the enemy of the Lord is to fail entirely in meeting the

Lord's will and the Lord's glory. And so it was now, and we too have to do with the very same principle; and let us look to it, beloved friends, that whenever the time comes to stand firm, though it may seem to be showing an unkindness though it may seem to be a rejecting those that would gladly avail themselves of mercy — on the contrary we are bound to be firm against that which overthrows the glory of the Lord. God only can show us when mercy is right, and when it is fatal. Ahab entirely failed the Lord, and this becomes most apparent in the next chapter, on which I will not dwell in this lecture. The vineyard of Naboth becomes an object, and Ahab cowers before the difficulty even of that which he coveted. But the wife had none. Possessed of not one link of feeling with the people of God, an enemy, although the wife of the king of Israel — it was nothing to her to rob an Israelite. It was nothing to her to shed the blood of the guiltless. It was nothing to her to fly in the face of the Lord Jehovah, and what her weak and guilty husband shrank from she stimulates him to. Jezebel has therefore an undying, but a most miserable memory in the word of God, and the last book of Scripture does not fail still to bring before us the sad character and way of Jezebel for our instruction.

So Naboth perishes, but his blood was watched by the Lord, and the word comes forth, too, in consequence, through Elijah. "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of Jehovah. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every man child, and him that is shut up and left in, Israel, and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake Jehovah, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat" (1 Kings 21: 18-24).

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

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

2 Kings 1, 2.

It has been already remarked that the mission, or, at any rate, the proper ministry of Elijah closed with his own complaint against the children of Israel. God took him at his word. He pleaded against,

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

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

The messengers, then, arrested by the prophet, bring back the word of his coming death to the king, who soon finds out that it is none other than Elijah the Tishbite. He thereupon sends an officer with his company to take him. This was more easily said than done, and, in fact, brought an immediate judgment upon the heads of those that obeyed the king. We can understand that there are some who wonder at this. But it must never be forgotten that not even in Judah was it a mere monarchy, still less in Israel, now that they were divided. The government of the kingdom of Israel was a theocracy. No doubt the king was the representative of God's power, but still it was a throne of Jehovah. When, therefore, a king set himself in defiance of Jehovah he must take the consequences. No person, for instance, bearing the Queen's commission, is entitled to order his men against the Queen, and the Queen is perfectly entitled to punish them. Their pleading the order of the officer has nothing to do with the matter. The officer has no commission against the Queen. If the men choose to follow their officer's command against the Queen's authority they need not be surprised at what must be the issue.

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

kingdoms, inasmuch as if these kingdoms pretend to be theocratic it is merely a delusion and a falsehood, whereas in Israel it is the fact. And all the effort of Satan was to make the Israelites and their king forget that it was a theocracy — forget the peculiarity of their place and of their calling. In all other cases the pretension was a mere spurious thing, the cover of downright hypocrisy and tyranny; in Israel it was the simple truth. Now this clears away heaps of difficulty in Scripture, because then God's dealing, even in a manner so terrible as the prompting His servant to ask for fire from heaven to consume a captain and his men, because of the daring defiance against God, the God of Israel, is simply a necessary consequence of the position of Israel. Instead of being a difficulty, it is what must be, what ought to be. God would be giving up His own authority otherwise.

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

This then clears away, I trust, any difficulty to a believer, that can be found in the scene before us. And indeed I have made the remarks more general in order to take in many other difficulties, for after all we must remember, even if we come to the general principle of it, that God is acting not in a close rigid way, but He is acting on the broad thought of His own plan with every man, woman, and child in the whole world. Because what is death if it be not an act of God's judging sin? And those who quarrel therefore with God's dealing with fifty men at a time forget that He is dealing with every person, and themselves among the rest, as objectors. I merely make this remark because people overlook the plainest facts before their eyes.

Another thing to which I would call your attention is this. Had there been compunction of heart and activity of conscience in the captains of these fifties, not one of them would have perished. We see that most clearly from the last captain and his company. He humbles himself, and the mercy of God flows out at once. We may be perfectly certain therefore that in the case of the others there was hardness of conscience and indifference. For there was not one of the captains — and I doubt not, not one of the fifties — that did not know the prophet Elijah, that had not the fullest testimony to his heart and conscience that that man was the most faithful representative of God's will and glory and power. If therefore men chose to bear the risk (and the object was great, the design was the injury, if not the death, of that very servant of God, and this, too, when God was acting on the grounds of righteousness and of law), they must take the consequences. It is plain that government by theocracy would be impossible if God did not reserve to Himself the right to punish, to impress upon others the necessity of obedience. In this scene, therefore, we have clearly that God still puts honour upon His servant. His proper ministry was closed, but in this there is no sign of one disgraced or one upon whom God is heaping dishonour — not the slightest. And there cannot be a greater proof than this very fact in these closing scenes of Elijah, that when the leader of the last troop humbles himself before the prophet, the prophet goes down by the word of the Lord, for he at least, a servant, abides in obedience to God. He goes before the king and gives, to the king's face, what he little desired to hear — "On that bed thou must die!" "So he died, according to the word of Jehovah which Elijah had spoken."

But the next chapter (1 Kings 2) shows us the closing and final scene of Elijah. "And it came to

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

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

"According to thy faith be it done unto thee." He waits. He well understood that the time was not come to fulfil his office. He looks for more. The sons of the prophets gave no intelligence; they were indeed but intruders. They would have liked him to occupy his mind with their information. Elisha told them to hold their peace. His heart was elsewhere — it was with Elijah, and these great things that were in store for him that day. Nothing would suffer from the prophet. So Elijah said to him, "Tarry I pray thee here." He bade him remain in Bethel, and Bethel was a place of great note in Israel. And Jericho was a place, I will not say of note, but marked with a curse, and God would not allow His curse to slumber any more than His blessing. But Elisha would go on with Elijah.

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

and now he is on the very eve of it. Elijah puts the question, "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Not a double portion as compared with Elijah's, but a double portion as compared with any other as a successor of Elijah. A double portion was the firstborn's portion. He asked for this, for the firstborn's portion. "And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing, nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."

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

We shall find him, therefore, instead of being a mere repetition of his fiery predecessor, a most suited successor, and one, in divine wisdom, given to meet the exigencies of God's glory in Israel. But Elisha has another character, for although righteousness be of God, righteousness is not all that is in God. And indeed if we look at God's attributes, righteousness is not the highest, although it is that which God can never sacrifice. But, nevertheless, if we are to speak of attributes, grace is surely of a higher character, and as the heavens are higher than the earth, so surely is the earth the place where righteousness must govern, and heaven is the place where grace must govern. And Elisha therefore becomes not merely what he began, but he became also the witness of grace; and it is not therefore merely as Elijah, for he starts just like the apostles themselves, who received once their commission in the land of Israel, and then went forth bearing the solemn message and wiping the dust from off their feet against those who rejected them as witnesses. But those apostles received another appointment of a higher ministry which that same Lord Jesus that sent them through the earth sent them from the heavens — Himself ascending up there.

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

Elisha was the true and God-given successor of Elijah, but not after the same sort; for God does not repeat Himself. The God with whom we have to do is a living God, and the God that sent Elijah was now sending Elisha for another work and of a different character, and this it will be my object to open a little tonight — to show how the Spirit of God brings out this new ministry. For now Elisha has been waiting, just as Elijah himself had waited. There was this pause, and we can see the great purpose.

For undoubtedly had Elisha gone forward before, we have no reason to believe that there would have been any such character to his ministry. He waited, and he waited to prove that it is not always those that are the quickest to go forward in a work of the Lord that have, and bear, and produce, the best fruits. By no means. But those who know what it is to wait a little while that the Lord may deal with them before they are competent to deal with others, and also at the particular season.

And here we find how truly his waiting upon the Lord had this result. "And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho saw him they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master." Were these the men that could give information to Elisha? These same men now propose, and this proves how poor even the son of a prophet may be when he no longer speaks the word of the Lord, that they should seek Elijah, "Lest peradventure the Spirit of Jehovah hath taken him up and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send." That is, he first deals with them according to wisdom. In the next place, if they will be foolish, let them prove their folly. "They sent, therefore, fifty men, and they sought three days but found him not. And when they came again to him (for he tarried at Jericho), he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not."

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

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

And thence he goes up, not to the place which was under the curse, and where he brings in a divine power of blessing and healing, but, to Bethel. Bethel was not under the curse, but it was under the burden of corruption. It is the place where God had caused the pledge and promise of His faithful care to be given to one that needed it, to one that was under circumstances of the greatest possible

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

That which will deal with the last mockers is given here in a little way, if I may so speak. Here there were those that insulted the prophet. It might be only little children, but little children often let out what their parents mean. How often you may know what goes wrong at home by that which little children say. And so it was with these little ones that mocked Elisha, and said, "Go up, thou bald head! Go up, thou bald head!" Now it was mockery that filled the land; there is no question of it. Elijah had gone up, and it was as good as telling him that he had better follow; — that Elisha had better take the same route as Elijah. No doubt it would have been a relief to the carnal and the worldly and the idolatrous and the wicked generally in the land of Israel were there no Elijahs and no Elishas. It was therefore the taunt of unbelief, for if men had seriously realized that Elijah had gone up to heaven, and that Elisha was one that was here upon earth doing the will of God, neither the little children nor their parents would have so uttered their evil thoughts and feelings against the Lord. And so it was. And here again we have the same solemn thing, only in an exceptional way, with Elisha — we have judgment accompanying the heavenly testimony.

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

2 Kings 3 - 9.

However, the next chapter (2 Kings 3) brings us at once into earthly circumstances. "Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah." There was no doubt a painful state of things most offensive to God. Not that the king of Judah was not pious, but that his testimony was ruined by his alliance with the kingdom of Israel. Accordingly, then, we find there is great weakness here, though God deals in nothing but tender mercy and goodness. The king of Moab provokes a rebellion against the king of Israel, and Jehoram goes to put it down. He calls upon Jehoshaphat to fulfil his treaty obligations, and, with the king of Edom, goes against the refractory king of Moab. But they come into difficulties. They are in danger of being themselves overthrown.

"Alas!" said the king of Moab, after they had been for some time without water and food for the cattle — "alas! that Jehovah hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of

Moab." Jehoshaphat knew better. "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah," says he, "that we may enquire of Jehovah by him?" And one of them tells him of Elisha. Jehoshaphat at once recognized him. He knows that the word of Jehovah is with him. So they go down to him; and Elisha says to the king of Israel, "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay; for Jehovah hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab." False confidence soon yields to real despair, but faith can be calm and wait upon God. "And Elisha said, As Jehovah liveth before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."

There is no doubt in this a rebuke, and a stern one, but we shall find that the action of the prophet is full of grace. "But now bring me a minstrel." He felt, as it were, that he was out of tune with his proper ministry. The presence of the wicked king had disturbed the heavenly tone of his soul. "Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Jehovah came upon him. And he said, Thus saith Jehovah, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith Jehovah, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye and your cattle and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of Jehovah; he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." Thus an answer of mercy comes instead of judgment. "And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that behold there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." This very thing misleads the Moabites, for they fancy it is blood. "And they rose up early in the morning and the sun shone upon the waters, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood" — for God was pleased that so it should appear. "And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now therefore Moab to the spoil." They were caught in their own trap. "But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rode up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them; but they went forward smiting the Moabites even in their country. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kirharaseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about and smote it. And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom; but they could not." The defeat not only was immediate but hopeless, so much so that the king was guilty of an act that filled the people of Edom with indignation against Israel. "For he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel, and they departed from him." This then was another signal manifestation of the mercy that God had caused to shine through Elisha.

But we find further in the next chapter (2 Kings 4), and in a very beautiful way — not in these outward events that the world calls great, but in that which in my judgment is a still more blessed pledge, a witness of the real greatness of God. The greatness of God is far more shown in His care for souls, for individuals and in his ability to think of the least want and of the least necessity of His people. "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear Jehovah; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons as bondmen." Elisha asked her what she wished him to do, and what she had in the house. "And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." Now it is according to what we can receive that God loves to bless us. "Go, borrow thee," says he, "vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels

were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed." It is only so that the blessing stays. There never can be a stay to the blessing as long as there is a heart ready to receive it. What a remarkable illustration! "Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt."

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

So on one day that he was there, he bethought him of a return of love for the love that was shown to him. And he called the Shunammite, and when she stood before him, he said unto her, "Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care — what is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host?" We can hardly conceive such an enquiry from Elijah; it was perfectly in keeping with Elisha; and I am anxious to bring out strongly the contrast between this twofold ministry. "And she answered, I dwell among mine own people"; she was right, she was content; and godliness with contentment is great gain. "He said to Gehazi, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid" — but so it was according to the word of the prophet.

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

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

So here again was another test of faith, and she was right. "And Gehazi passed on before them,

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

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

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

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

Further, another thing — it was unselfishly gracious; for when the prophet was presented with twenty loaves of barley and full ears of corn in the husks thereof, he says again, "Give unto the people that they may eat." We remember the remarkable difference in the case of Elijah, who tested the faith of the poor widow by asking first for himself. Not but what he knew the power that would meet her need, but still he tested her after so severe a sort. But in this case, thoroughly characteristic of Elisha's ministry, what is sent to him, he gives to others. And his servant, astonished, asked him, "What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat, for thus saith Jehovah, They shall eat and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat and left thereof, according to the word of Jehovah." There is no stinting with God. But it is not merely in the midst of the distressed, and the mourning, and the needy, and the dying, or dead, of God's people. The grace of God, when once it begins to flow, breaks over all boundaries.

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

Israel's own powerlessness comes out, for he knew right well that it was not in man to cure leprosy; it was one of the things that God kept in His own power. However, here was exactly the opportunity of the prophet.

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

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

Naaman was of the Gentile race; but, alas! the Jew is accursed with the leprosy from which the Gentile is delivered. And such was the state, not merely without a blessing, but under a judicial curse from God. The Gentile then is delivered, and we see the beautiful picture of a man not only set free, but with conscience active because he was set free. I do not say that he was all right; it is in vain to expect that all at once, but he was on the right road. And beautiful it is, beloved friends, to learn the lesson — I think we all need it sometimes — not to hurry souls, and not to be anxious to form them according to our own mould or our own measure.

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

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

Now here again we see the same thing. It is not reprimand. No doubt there was carelessness, but it is the grace that can meet every need, the little just as much as the great. And I do not hesitate to say that true greatness shows itself in its capacity to take in the little. "And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim. Therefore, said he, Take it up to thee; and he put out his hand and took it."

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

So now, Elisha leads these very, blinded, men into Samaria, into the city which least of all they would have wished so to enter. They were helpless prisoners — so much so that the king of Israel wants to smite them; but the prophet stays his hand. "My father, shall I smite them?" "Thou shalt not smite them. Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master." And what was the effect? "The bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel. To have smitten them would have only provoked another campaign. To have smitten them with blindness and to have restored their sight, and then to have fed them with bread and water in the very heart of the enemy's land, brought the immediate surrounding of the power of God so impressively before their eyes that the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel. It was no doubt a most effectual blow, but it was a blow of mercy and not of judgment.

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

The blame was laid upon him. "But Elisha sat in his house and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him; but ere the messengers came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer" (for indeed he was) "hath sent to take away mine head." But there is no fire that comes down from heaven to consume him — quite the contrary. He said, "Behold this evil is of Jehovah; what should I wait for Jehovah any longer." There was no fear of God before the king's eyes. There was no confidence in God; and the fear of, and confidence in, God go together.

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

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

For in the next chapter (2 Kings 8) he goes and says to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Arise, and go thou and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn." What was he going to do? To inflict a famine upon the land? Nay. We do not hear that it was he that prayed for it, but we do hear that it was he that warned this Shunammite, so that she should be preserved from the bitter consequences of the famine. It was an intervention of grace and not an execution of judgment. The Shunammite woman is told to go where she can. "It shall come upon the land," says he, "for seven years. And the woman arose and did after the saying of the man of God. And she went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years." And when the full time of dearth was passed, this woman returned.

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

So the Jew may talk of his traditional glory, but he has got none now. All that he can have now is to his shame. He is a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth. No matter what he may be, such is an Israelite now. He is under the very badge of shame. He carries on his brow his sentence as a wanderer and a leper before God. But there are bright hopes for Israel, and to Israel they will surely come. Not to this generation — the generation that cast out the Lord and has continued in its unbelief — it will still come under the desperate judgments of God. But there is a generation to come. I believe therefore that as Gehazi is the type of this generation, the woman now returning after the seven years is the type of the generation to come. And she has all restored to her, and the fruits of the field. She not merely enters upon her land intact, but all that she should have had during the long seven years is all given back; for the Lord will repay with interest all that is due to Israel. And what will He not count due when He is pleased to take up the cause of His ancient people? Thus, then, we have Elisha still in the activity of grace.

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

wilt do unto the children of Israel. And Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, Jehovah hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." And so it came to pass. And the chapter pursues the public events of the kingdom, on which I need not dwell more than just to finish the story of Elisha.

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

2 Kings 9.

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

Hence, you never can separate real faith from real repentance; and as the one is the eye open to see God as revealed in His own Son in a way in which He was never seen before — I am speaking now, of course, of the full Christian knowledge of God; the principle is the same all through, but still I use it now as applicable to our own souls — I say that as faith is the eye that is open by the Holy Ghost to see God revealing Himself in Christ, so, along with that, the eye sees, spiritually, what it cannot naturally. It sees within as well as without; it sees backward as well as forward. It sees, not only the object of faith which God has presented, but, along with that, it invariably sees ourselves; and this is very often the way in which you will detect a faith that is not of God, because it is quite within the capacity of the human spirit to take a great deal of truth, and a person may be zealous for the truth, too — orthodox after a sort — as the apostle Paul speaks in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans of the unrighteousness of them that *hold* the truth in unrighteousness. And the word is particularly emphatic. It is not merely those that hold the truth loosely; they may be very tenacious, they may be exceedingly keen for points of dogma. And this is supposed in that place. It is persons that hold firm

and fast the truth, but what is the good of it if it is held in unrighteousness? Hence, therefore, they come under a more than ordinary judgment of God. Unrighteousness anywhere is evil, but specially where the truth is held ever so fast in unrighteousness is it abomination. And, sorrowful to say, so it is always where the testimony of God is found. It was so in Israel, for they had the truth in a way that the Gentiles had not; and Christendom now has the truth in a way in which Israel had not. Hence, therefore, the apostle brings in the word as a most solemn warning, not merely as descriptive of what was already a past thing, but a solemn hint of that which was coming to pass.

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

Jehu then comes forth, and the captains asked in astonishment what had he to do with that "mad fellow" (2 Kings 9: 11) — a word we do well to consider — for so a prophet appeared! a true prophet of Jehovah! This was his appearance to the eye of the men of the world — a mad fellow. The world was just the same in Israel that it was afterwards in the days of the apostles, who were set forth, as the apostle so touchingly says, alas, as the off-scouring of all men! So they were regarded then. And, beloved friends, bear with me if I remind every one that is here, so, more or less, the scorn and contempt of the world must be just in proportion to our entrance into the mind of God now. Be not deceived. I admit that there will be a change, but that change has not yet come. The world is the same unchanged world now — the circumstances, no doubt, varied. The texture, the colour of them may be changed a little, but the material is the same — the real condition and relation to God just the same as before. I speak not of outward privileges, they are incomparably greater; I speak of the inner heart of the world. It is no better; if possible, worse. No doubt there will be a change, but that bright day is reserved for Jesus. He that suffered must have the glory. Till then we must be content to suffer with Christ.

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

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

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

So king Joram was now returning to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, and Jehu at once proposes to pay a visit to his master. "So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there." At this very time, sad to say, the king of Judah was there too, and here we find a very solemn fact in God's government — that if one who ought to be on the side of righteousness swerves from it into an unholy alliance with evil, he suffers according to the character of the evil he joins, and not of the righteousness that he may have previously possessed. This seems very hard, and there are many that cannot understand that God could deal so with those that have a measure of righteousness; but the truth is, the more we examine the principle the more we see how just it is. A sin is a sin whoever commits it, but whose sin is the greatest? Surely sin in a christian is worse than sin in an ordinary man who has no Christianity. Sin is always measured by the privilege of him who commits it, and consequently in Israel God Himself showed these differences. The sin of the priest that was anointed had a totally different character from that of one of the people; and the sin of a ruler was not at all to be met in the same way as the sin of one of the common people. So God, in His own people, showed that there were these differences; but even when you leave the people of God it is just the same.

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

The very same thing is true in the church of God. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. It is not merely that each particle requires to be leavened, but that that which contains the leaven is pronounced upon by God. Doubtless, if the leaven is allowed to work its way it will actually corrupt the whole lump; but God acts, and so should Christians according to the principle of the thing, and not merely the bare fact which comes out before the world. So we find in the most serious matters. Take the lady, even, in the Second Epistle of John — she was responsible for the people she received. She might say that she was only a woman, and who was she to judge. Was it not a woman's place to be very unobtrusive? Yes, but it is a woman's place to be true, and, if she ought to be true to anybody, true to Christ above all. If she, therefore, received those who brought not the doctrine of Christ, her orthodoxy would be no shield. She is warned by the apostle that she became a partaker of their evil deeds. She

may not have received the doctrine; it is not supposed that she had received the doctrine — in that case she would have shared their guilt. But she shared the punishment because she chose to identify the name of the Lord in her person with those that were His enemies. Thus you see this great principle is found true in every part of the word of God, though it comes out most stringently in the New Testament, and most of all where it is a question of Christ, and not merely an ordinary evil thing. Now this is most righteous, because of all evils none so bad as that which touches Christ — Christ, the spring of all that is good — the only means of deliverance. When His name is made a cover for evil, and for that which destroys, how great is that darkness!

Jehu then rides on, and as they come, a watchman spies them; and after a little while, although messenger after messenger is sent without returning, it seems evident that it must be Jehu. His driving betrayed him. So the kings at last became disturbed, and Joram, wounded as he was, said, "Make ready," and he "and Ahaziah, king of Judah, went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu?" He had his qualms. Well he might. "And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many? And Joram turned his hands and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sank down in his chariot." But it did not end there, for while Jehu told his captain to take him up and cast him in the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, according to the word of Jehovah, judgment did not fail to overtake Ahaziah as he fled. Jehu followed after him and said, "Smite him also in his chariot," and so he too dies at Megiddo. But this is not all. There remained a worse end for the one whose craft and violence had wrought such evil in Israel — Jezebel. She painted her face, she fled to her old artifices; but they were all vain to preserve her. The hour of her judgment was at hand. "And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace who slew his master?" But Jehu was not to be alarmed or turned away from the dread commission that God had given him. And he lifted up his face to the window and asked who was on his side, and when the eunuchs showed themselves he commanded them to throw her down, and her blood, as it is said, was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trod her under foot.

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

2 Kings 10.

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

The deed was done. "It came to pass when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jezreel." And there they were found, and Jehu goes to vindicate the bloody deed. "It came to pass in the morning that he went out and stood, and said to all the people, Ye be righteous; behold, I conspired against my master and slew him, but who slew all these? Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of Jehovah which Jehovah spake concerning the house of Ahab; for Jehovah hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Thus the word of the Lord was most fully accomplished.

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

We see him next with Jehonadab, the son of Rechab. There was a certain measure of companionship between the two men, for Jehonadab was stern, according to his own principles, and Jehu, too, was carrying out in his way the work that he had been raised up of God for. But there was more than this in the mind of Jehu. It was not only the feeling of the need of judgment in the royal houses, but there was a worse evil against the name of Jehovah in Israel — the worship of Baal. To this, then, he applies his skill. He proposes a grand feast of all the worshippers of Baal, gives himself out as if he were the patron of the worship, calls for all the worshippers and priests of Baal, and in the most careful manner looks that there shall be none of the worshippers of Jehovah among them. Accordingly all were gathered together into the same building, their hearts as elated as the hearts of those that clave to Jehovah must have fallen and sunk within them — that one so bloodthirsty and so determined was the apparent patron of Baal, and the enemy of Jehovah. But here, at least, Jehu could keep his own counsel. And Jehu brings into the house his soldiers, his captains, and men of war, and they smote them with the edge of the sword. "And they brought forth the images out of the house of

Baal, and burned them. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

So far although it might have seemed to be, and no doubt was, a most fearful evil — the utter dishonour of God — which Jehu had laid his hands upon, still we see how little the heart of the man was according to God. "Howbeit, from the sins which Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan." There was a plague spot, and every unregenerate and unrenewed man manifests it. He that cares for the will of God will not care for this part of His will to the disparagement of that. And this is just exactly what the apostle James says so truly, that the man that fails in one point is guilty of all, because, if there were a conscience towards God, that one point would have its value. James is not speaking of a failure. He is not speaking of a person who, desiring to do the will of God, breaks down through carelessness or levity. That alas! is the portion of every soul who is off his guard. What James speaks of is wilfulness and evil — wilfulness, though it may be only shown in one particular way. But such is not a soul that is born of God. No man that is born of God will give himself up deliberately and wilfully to sin, even though it may be in the least thing. He may have to mourn, he may have to be ashamed, he may have to judge himself and hate himself, but that very thing shows that it is not a thing done deliberately and systematically, and without conscience. On the contrary, where he fails he grieves over his failure before God.

Now James describes nothing of this kind, but the plain, positive and uncared-for infraction of the law of God. Here we see it in Jehu. Whatever might be the zeal of Jehu against the guilty king of Israel, the guilty king of Judah, and the worship of Baal, there was a reserve, there was an inner chamber of the heart that was not reached yet, and there was an idol there, and that idol was that old idolatry — the calves of gold. The reason is plain. Jehu cared for himself and not for God, and the golden calves were a political religion which it suited the policy of the ten tribes to maintain; for had the ten tribes had no calves of gold they had returned to the allegiance of Jehovah in Jerusalem. It was the grand means of having another centre, for had Jerusalem been the one centre for the ten tribes, as well as for the two, the twelve tribes of Israel had united, and had they united in worship of God they had united under the same king. But in order to make the breach, therefore, distinct and wide, and widening, between the two kingdoms, Jeroboam, the founder of the kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, had devised this most crafty scheme. In order to make a kingdom he must make a religion, for if there be the dissolution of a common bond so important as religion, and if men's minds are divided in religion, you cannot count upon them in politics. That is just one of the great causes of political weakness in the present state of the world, for there is no such thing as cohesion, and consequently all political foundations are breaking in every land and tongue. So it was seen that it must be then. Jeroboam began this, and Jehu had no intention of giving it up. He dearly loved the kingdom; he dearly loved his place. He loved it better than God — the man not born of God. Hence, therefore, whatever might be his apparent zeal, it had its limits. Nay, further, it utterly failed, for the worship of the calves was still maintained by Jehu. Unbelief is never consistent. Faith may fail, but still faith desires consistency. Faith cannot be happy without consistency. Jehu had no conscience about it. Jehu took no care to walk in the law of the Jehovah God of Israel with all his heart, for he departed not from the sin of Jeroboam which made Israel to sin.

The consequence was that Jehovah pronounces upon him. His comparative fidelity would be met by God, and to the fourth generation there should sit upon the throne of Israel kings of Jehu's house. Israel had a short lived tenure given to it, but out of that tenure Jehu's house was to command for four generations. So God accomplished. But there was to be no real permanent line, for Jehu had shown no

real conscience towards God. How different from David! David's heart was to build Jehovah a house, Jehovah must take the first place: Jehovah would build David a house. He would give it to David's son to build Him a house. Thus it was then that God laid the foundation in that very thing of a permanent line of Judah not of Israel.

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

2 Kings 11 - 13.

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

We know what the love of a parent and of a grandparent is, but here in Athaliah was no right feeling. Her very blood was corrupted in her veins. And this wretched and selfish woman — this inheritor of the wickedness of Jezebel, now, alas! in the line of Judah has the opportunity, as she thinks, to stamp out the royal line of Judah. Both the desire of dominion and the hatred of the purpose of God — wicked allies — strove together to accomplish this nefarious purpose. Had the line of Ahab been extinguished? Had Ahaziah and his brethren fallen? The guilty purpose rose in her heart to put an end to the seed-royal of Judah, as that of Israel had been already extinguished. What interest had she? How did she care for it? The word of God had distinctly assured them that the line of Judah should never go out — the only real line that has remained unbroken from the beginning, and will throughout eternity. I speak now for the earth — up to eternity at least, for even if we only look at the earth under the government of God, that line, and that line alone, so abides.

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

Athaliah then, Joash's own grandparent — the one that ought most of all, from her sense of her

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

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

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

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

there was she slain. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between Jehovah and the king and the people, that they should be Jehovah's people; between the king also and the people. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down." And thus the worship of Baal was dealt with in Judah, as it had been before in Israel.

"In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places" (2 Kings 12). Nevertheless, as long as Jehoiada was there there was a measure of care outwardly for the things of God; and, as the priests had watched over Jehoash in his childhood, Jehoash now in his maturity watches over them and says to the priests, "All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of Jehovah, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of Jehovah, let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance; and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house." That is, instead of applying the contributions for the house of Jehovah they had applied them to themselves.

"Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? Now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Jehovah: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah." And so it was done: the work proceeded, Jehoiada watched over it, and the house of Jehovah was repaired.

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

But, after this, we find, "In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign," and he comes in contact with the prophet Elisha. This is a point that I wish to direct your attention to for a moment. Joash comes down, and weeps over Elisha's face, and says, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" — the same words that Elisha himself had used when he saw the prophet going up to heaven — that is, he acknowledged him to be the strength of Israel. What makes it so touching is, that he was dying; all natural vigour was departing from him. But just as Elisha owned that the strength of Israel was not in horses or chariots, but that he

was the one — that he was all their strength as far as God had employed him for that purpose — so here in the same way Joash the king of Israel owns the dying Elisha, and God owns the word. "And Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows; and he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow; and he put his hand upon it." But there was another and a mightier hand, although the hand of a dying man. "Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands," and God saw, and God gave the power, the needed power. "And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance." Truly dying Elisha was the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof; for God would show that the strength of his people does not lie in what man can see, but in the vigour that He himself imparts. "The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance," said he, "and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek till thou have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice and stayed."

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

2 Kings 13 - 17.

But not merely this. "Elisha died and they buried him" (2 Kings 13: 20). Was not Elisha gone then? Not so. There was to be even a more glorious witness in his death than in his life. In his life, no doubt, he had witnessed; but — with what great toil and anxiety and pains! — stretching himself over the dead youth, he had breathed, and put his face upon the child's face; and so it was, laboriously and with effort in appearance, that God raised him up. For God would show the magnitude of the deed that he was doing then, and although it was in no wise because of all the labour of the prophet, since God could have done it in an instant as truly at the beginning as at the end, yet still it was the way of God. But not so now. Even in death what a witness of the power of life, in Elisha, for, as we are told, "It came to pass as they were burying a man that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood upon his feet." And so will Israel another day — not more truly that dead man then, than Israel by-and-by, when all seems forgotten and Israel as good as dead, and buried — in response to the prophets, in answer to that voice which will never be truly extinguished, though it may be forgotten or despised, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and the hand of the Lord had written it. And according to the prophets Israel will rise again.

They may be, as now they are politically, in the dust of the earth, but they will rise again. This is the portion of Israel. There are those who suppose that nations shall not rise. Alas! it is a common error. And there is no error more common in this day than the denying the resurrection of the body, but we

know that the resurrection of the body is the most essential truth of God and the most sacred truth and the peculiar one of the gospel. For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not risen, and God's testimony is denied, for God's testimony is that He raised Christ from the dead which He has not done if the dead rise not. But contrariwise He raised Him up, and so the dead will be raised; and as the dead man here undoubtedly rises, so truly Israel will rise again, and, in truth, it will be "life from the dead" for all the nations. Such is the clear voice of prophecy, and it will be accomplished.

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

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

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

Then we find another remarkable dealing of God in the case of Azariah in the fifteenth chapter. We are told there that he was found smitten of the Lord. "And Jehovah smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house." The details of this are not given. He is called here Azariah. You must remember it is the same person who is called Uzziah in the book of Chronicles. But further, at this time evil was coming in more and more with a flood, and we have the sad and humbling history of Samaria. What brought in this terrible day was Ahaz — so it is that the Spirit of God speaks of him — for Ahaz was the worst king that had ever reigned in Judah up to this point. He it was that first brought in the Assyrian as a helper. At this time the Assyrian had come in in another way. We are told of Azariah king of Judah that "In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king

of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land."

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

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

Take the present time. No man can look upon the face of Christendom without feeling that it is out of joint — that it is altogether anomalous — that the state of things is inexplicable except to the man who reads it in the light of the word of God — that it is confusion, and that the worst confusion is where the highest profession of order is found, and that the truest order is found where people would tax them with disorder; for I believe in point of fact, it really is so. You must remember that in an evil day the external order is always with the enemies of God; the true internal order is always found with those that have faith. Hence it is that now that which has the highest pretension to order is, as we know, the Eastern church — the Latin church; but of all the things under the sun in the form of religion, that which is most opposed to God is, surely, the Latin church. And therefore we see clearly how those who make the highest claim to order are precisely those that are most opposed to God's way, and the reason is plain because the great assumption, invariably, of those that stand to outward order is succession — a plain continued title from God!

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

Now, then, in this very place I call your attention, beloved friends, to this grand point. When this evil became insupportable, God granted this precious light of His own word — the light of prophecy, and I would press this strongly upon all here who love the word of the Lord. Use the same thing, not by any means to make it a kind of study — a kind of exclusive occupation, for nothing can be more drying up to spiritual affections than making, what I may call, a hobby of prophecy or of anything else; but I do say that where Christ has the first place, where all the precious hopes of grace, where all our associations with the Lord have their true place and power, a most important part is filled up by the understanding of that light which God gives to judge the present by the future. This was the object of the prophecies of Isaiah, for it is a very important thing to remember that the object of prophecy is, and must be, moral — that it is not merely facts; and there is no greater mistake than to suppose that the prediction of events is what makes a prophet. Not so. I admit that prophets did predict events, but prophecy does not mean predicting. Prophecy is always bringing in God to deal with the conscience. If that is not done the grand object of prophecy has failed. And here you have a test, therefore, as to whether you understand and rightly use prophecy. Does it bring your conscience into the presence of God? Does it deal with what you are about? Does it judge the secrets of the heart? Does it shine upon your ways? Where this fails, God's object is not attained. I just draw attention, therefore, by the way, to this beautiful contrast to man's ways on the one hand — this flood of evil that was now rising to its height. Nevertheless God, astonishing to say, instead of meeting it by immediate judgment answers it by prophecy. The glorious light that He caused to shine through the prophet Isaiah was His answer. No doubt that made the wickedness of what was going on in the land more apparent, but it had another purpose; it bound up the hopes of every believing soul in Israel with the Messiah that was coming. That was God's great object. It dissociated them from present things, giving them a sound judgment, and means to form an estimate of it, but it bound up their hearts with the Lord.

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

On this I do not now say more than just refer to it. It was a sad succession for a sad people. The ten tribes now dispersed in Assyria awaiting the day when the Saviour will awake them from the dust of the earth — when the Saviour will call them back to the land of their inheritance. But we must look at other scriptures before we reach that blessed point.

2 Kings 18.

The kingdom of Israel, or Samaria, was now closed, not for ever, but for a season, and a season protracted long, even unto this day. There has been no restoration save in individuals. We know that

Jehovah will set His hand a second time, and will recover them and bring them back with unexampled power and blessedness into their own land, for theirs was ever a sorrowful history. It was humiliating to think of them as the people of God from the very beginning of their separate existence unto its close. It began in self-will, and it ended in shame and sorrow. Truly, they; "lay down in sorrow." It must ever be so when men endeavour to kindle a fire of their own sparks. But not only this. The peculiar state of things that followed Israel in that land which they had vacated is brought before us — the mongrel population that the king of Assyria brought from the east and established in Samaria — mere pretenders to the name of Israel, who served their own gods but incorporated nominal allegiance to the Jehovah of Israel. This we have seen, and the Spirit of God leaves the matter before us without comment.

But now the grace of God works remarkably in Judah, for it was a serious time that was at hand. The same power of Assyria that destroyed Israel threatened the last portion of the people of God, and Judah at this time was extremely low — never so low. They had been weakened by the kingdom of Israel; one king having slain no fewer than one hundred and twenty thousand men. The Moabites had gained great advantages. So in Edom and in other ways, not to speak of internal dissolution, and all those influences which corrupt and destroy a nation's strength. For never does a nation fall by external power until it is undermined within. And so it was with Judah. But God, of His grace, saw fit in that dark and desolate day, to raise up a blessed man — not in the figure of David — neither so illustrious, on the one hand, nor stained with such sad spots of shame — one therefore of whom the Holy Ghost could say, "He trusted in Jehovah the God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings 18: 5). I do not think that by that it was meant to compare Hezekiah, the one here spoken of, with David, although in a certain sense that might be true, taking the evil as well as the good into account; but you observe He says, "The kings of Judah," not "of Israel." The Holy Ghost is not comparing him, therefore, with the day when the kingdom was unbroken, but with the times when Judah had a separate existence from the ten tribes, and in that case we can readily see how perfectly and accurately true it is. And it is a good thing to accustom our minds to see the perfect accuracy of the word of God.

Hezekiah was remarkable not merely for his fidelity in this respect. Indeed he had a goodly place in the roll of the kings of Judah, for he removed the high places, he brake the images, he cut down the groves, he broke even the brazen serpent which up to this time had become an object of idolatry to the children of Israel; so shamefully degraded were the people of the Lord. And it is very humbling to find that this is only discovered now. Had there not been kings — pious, devoted, faithful? What had Jehoshaphat been about? What had Asa? The truth is that there is nothing that more strikes us than the way in which we pass over either the good of scripture or the evil of practice. The children of God suddenly wake up to find that they have been doing something that will not bear the light of God. They have never seen it before. How dependent upon the word of God! Yet there it was; and when once the light is brought to bear upon it, it is indefensible nevertheless. God thus shows us that it is not only that we need the word, but we need God. We need Himself to apply and give force to His own word. As the apostle says, "Now I commend you" — not merely, "to the word of His grace" — "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace. "

So now Hezekiah proved. God had raised him up, and it was not only that he continued in the path of faithfulness as others before him, removing these unsightly abominations that were ever rising up afresh in Israel, and repeating themselves from generation to generation, so inveterate is the heart even among God's people in what is bad; but further, the superior light of Hezekiah's soul, granted by the Spirit of God, detected the offence in the idolatry that was paid to what was once a most signal sign

of divine power and blessing. For we know well that there was in the wilderness no way in which God marked His healing power more gloriously than in this very serpent of brass — the type of Christ made sin. This is the reason why it was a serpent of brass. It was not only Christ a sacrifice, but it was Christ made sin, and therefore He is shown under this emblem of the power of evil, not that there was any evil in our blessed Lord, but that He must come under all the consequences of it in judgment upon the cross, in order to deliver us from the effects of evil.

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

Well, then, Hezekiah shows us this great principle — that we must go back to first principles, and that we must judge everything even if it can boast of the most hoary head of antiquity, by the light of God — by God's word. So judged, the serpent of brass must perish! It might be ever so interesting as a relic, but Satan having turned it to an evil account, there must be no sparing. It is destroyed. "He brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made." It was a bold act, and not more bold than faithful, and all this because "he trusted in the Jehovah God of Israel." There is nothing that describes more accurately and powerfully the spiritual character of Hezekiah than trust in God. And trust in God is the root of all that is blessed, I may say, in a believing man. There may be other qualities. We shall find, if we look at Josiah, for instance, that there might be even greater energy against what was wrong, but nothing can make up for lack of trust, for trust is essentially what magnifies God and what keeps us in lowliness before God. It is the great expression of dependence, and for a man there is nothing more lovely than dependence upon God.

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

result is this — unhesitating obedience to God's word.

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

We shall see, therefore, that it had a mingled character, and I judge that it was mingled because the intervention of God, while it was real, was not without a permitted and a deep humiliation. And I think you will always find that where a soul is faithful, but where there is flesh mixed with it, God will honour that faithfulness, but He will rebuke the flesh. And this is too common a feature. It is a rare thing, beloved brethren, where we are enabled both to be faithful and be lowly, but very often in the desire to be faithful we lose a little our balance, and the very energy of faith that goes forward is sometimes connected with a little forgetfulness of our own proper place. I think that there was this mixture in Hezekiah, because of the way of God's dealing with it. There are two ways of judging, first the looking at a person's conduct, and secondly observing how God deals with it; and both, in my judgment, answer to each other in this case. However that may be, we have now the connection of Assyria not simply with Judah — the conqueror of Israel comes up against Jerusalem. God had permitted Assyria to sweep away the ten tribes. Was there not enough wickedness in Judah for God to deal with now? We shall see how God acts. We shall see how God answers fidelity of heart and trust in Himself.

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

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

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

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

So with David. Who would have expected that David would ever find himself in the army of the Philistines? Why there never was such a man for putting down the Philistines. It was the very thing that made him such a man. I may say, as far as the public knowledge of Israel was concerned, he was the choice champion of Jehovah against the vaunting Philistines, and yet that is the very man who, if he began his career against the Philistines, afterwards finds himself through want of faith ranged with the Philistines, and it was only the Philistines' jealousy and distrust of David that hindered him from fighting against Israel instead of being their champion! Such was the painful reverse in the very point in which David was so conspicuous.

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

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

shakeh tells him to speak to the king. "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest (but they are but vain words), I have counsel and strength for the war."

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

"Is not that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?" Rab-shakeh could not distinguish between the idols and Jehovah. Jehovah to him was only an idol — one out of many idols, and inasmuch as Hezekiah had broken down all the idols, he fancied that they were different forms of Jehovah's worship, because that was the heathen idea of God — the philosophic idea — the idea of the higher classes. The lower classes, perhaps, regarded them as so many gods, but there were men a little above that who thought that it was God displaying himself in his various attributes. That was the philosophy of heathenism any way. And Rab-shakeh seems to have been a bit of a philosopher, and so he taunts the ministers of king Hezekiah with having destroyed the worship of Jehovah. "Now, therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?"

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

It is true the servants of Hezekiah were rather feeble. Nothing was to be won by deprecating the enemies of the Lord. It is always well to remember that they are enemies. Ask no favours of them, and expect none. But these three men were alarmed; they were afraid of the effect upon the Jewish people, and therefore they begged him not to talk in the Jews' language in the ears of the people. And what could that do but call out from Rab-shakeh a more vehement appeal and more vaunting than ever. "But Rab-shakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words?" His object was to excite rebellion among the people of Jerusalem and Judah. "Then Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you." It suggested an idea. It exactly gave him a new weapon, a new argument, a new ground of appealing to the people, which he might not

have thought of if the fears of Hezekiah's servants had not put it into his head. The very thing which they feared and asked him not to do gave him the idea of doing it. At all events he acts upon it at once. "For he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not to Hezekiah." And so he asked him to come out and surrender to the king, and the king would give them a good land like their own, and then he spreads before them all the destruction of other cities and people greater than they, and how powerless their gods were against Assyria.

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

2 Kings 19, 20.

"And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz" (2 Kings 19). He goes to Jehovah; they are sent to Jehovah's servant. This was right. He looks in prayer to God himself, and he expects an answer through His servant. "And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be Jehovah thy God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which Jehovah thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah." And the answer is immediate. "Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith Jehovah, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. "

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

reproach the living God."

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

Such was the decree of God, for even in the case of the enemies God is just as peremptory, and as thoroughly governs as among His friends. It is not man that governs in any case, but God. God is sovereign, and therefore does according to His own will. It is not a question of the party that has the most strength or the most wisdom. It is never so in the world, for God acts according to His own sovereignty. It was not because of their superior power that Babylon, or Persia, or Greece, or Rome achieved the empire of the world. Small beginnings in most of them. And in those too who made the longest and the most permanent conquest of the world, it was in no way a question of their own strength, but God was pleased so to work in His sovereignty. So here in this case this diminutive and reduced kingdom of Judah God meant to put honour upon, and now we may say Jerusalem scarcely had anything left. The fenced cities of Judah were taken, and here was Jerusalem, and it seemed as if a shovel of earth, so to speak, would be sufficient to bury Jerusalem in those days. But not so. The very fact that the Assyrian came full of his proud confidence was that which drew out the arm of Jehovah in defence of His despised city; but when He speaks by the prophet because of the Assyrian despising Zion, it is Zion that despises the Assyrian. For, as we have already observed, God speaks according to His thoughts.

"That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that Jehovah hath spoken concerning him: The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." We know right well that the Assyrian shook his hand at Zion, and quite expected to have an easy conquest. But God retorts now for His despised city. "The daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even again the Holy One of Israel." The Assyrian little knew that. I do not doubt that there was a certain uneasiness. There always is: I care not how simple the Christian may be; I care not how great the man of the world may be; you will never find a man of the world, let him be ever so bold, or ever so great in the presence of a genuine trial of God without a certain anxiety, a certain uneasiness. He may despise; he may see things that draw out his scorn and contempt; but he is conscious, in spite of his will, of something strange, something that baffles him, something that he cannot understand. I have no doubt then that so it was with this great Assyrian, in presence of this contemptible city which stood out against him in a manner so unexampled. And so the Lord appears, and the prophet brings out, in the most grand and sublime terms, the manner in which He would deal with this haughty conqueror; and as he closes, he says, "For I will defend this city." Jehovah would take it upon Himself: "I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." He must return by the way he came. "And he shall not come into this city, saith Jehovah."

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

But now (2 Kings 20) we have the dealings of God, not with the Assyrian in defence of Jerusalem, but with Hezekiah. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live." So, as his manner was, he bows; he turns his face to the wall. What had he now to do with anything outside? "He turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto Jehovah, saying, I beseech, O Jehovah, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." Up to this time it could not be said that death was conquered, for indeed it was not. Even to a believer death was not without its terrors. Now it is stripped of its terrors, and death is no longer the king of terrors to a Christian, and for this simple reason, that death is now compelled to be the servant of the Christian, compelled to usher the departing Christian into the presence of the Lord. This is not loss, but gain. Who would weep sore at a great gain? Indeed, there might be some, but certainly they are souls who do not understand their privileges. However, it was not so then, and this is one of the great changes now effected by the mighty work of redemption. Hezekiah then wept sore.

"And it came to pass afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of Jehovah came to him saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer." There again it was not long; it was immediate. If in the previous instance, it was that same night there came the destroying angel, so now I may say, that same minute came the prophet, or at any rate the word of Jehovah to the prophet. The answer was immediate. "I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears" — for God did not despise them. "Behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of Jehovah. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." And so a certain sign was given him — a sign that Hezekiah takes in remarkable contrast with his father. When the same prophet asked Ahaz to search for a sign in heaven or earth, Ahaz pretended that he could not do such a thing — that it was not for him to ask a sign. But there would have been far more real subjection of heart if he *had* asked. When God bids us ask; it is a serious thing to refuse. We ought to be bold in faith, and Hezekiah was; for whereas there was a double sign, either the dial going forward or going backward, he chooses the more difficult of the two. To advance the dial would be only, in a certain measure, natural, though it might be an extraordinary act of God, but to make the dial go back was a far more striking proof of the interference of Jehovah, and, accordingly, Hezekiah does ask; and Hezekiah was right. Hezekiah answers, "It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees." And so it was.

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

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

And it would be a great mistake to suppose that all these circumstances have only an historical aspect. This very part of the book is strongly typical. Anyone who is familiar with the prophets is aware that these two kingdoms which were then about to contend for the sovereignty of the world, will have their representatives in the last days. The Assyrian, strange as it may sound, will reappear. Not only will there be an Assyrian in the last days, but he is the last national enemy of the Jewish people. When God shall have accomplished His whole work in mount Zion and Jerusalem, He is to deal with the Assyrian. And Babylon too will have also its representative in the last days quite distinct. And it is of very great importance to distinguish; for Babylon was the beginning of the great imperial system. The Assyrian was the last leader of the national system. These are two distinct systems which we find in the word of God. As long as Israel was owned as a nation for God, the Assyrian had power. When Israel received its first great humiliation and Judah was about to be destroyed, Babylon was allowed to come into supremacy on the fall of Assyria. The Assyrian therefore was the last holder of the great national power of the Gentiles. The Babylonian was the first that was allowed to become the sovereign of the world — to acquire an imperial authority. In the last days there will be the counterpart of these two powers, but in an inverse order. The Assyrian was before Babylon, viewed now in the manner which I have been describing. In the last days what answers to Babylon will be before the Assyrian. The reason is manifest. Babylon has to do with Judah, Assyrian with Israel. Now, in point of fact, Israel will only be brought back after God has dealt with Judah. It is the enemy of Judah that comes first in the last days, and the enemy of Israel will come up afterwards. That is the reason of the inverse order in the last days.

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

When dealing with the Assyrian it is different. He puts himself at the head of Israel. He is pleased to use them as his battleaxe. He comes as the head of the armies of Israel — not as a mere human king, but nevertheless He is pleased to put honour upon them, and so He will fight for His people. So it is described in the fourteenth of Zechariah. There it is not the antichrist or the beast that is destroyed. It is not the Babylonish power, or the last holder of the Babylonish power. It is the Assyrian. The Assyrian is destroyed when the Lord is with Israel. The one that answers to Babylon is destroyed when the Lord is coming from heaven, before He is joined to His people Israel. It is then the inverse order. In the actual history the Assyrian was swept away first; but it will not be so when the Lord comes. The last

holder of the image power of Babylon — and that is the reason why I call it Babylon — will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus coming from heaven; and then will remain the great Assyrian, the head of the nations who will make a conspiracy of the nations to destroy Israel, and the Lord will overthrow him for ever. Such is the order of events in the future, so that the dead and risen Son of David has a most important place in the last days as the instrument of the deliverance from both the power of Babylon and also from the power of Assyria.

2 Kings 21 - 25.

Well, then, in the next portion of our book (2 Kings 21) we see how truly a pious father may be followed by an impious son. Manasseh, young as he was, did not only begin to reign, but "did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah after the abominations of the heathen, whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of Jehovah, which Jehovah said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah. And he made his son pass through the fire." Burnt them to Moloch. Cruel king! "And observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of Jehovah to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which Jehovah said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. But they hearkened not."

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

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

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

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

The account then of the great reformation that was wrought is fully gone into in the rest of the chapter, but I shall only add that although the king had been thus faithful, he slips out of the path of the Lord in opposing Pharaoh-nechoh. God had not called him to it, and if the Lord always blesses fidelity, and loves to bless wherever He can, on the other hand the Lord is righteous in His government; and if therefore the righteous man slips out of the path of fidelity he bears the consequences. What we sow to the flesh, we must reap in corruption. It matters not who. Converted or unconverted, it is always true. So with Josiah. There might be grace on the Lord's part to take him away from the evil to come, but I do not doubt it was a chastening upon his eagerness of spirit in opposing the king of Egypt without a word from the Lord.

However, the king of Egypt put Jehoahaz in bands. The people had made him king in Jerusalem in the stead of Josiah, and he made Eliakim his brother king, changing his name to Jehoiakim. And

Jehoiakim, we are told, was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. But all this was only one sorrowful event after another.

In the next chapter (2 Kings 24) we have the mighty king of Babylon, who first comes before us — Nebuchadnezzar, the destined beginner of the great imperial system with which we have not done yet; for the world is yet to see the last phase of the imperial power that began at this very time, or shortly after. This gives deep interest to what we are now looking at. I am aware that men are not expecting it. This does not at all hinder its truth as the word of God, and His word alone can decide such questions. The first then who acquires the empire of the world — Nebuchadnezzar — comes up, and Jehoiakim, became his servant three years. Afterwards he rebels. The Lord puts him down, and Jehoiachin his son reigns in his stead, and the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land, because he was put down by Nebuchadnezzar. These are the steps by which he arrives at the throne of the world, according to the sovereign gift of Jehovah. And Jehoiachin does evil; and at that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar came up when he rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar himself too besieges the city and carries away the treasures of the house as well as the princes and mighty men. Not only the king, but as we know also a man afterwards most distinguished, and of such deep interest to us — Daniel, the prophet. Then follows another sorrowful state. Zedekiah having been made king provisionally in the land over a small remnant, he too is guilty of breaking the oath of Jehovah, and Nebuchadnezzar comes against him. Here we find the last phase of Jerusalem's sorrowful history of the last batch of the Jews that was carried down into captivity. And this is pursued to the end of the twenty-fifth chapter, and this closes the book.

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