Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

2 Kings

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Chapter 1

Elijah's ministry resumed in Israel

If God has shewn that He took notice of His servant's fault, and did not pass it lightly over, He did not fail towards him in either tenderness or faithfulness. He acted towards him as towards a beloved and faithful servant, even at the moment in which He made him sensible of his failure in the energy of faith; for He did not make others aware of it, although He has communicated it to us for our instruction.

I said failure in the energy of faith; for, with respect to the mass of the people, Elijah's judgment was just. God reveals His thoughts and His intentions to him, and even points out to him the agents He will employ; and, while definitely replacing the prophet by Elisha, God nevertheless makes him publicly re-enter His service, by commanding him to call Elisha to accompany him in his work. Thus Elijah resumes his ministry in the midst of Israel.

Ahaziah's sin and its reproof in power

Now Ahaziah walked in the way of his father, and openly confessed Baal to be his god by sending to consult Baal-zebub at Ekron. Sent to meet the king's messengers, Elijah pronounces his sentence from the Lord. Incensed at being opposed in his iniquity, Ahaziah sends men of his army to take him.

We find again here the same judicial character in Elijah's miracles which was spoken of before — a character pointed out by Jehovah Himself. He calls down fire from heaven to consume these men. The last of those sent by the king, owning the authority and power of Elijah, has his life spared. Elijah goes down with him to the king, to declare again to him in person Jehovah's judgment which awaited him.

Chapter 2

Elijah's translation to heaven

And now we reach the end of the troubles and afflictions of this precious and faithful servant of God. And, if we do not find in his case the calmness of the ascension of Jesus, who, while blessing His disciples, ascends to His eternal and familiar home; if this peculiar characteristic became His departure alone, who — perfect in Himself and in His human life, in which nothing had been found out of harmony with the heaven He was re-entering — went back to His Father, from whom He came; if in Elijah's rapture we find not the elevation of One who, having come forth from the Father and come into the world, again left the world and returned to His Father, without having for one moment departed from this word — "The Son of man which is in heaven," and who had so much the more right and title to be there, that He had perfectly glorified the Father here below; if, in a word; he who goes up is not the God-man ascending after having finished the work committed to Him, at least the presence of God is felt throughout the whole scene in the most solemn manner — a God whose presence alone can abrogate the laws of His government, and set aside, in His servant's behalf, that which is appointed unto

men.

Moreover it is not surprising that such an event should have been accompanied with the mysterious solemnity which in fact surrounds it, and that those who were present should feel that something was about to happen which was beyond the common track of human joy and sorrow.

Elijah, taken away by the power of God, quits the earth without passing through death. We find in the fact itself a marvellous testimony to the sovereign goodness of God, and to the approbation He bestowed upon His faithful servant.

The details are worthy of all attention.

Elijah's maintenance of the relationship between God and Israel

If the prophet's translation to heaven is the great object presented to faith, we find also that he goes to every place that had a voice with respect to God's relationship to Israel. Elijah maintained, in spite of the king, the relationship between God and Israel, according to God's faithfulness, and as a prophet upon the earth.* He did not maintain it by the king, which, since David, was the normal state of the people. This earthly relationship was impossible, and was to close by an act of judgment. It is this which took place, with respect even to Judah, in the rejection of Christ. {* This consideration makes Elijah's position pretty evident. We have seen that prophecy was the means of maintaining God's relationship with Israel, in a sovereign manner, when the ark had been taken and the priesthood was fallen. Prophecy still holds this place in the presence of royalty in a state of failure, which, instead of maintaining the people in relationship with God, causes them to depart from Him. While presenting their true King to the people according to Zechariah's prophecy, Christ filled also this prophetic office according to the word of Moses, only in a manner quite peculiar. It must be remembered that, in comparing Elijah and Elisha with the Lord, Christ is looked at in this character. This gives a very important position to the function of prophecy. (Compare Hosea 12:13).}

Nevertheless the counsels of God change not; they will be fulfilled in heavenly power.

The starting-point of Elisha's ministry

Elisha, is, so to say, the link between these two things as to prophecy. He does not return to Horeb, to announce the uselessness of an earthly ministry, and, in some sort, to place the broken law again in His hands who gave it, but who was really acting in grace [2]. The starting-point of his ministry is the ascended man, evidently quite a new starting-point in God's messages to Israel. Up to this point he constantly attached himself to Elijah. The latter had thrown his prophetic mantle over him (1 Kings 19); Elisha thenceforth was as if identified with him. {* It is this grace, which Elijah had not properly understood; that was the only means by which God could maintain His relationship with the people; so that a return to Horeb could only put an end to the relation itself as standing on Sinai ground, and especially to the ministry of Elijah which took no higher position. Nevertheless God wrought for the revelation of all this.

Elisha's faith

At the present moment, when Elijah is under the extraordinary power which is to snatch him away from Elisha, will the faith of Elisha maintain this position? Yes: the power of God upholds him, and he accompanies Elijah until the chariots of God Himself separate them, and in such a way that he may see Elijah ascending to heaven upon them. Through grace the whole heart of Elisha was in the prophet's ministry, and by faith he walked in the height of God's thoughts in this respect.

The path of Elijah and Elisha from Gilgal beyond Jordan

Let us trace their path upon the earth. It is no longer the weakness of man, as when he went to Horeb, but the power of God; and Elijah traverses all that in type had to do with God's relationship with Israel, even death itself (and that dry-shod), up to heaven. Gilgal* is his starting-point — the consecration of man to God by death applied to the flesh — the place where Israel was cleansed from all remembrance of Egypt, where the people were set apart for God, where their camp was fixed for their victories under Joshua; in a word, it was the place where, by circumcision,** Israel was definitively separated unto God. Elijah repairs thither, and acknowledges it thus according to God, although it was now only a place of sin to the people.*** He attains the mind of God with respect to the people, as separated from evil and consecrated to God. He sets out with this. He thinks with God: this is faith. {* Reflection will shew us that all this is a moral history of the life of Christ, save that Christ is what He makes us to be. But this is everywhere true. Still it was experimentally realised in Him. He had not to be circumcised; still it was the circumcision of Christ. See following note. So the high priest was washed as well as the priests. Though absolutely obedient in nature and will, He learned obedience. ** This, as we have seen in the Book of Joshua, was in Canaan after the passage of Jordan, as the circumcision of Christ (that is, His separation from evil which, always true in His Person, was externally made good in His death) has a true heavenly character, and to us is by being risen, and in heavenly places. *** See Amos 4:4, Hosea 9:15, and many other passages in the prophets. This is a very striking fact, just as the cross now is a matter of constant idolatry. The memorial of good, of the denial and death of flesh too, is to flesh the power of evil. Oh, what is man!}

Elisha will not leave him; and they go away to Bethel; that is to say, Elijah places himself in the testimony of God's unchangeable faithfulness. to His people [6].* He acknowledges it; he takes his place in it; and Elisha is with him. {* See Genesis 28:13-15. Here too one of the calves was set up; the place of special blessing again made the place of idolatry.}

These were the two main branches of faith — of the faith of God's people: the setting apart of the people, of man, unto God; and the unchangeable and perpetual faithfulness of God to His people, whatever their circumstances may be.

Israel (what a triumph to Satan!) had set their false gods, their golden calf, in Bethel. Elijah (and this is faith) links himself with the mind of God there in spite of this. These two things compose the life of Jesus on earth in the midst of Israel.

Elijah cannot stay there. What will he find in going farther? The scene changes: he is still with God. But if transgression is multiplied at Gilgal, and if false gods are worshipped at Bethel, as "the king's chapel and the king's court," the curse will meet him (for Israel has placed itself under it). He goes to Jericho. It was there that formerly the power of the enemy barred the whole land against Israel, and God had smitten Jericho and pronounced a curse against it. Man had rebuilt it to his own destruction (1 Kings 16: 34). Pleasant as its situation was, the curse of God still rested on it. Elijah goes thither, and Elisha accompanies him, and refuses to leave him.

But he does not remain there either; he is still under the mighty hand of God, Elisha following him. The sons of the prophets give their testimony to that which shall take place (but they only look on from afar, when the two prophets draw nigh to Jordan); Elisha knows it too, and puts an end to a discourse which, adding nothing to his knowledge of the mind of God, and disturbing the concentration of his thoughts, tended rather to weaken the union of his soul with Elijah.

Elijah comes at length to Jordan, the type of death, which should carry him out of the land of earthly promise, and break the links of God Himself with Israel on that footing. He crossed it indeed dry-shod. We know that he ascended without having tasted death, but typically he passed through it. (It is not a question here of expiation, but of passing through death). And now, beyond the borders of Israel — the land of law, forsaken of God — he can freely propose blessing to Elisha according to his desire.

As Jesus said, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." In every detail death is the path of liberty. Elisha's request granted Elisha, attached by the power of God to the prophet — to the same ministry which Elijah had just left — asks for a double portion of his spirit; and, although now separated from him, yet associated by faith with Elijah, gone up on high (testified by his having seen him in his heavenly condition), his request is granted. He again receives Elijah's mantle; but it is that of the ascended Elijah.

As we have said, the starting-point of his ministry is not Sinai. It is heaven beyond the borders of Canaan, the other side of Jordan, which is the type of death. For, the law having been broken, and prophecy — which set before the people their relation to God on earth, and His blessing on that earth — having been proved powerless for restoration, the faithful prophet, forsaking a land which had rejected him, had taken his place outside a blind and ungrateful people, and had been taken up to Him who had sent him (hidden, so to speak, in God; although that expression, in its fulness, is true of the precious Saviour alone).

Elijah demands the execution of justice

Up to Jordan Elijah demanded, by his ministry, that the righteous claims of God upon His people should be satisfied. He sets these claims before them. He must withdraw, and God takes him away from a people who did not know Him.

At Sinai he acted in human weakness, although God had revealed Himself. Why retire to Horeb, where the law dwelt which the people had broken? This could be only to demand the execution of justice. While manifesting that He could in His own time exercise justice, God reserved to Himself His

sovereign rights of grace. But in effect it is fitting that it should be exercised in a sovereign manner beyond the limits of man's responsibility. The relationship of Christ with Israel, with man, clearly explains this. Therefore God first shews that grace has reserved the perfect number who were known of God in Israel; then, having sent Elijah to fill up the long-suffering of the will of God in grace towards the people, instead of cutting Israel off, He places ministry in a position with respect to Israel, in which He can act sovereignly in grace towards every one who has faith to avail himself of it.

Grace the distinctive character of Elisha's ministry

After Elijah had passed the Jordan, we have seen that all was changed. Until then Elisha is on probation; after that, grace acts. In principle it is the position of Christ towards the assembly* or at least towards men in grace; that is to say, it is sovereign grace, to the actings of which death has given free course, justice having nothing more to say, and no longer resting on the responsibility of man who had undertaken to obey, and from whom obedience was due. Justice now consists in God's having His rights, in His glorifying Himself, as is just, by being consistent with His entire being, love, justice, sovereignty, majesty, truth, and every attribute which forms a part of His perfection. He does so according to His sovereignty; and He does it by the Christ who has glorified Him on the earth in all these respects, in every part of His being, so indeed as to make Him known. The testimony of it is that He has exalted Christ as man to His right hand. {* And of course towards Israel also.}

It must be remembered here that the application of this regards Israel, so that the rejection of the people is considered to have taken place by the very fact of Elijah's rapture. God has ceased to maintain His relationship with them. In His sovereign counsels God never withdraws His love from Israel; but, on the ground of the people's responsibility, God has judged them. He has stretched out His hands all the day to a rebellious and gainsaying people. Therefore Elisha says to the king of Israel, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee."

Elisha nevertheless returns to Israel in grace. His ministry has then this distinctive character, that it is a testimony to the rejection of all that belonged to the condition of responsibility in which the people had been placed; but at the same time it is a testimony to grace by faith, according to election and the sovereignty of God, in order to maintain the people in blessing; and that through the righteous execution of the judgment which their sin had brought upon them.

This is what the return of Christ will be for Israel, rather than what it will be for the assembly, notwithstanding that fundamentally the principle is the same.

Elisha at Jericho: the curse removed

Elisha, in the power of resurrection, re-enters the scene of Elijah's labours, who had sought in vain — as He also had done who was more excellent than Elijah — to gather Israel unto the God of their fathers (that is to say, to bring back man in the flesh to some faithfulness towards God). Jericho (pleasant in itself yet, as we have seen, an accursed place) ceases to be so; the curse is removed, and the spring of

waters permanently healed, by means of salt brought in a new cruse: a type, I doubt not, of the purifying power of grace which separates man from evil, and which removes evil, as contrary to the relationship of man with God; a moral power, which will take away the curse from the world, and especially from the Jews, who are the centre of rebellion against God. Salt represents purifying power in the efficacy and the permanency that distinguish the work of God which heals the object of blessing; and it characterises, according to the faithfulness of God, the source of blessing itself. The new vessel is an image of the renewed condition of all things through resurrection.

Elisha at Bethel, Carmel and Samaria

From Jericho Elisha goes up to Bethel, which, as we have seen, is a place commemorative of the unchangeable faithfulness of God* towards Israel; a faithfulness which can now bring forth all its fruits through death and resurrection. {* This is the reason why Paul (Acts 13:3-5) quotes these words, "I will give you the sure mercies of David," in proof of the resurrection of Christ, "no more to return to corruption." Death rendered blessing possible with respect to a rebellious people, and resurrection gave complete stability to the conferred blessing; this was secured. Compare Isaiah 55 where grace towards Israel and the nations, through a risen Saviour, is gloriously proclaimed.}

From Bethel he proceeds to Carmel,* that is to God's fruitful field, the place where judgment had been executed upon Baal, the prince of this world; a place typical of that condition of Israel which will be the fruit of the fulfilment of God's faithful promises. It will be seen that all this answers perfectly to the character of his ministry, as we have considered it, and answers to it in so much the more interesting a manner from being in contrast with Elijah's ministry; the path of each corresponding with the ministry which we have ascribed to them respectively. {*Compare Isaiah 32:15-18.}

From Carmel Elisha returns to Samaria, in connection with which his ordinary ministry is fulfilled.

Judgment manifested on the mockers of God's messenger

There remains another circumstance to be noticed in this history. Elisha curses the children who mock him. This action not only shews us the prophet's authority upheld by God; it characterises his position. For although sovereign grace, in spite of Israel's fall, is in exercise towards the people, yet, together with grace, judgment shall be manifested with respect to those who despise the messenger of God. It will be well to remark that the judgment happens when he re-enters the land of Israel, before he takes his place in the unchangeable promises of God to His people. Thenceforth it is the Carmel of God which is presented to our faith.

Chapters 3 and 4

The prophet as the blesser and saviour of his people

In the following chapter we enter into the historical part of Elisha's ministry. Jehoram goes to war; and, although less wicked than his father, the prophet no longer regards him. Jehoshaphat is still something

to him: but the prophet seeks to abstract himself from the influence of the whole scene. He then proclaims blessing, and directs the counsels of the united kings. He is a saviour of Israel. He provides (2 Kings 4) for the need of the poor of his people, and delivers them from their distress. He bestows the heart's desire upon faith, which recognises and receives the prophet; and restores life to the dead, thus binding up the broken heart. He feeds the sons of the prophets during the famine, and multiplies the scant measure of bread. Death having been mingled with the food, he remedies the evil so that they eat with impunity.

Chapter 5

Naaman: sovereign grace to the Gentiles

Elisha goes also beyond the borders of Israel in dispensing the blessing of which he is the instrument; and, when the king of Israel is troubled at Naaman's coming, Elisha heals the leprosy of this Gentile, who is brought to acknowledge Jehovah, the God of Israel, as the only true God. The Lord Jesus points out the sovereign grace of God on this occasion, which, overstepping the narrow limits of Israel, and, owning no longer their rights, acts towards the Gentiles in the way of election.

Gehazi smitten irremediably with that from which Namaan had been freed

As it has been frequently remarked, the means used were simple, and humbling to the flesh and to the pride of man, having their efficacy in full apprehension of, and full submission of heart and faith to, death, which is become life unto man, and that which heals him and cleanses him from sin. The man who was the most closely connected with Elisha, a prey to covetousness, suffers the painful consequences of a hardened heart; and that from which the Gentile had been freed comes irremediably upon him. Such is the position of Israel, outwardly nearer to Jehovah, but morally afar from Him.

Chapter 6

Nature's laws reversed: the iron made to swim

The sons of the prophets must enlarge their dwelling-place, and Elisha, who consents to go with them, secures them from the results of their negligence by reversing the laws of nature.

I know not if we should seek here for anything beyond the general character of the miracle, or find a type in the fact that Jordan is in question. So far as Jordan has a typical meaning, that meaning is abiding. It means death. The house built with that which was taken thence, and the power of the stream overcome and destroyed by the piece of wood cast into it, by means of which that which was beyond hope and lost was rescued from it, easily suggest a typical meaning. I dare not say positively that it is the mind of the Spirit; and we must not give way to imagination.

Elisha, the captor of a host, teaches God's unceasing care

Elisha preserves Israel after this from the attacks of their powerful enemies. The king of Syria seeking to take Elisha prisoner, it is Elisha, on the contrary, who captures the whole host that came to seize him, thus teaching his blind servant, who had eyes and saw not, the unfailing care with which the Almighty constantly surrounds His own people.

After having taught the enemy the power of Israel's God, and the folly of attacking His people when the messenger of His covenant is with them, Elisha lets the Syrians go; and these men come no more into the land of Israel.

All these miracles sufficiently characterise Elisha's ministry. The poor comforted, the Gentiles healed, Israel delivered and protected, the election blessed, Israel and their unfaithful king set aside as regards the prophet's testimony — all this we find in it. These miracles are more numerous than Elijah's. The burden which weighed upon Elijah's heart had no place in Elisha's; and therefore he sought relief neither in judgment upon the evil, nor in withdrawing from a useless labour.

Chapter 7

Famine in Samaria: God's interposition

The iniquity of Israel plunges the nation again into distress; and Samaria is desolated by famine. The judgment produces indignation against Jehovah's testimony; for, although Jehoram did not worship Baal, his heart was unchanged. Then comes the despair which considers it useless to wait any longer upon Jehovah.* This is the result of professing Jehovah's name, when there is no faith in Him. It was so with Israel in the wilderness: "Wherefore has Jehovah brought us up hither to destroy all this people?" {* It may be doubted whether what is said in verse 33 be not the words of Elisha.

Elisha appears here again as saviour, or, at least, as proclaiming Jehovah's salvation. The unbelief of the king's attendant, who considered this deliverance impossible, is punished at the moment when he sees the abundance. When all is impossible to man, Jehovah interposes; and in a moment the whole scene is changed.

Chapter 8

Blessings restored: judgments accomplished

The history of the woman,* whose son Elisha had raised to life again, gives us a little picture of all God's dealings with Israel. During long years, as determined by Jehovah, Israel is deprived of everything; but God has preserved all for them, and in the day of blessing all will be restored to them; and they shall receive double the fruit of their years of affliction. It is the son restored to life that brings blessing. {* It seems to me that Gehazi stands here in a grievous position. Smitten by the hand of God, because his heart clung to earth, even in the presence of Jehovah's mighty and long-suffering testimony,

he is now a parasite in the king's court, relating the wonderful things in which he no longer took part. This poor world grows weary enough of itself to lead it to take some pleasure in hearing anything spoken of that has reality and power. Provided that it does not reach the conscience, they will listen to it for their amusement, taking credit to themselves perhaps for an enlarged and a liberal mind, which is not enslaved by that which they can yet recognise philosophically in its place. But that is a sad position, which makes it evident that formerly we were connected with a testimony, whilst now we only relate its marvels at court. Nevertheless God makes use of it; and it does not follow that there was no truth in Gehazi. But to rise in the world, and entertain the world with the mighty works of God, is to fall very deeply.}

Chapters 9 and 10

Judgment on Ahab's house begun by Jehu

In 2 Kings 9 the judgment on Ahab's house commences. He who executes it does not remove, in so doing, the rod which God had lifted up against Israel in the person of Hazael. By means of Jehu God judges the house of Ahab; but Israel was oppressed by the Syrians, and their land overrun by them during the whole of Jehu's reign. Going farther than Jehoram, Jehu destroyed Baal and his worship at the same time as the house of Ahab: but he did not return unto Jehovah. He saw the folly of idolatry: energetic and ambitious, his interest lay on the other side. When the prophet of the Lord announces to him the near possession of the throne, he hearkens unto him. Sincere perhaps in the conviction that Jehovah was God, he was quite ready to honour Him when his interest agreed with his convictions. He displayed all his energies in accomplishing a work to which he had devoted himself. Ahab's religion had no charm for him. He had felt in his conscience the power of Elijah's testimony; and he understood that it was madness to fight against Jehovah, whose part he had taken. What he did for Jehovah, he did well, according to his wonted energy. Nevertheless his vengeance is without the fear of Jehovah; it is carnal (see Hosea 1:4). At the same time the golden calves still existed, as the sanctuary of the kingdom, with whose origin they were connected, and of which they were the national religion. This Jehu did not care to touch. God recognises a zeal which had judged evil uprightly; for the question here was His outward government, and not His judgment of the secrets of the heart; and in fact Jehu acted faithfully in destroying Baal root and branch. Thus he slays the king of Judah, who was confederate with the evil, and the royal family of Judah, who had come to visit that of Israel. Everything falls before his avenging sword, and the words of Elijah, the servant of Jehovah, are fulfilled. Thus it is Elisha who performs the function of Elijah* in his stead, prophetically anointing Hazael and Jehu, although not with his own hands. {*In this respect Elijah and Elisha form but one prophet, with the difference that has been pointed out. Elisha was a "prophet in his room," an expression not used with regard to prophets in general. In fact it is Christ risen who will execute, or cause to be executed judgments of God upon apostate Israel (see Psalms 20, 21).}

Chapters 11 and 12

Athaliah judged, with Judah's royal family, as connected with Ahab

In 2 Kings 11, the judgment of God falls upon the family* which had corrupted Israel, and even Judah also. The daughter of the house of Ahab, the usurper of the throne of Judah, Athaliah, is cut off through the faithfulness of the high priest, whose wife had preserved one of the offspring of David. {* During the time that Ahab, stirred up by Jezebel, as well as his family and sons are the instruments of Israel's apostasy and corruption God sends the testimony of Elijah and Elisha. This is, in the main (after Solomon), the subject of the two Books of Kings. The fall of the house of David, brought on by its alliance with Israel, or by the example of their kings, is related in the end of the book, where we find also the connections of the Assyrians with the people of God.}

Unfaithfulness in Judah's priests

Chapters 13 to 17

Israel's deliverance from the Syrians

Walking in the steps of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, the house of Jehu was no protection to Israel against Hazael. But the compassion of Jehovah raised up a deliverer. To His pitiful heart there was yet space for long-suffering towards His people. Elisha, at the point of death, puts the king in the way of deliverance; but his heart was unable to embrace it in its full extent. Still, in the reign of Jehoash, the Syrians were driven back into their own land; and Jeroboam, although walking in the evil ways of the son of Nebat, was able to recover all the original possessions of Judah; for God had pity on Israel, and had seen that their affliction was very bitter.

The Assyrian invader: Israel and Syria allied against Judah

Alas! when it is not the faith of God's people that is the source of their strength, one enemy destroyed only makes room for another. The Assyrian soon appears on the scene. Elisha being dead, Israel — deprived of this last link with God — soon fall into anarchy and ruin. The Assyrian invades the land. Israel, leagued with the king of Syria, turn their last efforts against Judah. A sorrowful picture of the people of God! The alliance between Syria and Israel brings out the king of Judah's unfaithfulness, and entangles him in the snares of the Assyrian.

Elisha's death: his history stamped with the power of life

Elisha, already dead, restores life to a corpse which was being hastily buried on account of an invasion of the Moabites. His history, unto the end, is stamped with the character of the power of life.* {* To understand all this part of the history which we are considering, the prophets Hosea and Amos must be read, and Isaiah 7 and 8 (compare Hosea 5:13; 8:4; 11:5; Amos 5:27; and also is, 26; Hosea 13:10-11); but, to understand well God's dealings, the whole of these prophecies should be read. I have only quoted the passages which mark the connection with the history; but the internal condition of the

people is much more seen in the prophets than even in the books which instruct us as to their public history.}

This resurrection, wrought by contact with the bones of Elisha, appears to me to give the comforting instruction, that, while apparently lost to Israel, the true prophet is still the vessel and guardian of all their hopes; and that when Israel is, as it were, dead and forgotten, He will, after all, restore them to life in a manner as unexpected as powerful.

Judah's alliance with the Assyrian

We come now to the connection of Judah with the Assyrian, fruit of the inward demoralisation of the former.

Ahaz plunged into the worst idolatry. Full of worldly wisdom, he seeks in the new power of Assyria a support against enemies nearer home, and he succeeds to his ruin. We see again here the nullity of the high priest in presence of the king. It appears that the people had lost their confidence in the house of David, as had the latter in the faithfulness and goodness of the Lord.

Hoshea, the last of the kings of the northern kingdom: Israel in captivity

Hoshea, although less wicked than his predecessors, concludes the list of kings, whom the patience of God had borne with in Israel. God thought of His people; and now there was no more hope of them. They were not even a vessel fit to contain the election of God, to whom He made Himself known. Brought under subjection to the king of Assyria, Hoshea had sought help from Egypt. After the king of Assyria had put him in prison, Samaria and all Israel could not long resist. The people of God are carried into captivity, and dispersed among the cities of Assyria and Media; and the land which belonged to Jehovah, and which had been given in possession to Israel, is peopled by strangers, sent thither by the king of Assyria.

Hosea's prophecies after Elisha's death

In the prophecies of Hosea the two great principles of God's dealings may be seen, one of which has been set before us in Elisha (the connection between the resurrection of the man about to be buried, and the first verse I shall quote, is remarkable), namely, redemption from the power of death (Hosea 13:14); and the governmental dealings of God (Hosea 14:9). But how the prophet labours to adapt his voice to the foolishness of Israel, and to make it reach the conscience of this erring people! He comes after Elisha's death. Elisha's presence among them, and the subsequent testimony of Hosea, bring out the marvellous patience and kindness of God towards them. Hosea gives us more than the internal history — he unfolds the causes of the judgments, although God may have sometimes interposed for restoration, and may have appeared to smite when the king was less wicked than ordinarily.

In the language of the prophets we find what the people really were in the sight of God. The promise of their restoration, and in principle even that of our present blessing, is found there also.

Foreign nations brought in to the land

Chapters 18 and 19

Judah in relation to Assyria and Babylon

2 Kings 18 brings us to a rather different subject, namely, the relations of Judah with the Assyrian, who had become their oppressor through their unfaithfulness; and also their relationship with Babylon.

Hezekiah's faith in Jehovah

In order to set His dealings with His people in their true light, God raises up a faithful king, distinguished by this, that he puts his trust in Jehovah as no king had done since David until this period, and as none did after him until the captivity. {* We shall see, farther on, that which characterised Josiah.}

The brazen serpent: Satan's use of it

That which happened with respect to the brazen serpent shews us the tendency of the heart to idolatry. And how many things, to which man continues attached in a carnal way, remain hidden in the midst of so many blessings and chastenings This teaches us also how near — with such hearts as ours — is the remembrance of blessing, to idolatry of the symbols of blessing. Faith gets rid of these things; for God had given the brazen serpent, not to be a token of the remembrance after the cure, but in order to cure. Man preserved it by a very natural feeling; but this is not of God, and it soon became the instrument of Satan.

The Philistines subdued

Hezekiah smites the Philistines, those inward and perpetual enemies of God's people, and in a great measure subdues them.

It is after this that the king of Assyria comes up.

The king of Assyria, Israel's conqueror, assails Judah

The king of Assyria had carried Israel away captive. His successor seeks to conquer Judah likewise. According to the prophet's expression, the waters of this river reached even to the neck. The power of the allied kings of Israel and Syria appears to have had some attraction for the people of Judah, who, on the other hand, despised the weakness of the house of David; for God was little in their thoughts. In this confederacy, favoured apparently by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, they proposed to set aside the house of David in favour of the son of Tabeal. There was an apparently well-conceived plan on the one side, and an imminent danger on the other. But these were not God's thoughts. In His mercy He would

not yet put out the lamp of David's house. He sends the promise of Emmanuel, and exhorts the remnant to put their trust in Jehovah Himself.

We shall examine this more in detail when we consider the prophecy of Isaiah. I only refer to it now, in order to elucidate the history and exhibit the condition of the people. Ahaz, who did not trust in Jehovah, was the instrument of fulfilling His purposes; but the Assyrian, in whose power he trusted, became through him the scourge of Judah.

Hezekiah and Sennacherib

But in order still to bless and preserve Jerusalem and Judah, God raises up Hezekiah, a godly and faithful king, who put his trust in Jehovah. Hezekiah is unable to repulse Sennacherib; so that the people are punished. He submits to Sennacherib, offering to pay whatever he demands; but whether the king's resources were insufficient, or that the king of Assyria, after having accepted the present which Hezekiah sent him, broke his engagement (compare Isaiah 33), Sennacherib, taking advantage of the king's apparent weakness, requires complete submission, both from the king and the kingdom, and invites the inhabitants of Jerusalem to come out of the city and place themselves under his command.

Sennacherib's blasphemies answered by God

We see however, that even while blaspheming Jehovah, Sennacherib is conscious that he is in the presence of a principle and a power that he does not understand. The people, obedient to the king's commandment, make him no answer. Drawn elsewhere by tidings of the king of Ethiopia's attack, Sennacherib repeats in a letter his blasphemies and insults. Hezekiah lays all these things before Jehovah, and seeks His answer through the prophet Isaiah. The same night God smote the army of the Assyrians. Sennacherib returns to his own country, and dies there by the hand of his own sons.

Hezekiah as a type of the true Immanuel

Hezekiah is thus a type of the true Emmanuel, of Him before whom the Assyrian, the desolater of Israel, will fall. This is a very important history, as foreshadowing the events of the last days; but it will be studied more advantageously when examining the Book of Isaiah, which frequently applies it in this manner. It is but the general idea that needs to be touched upon here.

Chapter 20

Raised as from the dead

We find here again in a figure the principle with which Israel's deliverance, and that of all men, is connected — a principle pointed out in Elisha, and accomplished in Jesus. Hezekiah is raised as from the dead. He had been sick unto death; but Jehovah heard his prayer, and, on his humiliation, revokes the sentence which He had pronounced through Isaiah.

Hezekiah's boasts: the prophet's warning

But man can scarcely bear exaltation. Blessed of Jehovah he boasts himself of that which he has received. After having displayed all his riches to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, who were sent to congratulate him on his recovery, he is warned that they shall all be carried away even to Babylon The king of Babylon felt, perhaps, some satisfaction in allying himself with one who had not yielded to the power of the king of Assyria; but the world's wisdom, which cultivates profitable connections with the people of God, is always a snare to them Hezekiah might have made known the source and giver of all this; but he acted as a man. Nevertheless he submits graciously and humbly to the word of Jehovah, which was spoken to him on this occasion.

Judah's condition at Hezekiah's death

But, at this period, the people had deeply corrupted themselves, and the impulse which God had given disappeared entirely with the man in whom it acted. The son of Hezekiah was a model of wickedness. God was about to transfer power to the Gentiles; and, even while making it manifest that certain blessing attended faithfulness and trust in Himself, He allowed the house of David to give themselves up to debasement.

Chapter 21

Manasseh's heinous sins: evil rampant

When Hezekiah died at the age of fifty-four, his son was but twelve years old. Beguiled himself, Manasseh seduced the people, who were but too willing to commit greater iniquity than the nations who knew not God.

The particular events of Manasseh's life are not related here. The Holy Ghost, having given us the details, in that which precedes, of God's public government in Israel, until He had said, "Lo-ruhamah," then shews us God's dealings with Judah, governed by the conduct of their kings, until God has said, "Lo-ammi." This had been already announced on account of Manasseh's heinous sins; and Josiah's piety could not change the just judgment of God. There was yet for Judah some prolongation of tranquillity; but their repentance under Josiah was but outward,* and evil regained the mastery immediately after his death. Amon did but follow the evil ways of his father Manasseh. {* See Jeremiah 3:10. This passage teaches us how seldom the heart, which is what God judges, corresponds with the semblance of zeal for Him and for His glory, which appears on the surface, when, moved by the Spirit of God, a man of faith presents himself to promote His glory. See also under Hezekiah's reign the condition of the people and God's judgment — Isaiah 22.}

Chapters 22 and 23

God's sovereign grace manifested; His readiness to bless

Observe what grace raised up Hezekiah and Josiah, both of whom were born of fathers given up to idolatry, and followed by sons who were equally abandoned to it. But the sovereign grace of God towards Israel again raised up this testimony, and manifested that He was always ready to bless, even if Israel refused to be blessed, and chose their own ruin instead. Without God, what is the heart of man? In all this the patience of God's government was fully demonstrated; for, under Hezekiah, many things still existed which escaped the king's eye and judgment, through lack of watchfulness in the fear of the Lord.

The distinguishing characteristics of Josiah and Hezekiah

That which distinguished Josiah was his carefulness to observe the law of Moses, the book of which had been discovered in the temple; trust in Jehovah had characterised Hezekiah; and in these respective characteristics they are both unequalled as to their walk.

The Assyrian's connection with God's people

The kingdom of Assyria was declining, and Josiah exercises his royal power through the whole extent of the country. The threat addressed to Jeroboam of old is fulfilled. All the high places of Israel are destroyed. Perhaps the heart of Josiah was lifted up. Be that as it may, God performed His promise, and took him away from the evil, the dreadful accomplishment of which was hastening onwards; for, whatever might be the sincerity of Josiah's piety, all hearts were corrupted. Compare with this 2 Chronicles 30:17, etc. — the account of that which happened long before his reign.

Chapters 24 and 25

The kings of Israel had been the fatal examples of a course which had led Judah and all Israel to their ruin (see 2 Kings 16:3). The pious Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab was the origin of all this, for evil bears fruit which continues long to reproduce itself. Alas! alas! what is man when he turns aside from Jehovah's ways, from the narrow and straight path of God's word and will, from the path of faith — the true path of an obedient spirit?

Pharaoh's pretensions and God's purposes: Jerusalem trodden underfoot of the Gentiles

The history which we have been going over has given us an account of the Assyrian's connection with the people of God. He was a cedar of Lebanon; but he is cut down. Pharaoh thought, for a moment, of making the empire his own; he sought to exalt himself that he might rule over the trees of the forest. Judah, brought out in former days with a high hand by the power of God from Pharaoh's country, is subject to him. But, whatever Pharaoh's pretensions may be, this is not the purpose of God. If God writes "Lo-ammi" on His people, it is Babylon which is to begin the times of the Gentiles.* Pharaoh returns into his own country, and Jehoiakim, powerless and without God, comes under the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar.** We need not go into the details. His son, as wicked as himself, rebels against

Nebuchadnezzar; for Judah, the son of the Most High, was little used to bondage; but this heifer also must bend its neck to the yoke (Hosea 10:11), and Jehoiachin is carried captive to Babylon. The kingdom and the temple still exist; but Zedekiah, having broken the oath which he had made in the name of Jehovah,*** and, allowing himself to be governed by the princes, persists in his rebellion and is taken prisoner. His sons having been slain before his eyes, and himself deprived of sight, he is carried away to Babylon. The temple is burnt; the walls of Jerusalem are broken down; the seat of Jehovah's throne is trodden under foot of the Gentiles. Sorrowful result of His having entrusted His glory to men among whom He had placed His throne! Sorrowful, thrice sorrowful, conduct of man — of that generation whom God had so honoured! On the other hand, God will take occasion from it to manifest that infinite goodness, which, in sovereign grace, will re-establish the very thing that man has cast under foot to the profane. {* As a figure, this is an important principle; for Egypt is the state of nature, out of which the assembly is brought; Babylon is the corruption and worldliness into which she falls. ** How sorrowful is this part of the history, in which the only question is, whether Egypt or Babylon is to possess the land of God's people, the land of promise! It being no longer a doubtful point whether Israel shall continue to possess it, it must become a prey to one or the other of these hostile and unbelieving powers. Alas! Israel was unbelieving with more light than the others, who did but take advantage of the position and the strength which the unbelief of Israel gave them, and acknowledged in them. *** This filled up the measure of sin. We shall draw the reader's attention to this when considering the prophecy of Ezekiel, who dwells upon it. By making use of an oath in Jehovah's name in the hope of preventing revolt, Nebuchadnezzar shewed more respect for that name than Zedekiah did, who despised such an oath. God permitted thus final evidence of iniquity. Zedekiah might have remained a spreading vine of low stature. One who was above all, alone knew how to render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.}

The prophets reveal the condition drawing down judgment and the patience of God

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel must be read to have the complete history, and the internal history of the spirit of the people, and that of the king; the history at once of the condition which drew down the judgment, and of the patience of God, who, even until the very taking of the city, continued to. send them most affecting calls to repentance — alas! in vain; and the times of the Gentiles began.

The reader who would thoroughly understand the events of all this history, the marvellous patience of God, and the way in which He raised up faithful kings, in order that He might bless, should read the prophets Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah, and certain chapters of Isaiah, which speak to the people in the name of Jehovah and tell them of their true condition.