

[R2354 : page 248]

"ELISHA DIED, AND THEY BURIED HIM."

– SEPT. 4. – 2 KINGS 13:14-25. –

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

– Psa. 116:15.

MANY YEARS rolled by, and Elisha, the prophet, about eighty years of age, fell "sick of his sickness wherewith he died." Meantime there had been various experiences in Israel, and so far as the kings were concerned a better condition of matters had been reached, through the process of the reformation begun by Elijah. King Jehu had destroyed the worshipers of Baal, and his images and groves, and had in some measure sought to restore the worship of Jehovah, and the Kingdom had been established in the hands of his offspring, one of whom, Joash, otherwise called Jehoash, was now king of Israel.

Elisha's remarkable history as a prophet and representative of God in Israel continued during a period of nearly sixty-five years, it is presumed. He shared the difficulties and vicissitudes of Israel: sometimes much divine favor and blessing and deliverance; at other times trials and difficulties and famines, the punishments [R2354 : page 249] of neglect of God, departure from his worship, etc. One of these passed over was the siege of the city of Samaria, the capital of Israel, by the hosts of the Syrians. Elisha shared with the others the terrible ordeal of famine which the long siege developed. This was in the days of Jehu's son, Jehoram, and no doubt was on account of deflections from the Lord. In the remarkable delivery of Israel from that famine, by the overthrow of their enemies without a spear or an arrow, the Lord manifested his power as he had previously declared it through the prophet Elisha. These various lessons were in harmony with what the Lord had already covenanted with Israel as a nation; namely, that if they would live in harmony with him and his law he would bless them in every way, and that if they did not so live he

would send plagues and disasters upon them. – See Deut. 28:45; Amos 3:6.

But now, at the time of Elisha's death, Jehoash was king and was evidently very humble and had come to realize that Israel's trouble lay in neglecting Jehovah; and hearing of the Prophet's illness he seemed to feel himself about to be bereft of his only helper and guide in the way of the Lord; and our lesson introduces him as weeping over Elisha. It is suggested by some that his peculiar remark, "The chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," may have been intended to signify that he regarded Elisha as a host in himself, as the chief defence and protection of the nation of Israel. At all events, he was in a proper attitude of mind so far as we may judge, sincerely desirous of choosing and walking in the proper course, and sorrowful that he now would no longer have heavenly counsel; perhaps remorseful, too, that he had not sooner appreciated the privileges which he did enjoy and had now come to realize.

Having gotten into a right attitude of mind, the Lord was pleased to release him and the kings of Israel from their subjection to the King of Syria. Accordingly, Elisha, under the secret counsel of the Lord, told the king to open the window to the eastward, and to shoot out an arrow, meantime placing his own weak hands over the hands of the king, he explained to him that this signified an arrow of divine power on behalf of Israel and against Syria. He further instructed him to take the remaining arrows from his quiver, and strike with them upon the floor: the king did so; but whether he had comparatively little faith in the Prophet's promise, or whether he was lacking in patriotism, and therefore lacking of appreciation of the Prophet's assurance of victory for Israel, whatever the cause, he seems to have struck the arrows in rather a feeble way, and three times only, not even asking how many times he should strike.

Elisha reprovved him for this, and showed him that as a consequence he should have only three victories over the Syrians

through this blessing. The Prophet evidently reasoned, and perhaps invisibly guided to such a view of the matter, that if Jehoash had been full of zeal and faith for the work of delivering Israel from its enemies, and of bringing to Israel all the blessings permitted by the Lord, he would have been more energetic to smite the floor, which to him was to represent Syria.

There is a lesson for us here, to the effect that what we do should be done with our might: if Jehovah be God, serve him; if Baal be God, serve him. But let the service be whole-hearted; for a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways; and such are not to expect much of the Lord: "Let not such think that they shall receive anything of the Lord." We have a spiritual conflict against a wily foe; and we are to be so much in earnest for the deliverance of ourselves and of all the Lord's people from his control, that we will smite him energetically, fighting the good fight of faith; and we should keep on smiting until our enemy is vanquished: we are not to be faint-hearted, nor indifferent, nor to slack our hands. Our part in the privilege of smiting down error will depend largely upon our humility, our zeal and our faith. And our works show what is the degree and character of our faith.

God evidently wished that the influence of these two reformers, Elijah and Elisha, should be deep and permanent in Israel: accordingly, the various miracles which they wrought were calculated to impress the matter upon the minds of the people. Even after Elisha's death, God gave another sign by which he would remind Israel of his power and his word, by reminding them of Elisha and his words; so that when, nearly a year after Elisha's death and burial, the Moabites invaded the land, and were burying one of their number, as soon as the corpse touched the bones of Elisha, vitality returned. The history of those times is limited, but it is quite possible that the faintheartedness of Jehoash became all the more manifest when he felt himself alone, after Elisha's death, and that he and Israel did not serve the Lord with a whole heart, and that consequently these Moabites were permitted to come upon them, as a further chastisement. And possibly it was to

draw the minds of the people back again to Elisha and to his teaching, and thus to revive their confidence in the Lord, that this miracle occurred in connection with his bones. The record, nevertheless, is that Jehoash succeeded in defeating the Syrians three times, as the prophet Elisha had promised, and thus he delivered Israel out of the hands of the Syrians, from whose dominion his father Jehoahaz had never succeeded in getting free.

The Golden Text gives a cheering thought, which **[R2354 : page 250]** applies not only to all the holy ones of the past, but in an especial manner to the fully consecrated ones ("saints") of this Gospel age. If it were not for such assurances from the Lord's Word, our increased knowledge of Jehovah (of his greatness), and our increased knowledge of ourselves (of our own littleness), might lead us to infer that we are altogether too small for **[R2355 : page 250]** his notice and attention. But when we realize that our Heavenly Father careth for us, so that not a hair of our heads might be injured without his notice, nor even without his permission; and when we know that our lives are precious to him, that he is not indifferent to our welfare, temporal or spiritual, it puts a new value upon life itself, and upon all that we have and are.

Altho God does not hinder his saints from going down into the great prisonhouse of death, altho he does not shield them from the experiences of the world, yet he does do something for them even in this respect; he informs them of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and of the glorious time of refreshment and blessing of the future, when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and come forth. Not only so, but he promises to the saints of this Gospel age that if they are faithful unto death he will give them the crown, the prize of life, in joint-heirship with their Lord Jesus Christ. What a kind, beneficent God we have! How different from all the heathen conceptions of God: how different from all the conceptions of the natural man. Our God is our Father; he remembereth that we are dust; he has compassion upon us. "The Father himself loveth you," said our dear Redeemer. Precious in the sight of

the Lord is the death of his holy ones. He will not suffer his holy ones to remain under the dominion of death. In his own good time the prison shall be broken up and all the prisoners of the pit shall go forth. Hallelujah! What a Savior! He is able to save unto the *uttermost* all that come unto the Father by him.
