

CHAPTER 7

Relief is here brought to Samaria and her king, when the case is, in a manner, desperate, and the king despairing.

I. It is foretold by Elisha, and an unbelieving lord shut out from the benefit of it (v. 1, 2).

II. It is brought about,

1. By an unaccountable fright into which God put the Syrians (v. 6), which caused them to retire precipitately (v. 7).

2. By the seasonable discovery which four lepers made of this (v. 3-5), and the account which they gave of it to the court (v. 8-11).

3. By the cautious trial which the king made of the truth of it (v. 12-15).

III. The event answered the prediction both in the sudden plenty (v. 16), and the death of the unbelieving lord (v. 17-20); for no word of God shall fall to the ground.

2 KINGS 7:1-2

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

Here,

I. Elisha foretels that, notwithstanding the great straits to which the city of Samaria is reduced, yet within twenty-four hours they shall have plenty, v. 1. The king of Israel despaired of it and grew weary of waiting: then Elisha foretold it, when things were at the worst. Man's extremity is God's opportunity of magnifying his own power; his time to appear for his people is when *their strength is gone*, ^{<FR236>}Deuteronomy 32:36. When they had given over expecting help it came. *When the son of man comes shall he find faith on the earth?* ^{<2108>}Luke 18:8. The king said, *What shall I wait for the Lord any longer?* And perhaps some of the elders were ready to say the same: "Well," said Elisha, "you hear what these say; *now hear you the word of the Lord*, hear what he says, hear it and heed it and believe it: tomorrow corn shall be sold at the usual rate in the gate of Samaria;" that is,

the siege shall be raised, for the gate of the city shall be opened, and the market shall be held there as formerly. The return of peace is thus expressed (Judges v. 11), *Then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates, to buy and sell there.*

2. The consequence of that shall be great plenty. This would, in time, follow of course, but that corn should be thus cheap in so short a time was quite beyond what could be thought of. Though the king of Israel had just now threatened Elisha's life, God promises to save his life and the life of his people; for *where sin abounded grace doth much more abound.*

II. A peer of Israel that happened to be present openly declared his disbelief of this prediction, v. 2. He was a courtier whom the king had an affection for, as the man of his right hand, on whom he leaned, that is, on whose prudence he much relied, and in whom he reposed much confidence. He thought it impossible, unless God should rain corn out of the clouds, as once he did manna; no less than the repetition of Moses's miracle will serve him, though that of Elijah might have served to answer this intention, the increasing of the meal in the barrel.

III. The just doom passed upon him for his infidelity, that he should see this great plenty for this conviction, and yet not eat of it to his comfort. Note, Unbelief is a sin by which men greatly dishonour and displease God, and deprive themselves of the favours he designed for them. The murmuring Israelites saw Canaan, but could not enter in because of unbelief. Such (says bishop Patrick) will be the portion of those that believe not the promise of eternal life; they shall see it at a distance — Abraham afar off, but shall never taste of it; for they forfeit the benefit of the promise if they cannot find in their heart to take God's word.

~~1203~~ 2 KINGS 7:3-11

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA RAISED

We are here told,

I. How the siege of Samaria was raised in the evening, at the edge of night (v. 6, 7), not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, striking terror upon the spirits of the besiegers. Here was not a sword

drawn against them, not a drop of blood shed, it was not by thunder or hailstones that they were discomfited, nor were they slain, as Sennacherib's army before Jerusalem, by a destroying angel; but,

1. *The Lord made them to hear a noise of chariots and horses.* The Syrians that besieged Dothan had their *sight* imposed upon, ^{<1168>}2 Kings 6:18. These had their *hearing* imposed upon. For God knows how to work upon every sense, pursuant to his own counsels as *he makes the hearing ear and the seeing eye, so he makes the deaf and the blind,* ^{<1161>}Exodus 4:11. Whether the noise was really made in the air by the ministry of angels, or whether it was only a sound in their ears, is not certain; which soever it was, it was from God, who both *brings the wind out of his treasures, and forms the spirit of man within him.* The sight of horses and chariots had encouraged the prophet's servant, ^{<1167>}2 Kings 6:17. The noise of horses and chariots terrified the hosts of Syria. For notices from the invisible world are either very comfortable or very dreadful, according as men are at peace with God or at war with him.

2. Hearing this noise, they concluded the king of Israel had certainly procured assistance from some foreign power: *He has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians.* There was, for aught we know but one king of Egypt, and what kings there were of the Hittites nobody can imagine; but, as they were imposed upon by that dreadful sound in their ears, so they imposed upon themselves by the interpretation they made of it. Had they supposed the king of Judah to have come with his forces, there would have been more of probability in their apprehensions than to dream of the *kings of the Hittites and the Egyptians.* If the fancies of any of them raised this spectre, yet their reasons might soon have laid it: how could the king of Israel, who was closely besieged, hold intelligence with those distant princes? What had he to hire them with? It was impossible but some notice would come, before, of the motions of so great a host; but *there were they in great fear where no fear was.*

3. Hereupon they all fled with incredible precipitation, as for their lives, left their camp as it was: even their horses, that might have hastened their flight, they could not stay to take with them, v. 7. None of them had so much sense as to send out scouts to discover the supposed enemy, much less courage enough to face the enemy, though fatigued with a long march. *The wicked flee when none pursues.* God can, when he pleases, dispirit the

boldest and most brave, and make the stoutest heart to tremble. Those that will not fear God he can make to fear at the shaking of a leaf.

II. How the Syrians' flight was discovered by four leprous men. Samaria was delivered, and did not know it. The watchmen on the walls were not aware of the retreat of the enemy, so silently did they steal away. But Providence employed four lepers to be the intelligencers, who had their lodging without the gate, being excluded from the city, as ceremonially unclean: the Jews say they were Gehazi and his three sons; perhaps Gehazi might be one of them, which might cause him to be taken notice of afterwards by the king, ~~1284~~ 2 Kings 8:4. See here,

1. How these lepers reasoned themselves into a resolution to make a visit in the night to the camp of the Syrians, v. 3, 4. They were ready to perish for hunger; none passed through the gate to relieve them. Should they go into the city, there was nothing to be had there, they must die in the streets; should they sit still, they must pine to death in their cottage. They therefore determine to go over to the enemy, and throw themselves upon their mercy: if they killed them, better die by the sword than by famine, one death than a thousand; but perhaps they would save them alive, as objects of compassion. Common prudence will put us upon that method which may better our condition, but cannot make it worse. The prodigal son resolves to return to his father, whose displeasure he had reason to fear, rather than perish with hunger in the far country. These lepers conclude, "If they kill us, we shall but die;" and happy they who, in another sense, can thus speak of dying. "We shall but die, that is the worst of it, not die and be damned, not be hurt of the second death." According to this resolution, they went, in the beginning of the night, to the camp of the Syrians, and, to their great surprise, found it wholly deserted, not a man to be seen or heard in it, v. 5. Providence ordered it, that these lepers came as soon as ever the Syrians had fled, for they fled in the twilight, the evening twilight (v. 7), and in the twilight the lepers came (v. 5), and so no time was lost.

2. How they reasoned themselves into a resolution to bring tidings of this to the city. They feasted in the first tent they came to (v. 8) and then began to think of enriching themselves with the plunder; but they corrected themselves (v. 9): "*We do not well* to conceal these good tidings from the community we are members of, under colour of being avenged upon them for excluding us from their society; it was the law that did it, not they, and therefore let us bring them the news. Though it awake them from sleep, it

will be *life from the dead* to them.” Their own consciences told them that some mischief would befall them if they acted separately, and sought themselves only. Selfish narrow-spirited people cannot expect to prosper; the most comfortable advantage is that which our brethren share with us in. According to this resolution, they returned to the gate, and acquainted the sentinel with what they had discovered (v. 10), who straightway brought the intelligence to court (v. 11), and it was not the less acceptable for being first brought by lepers.

~~2~~ 2 KINGS 7:12-20

SAMARIA PLENTIFULLY SUPPLIED

Here we have,

I. The king's jealousy of a stratagem in the Syrian's retreat, v. 12. He feared that they had withdrawn into an ambush, to draw out the besieged, that they might fall on them with more advantage. he knew he had no reason to expect that God should appear thus wonderfully for him, having forfeited his favour by his unbelief and impatience. He knew no reason the Syrians had to fly, for it does not appear that he or any of this attendants heard the noise of the chariots which the Syrians were frightened at. Let not those who, like him, are *unstable in all their ways, think to receive any thing from God*; nay, a guilty conscience fears the worst and makes men suspicious.

II. The course they took for their satisfaction, and to prevent their falling into a snare. They sent out spies to see what had become of the Syrians, and found they had all fled indeed, commanders as well a common soldiers. They could track them by the garments which they threw off, and left by the way, for their greater expedition, v. 15. He that gave this advice seems to have been very sensible of the deplorable condition the people were in (v. 13); for speaking of the horses, many of which were dead and the rest ready to perish for hunger, he says, and repeats it, “*They are as all the multitude of Israel.* Israel used to glory in their multitude, but now they are diminished and brought low.” He advised to send five horsemen, but, it should seem, there were only two horses fit to be sent, and those chariot-

horses, v. 14. Now the Lord repented himself concerning his servants, when he saw that their strength was gone, ^{<16326>}Deuteronomy 32:36.

III. The plenty that was in Samaria, from the plunder of the camp of the Syrians, v. 16. Had the Syrians been governed by the modern policies of war, when they could not take their baggage and their tents with them they would rather have burnt them (as it is common to do with the forage of a country) than let them fall into their enemies' hands; but God determined that the besieging of Samaria, which was intended for its ruin, should turn to its advantage, and that Israel should now be enriched with the spoil of the Syrians as of old with that of the Egyptians. here see,

1. The *wealth of the sinner laid up for the just* (^{<18276>}Job 27:16, 17) and the spoilers spoiled, ^{<23301>}Isaiah 33:1.

2. The wants of Israel supplied in a way that they little thought of, which should encourage us to depend upon the power and goodness of God in our greatest straits.

3. The word of Elisha fulfilled to a tittle: *A measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel*; those that spoiled the camp had not only enough to supply themselves with, but an overplus to sell at an easy rate for the benefit of others, and so even *those that tarried at home did divide the spoil*, ^{<19612>}Psalms 68:12; ^{<23323>}Isaiah 33:23. God's promise may be safely relied on, for no word of his shall fall to the ground.

IV. The death of the unbelieving courtier, that questioned the truth of Elisha's word. Divine threatenings will as surely be accomplished as divine promises. *He that believeth not shall be damned* stands as firm as *He that believeth shall be saved*. This lord,

1. Was preferred by the king to the *charge of the gate* (v. 17), to keep the peace, and to see that there was no tumult or disorder in dividing and disposing of the spoil. So much trust did the king repose in him, in his prudence and gravity, and so much did he delight to honour him. He that will be great, let him serve the public.

2. Was trodden to death by the people in the gate, either by accident, the crowd being exceedingly great, and he in the thickest of it, or perhaps designedly, because he abused his power, and was imperious in restraining the people from satisfying their hunger. However it was, God's justice was glorified, and the word of Elisha was fulfilled. He saw the plenty, for the

silencing and shaming of his unbelief, corn cheap without *opening windows in heaven*, and therein saw his own folly in prescribing to God; but he did not eat of the plenty he saw. *When he was about to fill his belly God cast the fury of his wrath upon him* (~~Job~~ Job 20:23) and it came between the cup and the lip. Justly are those thus tantalized with the world's promises that think themselves tantalized with the promises of God. If believing shall not be seeing, seeing shall not be enjoying. This matter is repeated, and the event very particularly compared with the prediction (v. 18-20), that we might take special notice of it, and might learn,

(1.) How deeply God resents out distrust of him, of his power, providence, and promise. When Israel said, *Can God furnish a table? the Lord heard it and was wroth*. Infinite wisdom will not be limited by our folly. God never promises the end without knowing where to provide the means.

(2.) How uncertain life and the enjoyments of it are. Honour and power cannot secure men from sudden and inglorious deaths. He whom the king leaned upon the people trod upon; he who fancied himself the stay and support of the government was trampled under foot as the mire in the streets. Thus hath the pride of men's glory been often stained.

(3.) How certain God's threatenings are, and how sure to alight on the guilty and obnoxious heads. Let all men fear before the great God, who *treads upon princes as mortar* and is *terrible to the kings of the earth*.