

CHAPTER 8

The passages of story recorded in this chapter oblige us to look back.

I. We read before of a Shuammite woman that was a kind benefactor to Elisha; now here we are told how she fared the better for it, afterwards, in the advice Elisha gave her, and the favour the king showed her for his sake (v. 1-6).

II. We read before of the designation of Hazael to be king of Syria (^{<1195>}1 Kings 19:15), and here we have an account of his elevation to that throne and the way he forced for himself to it, by killing his master (v. 7-15).

III. We read before of Jehoram's reigning over Judah in the room of his father Jehoshaphat (^{<1220>}1 Kings 22:50), now here we have a short and sad history of his short and wicked reign (v. 16-24), and the beginning of the history of the reign of his son Ahaziah (v. 25-29).

~~<1181>~~ 2 KINGS 8:1-6

A FAMINE IN ISRAEL

Here we have,

I. The wickedness of Israel punished with a long famine, one of God's sore judgments often threatened in the law. *Canaan*, that fruitful land, *was turned into barrenness*, for the *iniquity of those that dwelt therein*. The famine in Samaria was soon relieved by the raising of that siege, but neither that judgment nor that mercy had a due influence upon them, and therefore *the Lord called for another famine*; for when he judgeth he will overcome. If less judgments do not prevail to bring men to repentance, he will send greater and longer; they are at his beck, and will come when he calls for them. He does, by his ministers, call for reformation and obedience, and, if those calls be not regarded, we may expect he will call for some plague or other, for he will be heard. This famine continued seven years, as long

again as that in Elijah's time; for if men will walk contrary to him, he will heat the furnace yet hotter.

II. The kindness of the good Shunammite to the prophet rewarded by the care that was taken of her in that famine; she was not indeed fed by miracle, as the widow of Sarepta was, but,

1. She had notice given her of this famine before it came, that she might provide accordingly, and was directed to remove to some other country; any where but in Israel she would find plenty. It was a great advantage to Egypt in Joseph's time that they had notice of the famine before it came, so it was to this Shunammite; others would be forced to remove at last, after they had long borne the grievances of the famine, and had wasted their substance, and could not settle elsewhere upon such good terms as she might that went early, before the crowd, and took her stock with her unbroken. It is our happiness to foresee an evil, and our wisdom, when we foresee an evil, and our wisdom, when we foresee it, to hide ourselves.

2. Providence gave her a comfortable settlement in *the land of the Philistines*, who, though subdued by David, yet were not wholly rooted out. It seems the famine was peculiar to the land of Israel, and other countries that joined close to them had plenty at the same time, which plainly showed the immediate hand of God in it (as in the plagues of Egypt, when they distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians) and that the sins of Israel, against whom this judgment was directly levelled, were more provoking to God than the sins of their neighbours, because of their profession of relation to God. *You only have I known, therefore will I punish you,* ^{<300B>}Amos 3:2. Other countries had rain when they had none, were free from locusts and caterpillars when they were eaten up with them; for some think this was the famine spoken of, ^{<300B>}Joel 1:3, 4. It is strange that when there was plenty in the neighbouring countries there were not those that made it their business to import corn into the land of Israel, which might have prevented the inhabitants from removing; but, as they were befooled with their idolatries, so they were infatuated even in the matters of their civil interest.

III. Her petition to the king at her return, favoured by the seasonableness of her application to him.

1. When the famine was over she *returned out of the land of the Philistines*; that was no proper place for an Israelite to dwell any longer

than there was a necessity for so doing, for there she could not keep her new moons and her sabbaths as she used to do in her own country, among the schools of the prophets, ^{<1142>}2 Kings 4:23.

2. At her return she found herself kept out of the possession of her own estate, it being either confiscated to the exchequer, seized by the lord, or usurped in her absence by some of the neighbours; or perhaps the person she had entrusted with the management of it proved false, and would neither resign it to her nor come to an account with her for the profits: so hard is it to find a person that one can put a confidence in *in a time of trouble*, ^{<1159>}Proverbs 25:19; ^{<1108>}Micah 7:5.

3. She made her application to the king himself for redress; for, it seems (be it observed to his praise), he was easy of access, and did himself take cognizance of the complaint of his injured subjects. Time was when she dwelt so securely among her own people that she had no occasion to be *spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host* (^{<1143>}2 Kings 4:13); but now her own familiar friends, in whom she trusted, proved so unjust and unkind that she was glad to appeal to the king against them. Such uncertainty there is in the creature that that may fail us which we most depend upon and that befriend us which we think we shall never need.

4. She found the king talking with Gehazi about Elisha's miracles, v. 4. It was his shame that he needed now to be informed concerning them, when he might have acquainted himself with them as they were done from Elisha himself, if he had not been wiling to shut his eyes against the convincing evidence of his mission; yet it was his praise that he was now better disposed, and would rather talk with a leper that was capable of giving a good account of them than continue ignorant of them. The law did not forbid all conversation with lepers, but only dwelling with them. There being then no priests in Israel, perhaps the king, or some one appointed by him, had the inspection of lepers, and passed the judgment upon them, which might bring him acquainted with Behazi.

5. This happy coincidence befriended both Behazi's narrative and her petition. Providence is to be acknowledged in ordering the circumstances of events, for sometimes those that are minute in themselves prove of great consequence, as this did, for,

(1.) It made the king ready to believe Gehazi's narrative when it was thus confirmed by the persons most nearly concerned: "*This is the woman, and*

this her son; let them speak for themselves,” v. 5. Thus did God even force him to believe what he might have had some colour to question if he had only had Gehazi's word for it, because he was branded for a liar, witness his leprosy.

(2.) It made him ready to grant her request; for who would not be ready to favour one whom heaven had thus favoured, and to support a life which was given once and again by miracle? In consideration of this the king gave orders that her land should be restored to her and all the profits that were made of it in her absence. If it was to himself that the land and profits had escheated, it was generous and kind to make so full a restitution; he would not (as Pharaoh did in Joseph's time) enrich the crown by the calamities of his subjects. If it was by some other person that her property was invaded, it was an act of justice in the king, and part of the duty of his place, to give her redress, ^{<1881B>}Psalm 82:3, 4; ^{<1881D>}Proverbs 31:9. It is not enough for those in authority that they do no wrong themselves, but they must support the right of those that are wronged.

^{<1281D>}2 KINGS 8:7-15

HAZAEL'S BARBARITY PREDICTED

Here,

I. We may enquire what brought Elisha to Damascus, the chief city of Syria. Was he sent to any but the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*? It seems he was. Perhaps he went to pay a visit to Naaman his convert, and to confirm him in his choice of the true religion, which was the more needful now because, it should seem, he was not out of his place (for Hazael is supposed to be captain of that host); either he resigned it or was turned out of it, because he would not bow, or not bow heartily, in the house of Rimmon. Some think he went to Damascus upon account of the famine, or rather he went thither in obedience to the orders God gave Elijah, ^{<1191S>}1 Kings 19:15, “*Go to Damascus to anoint Hazael, thou, or thy successor.*”

II. We may observe that Ben-hadad, a great king, rich and mighty, lay sick. No honour, wealth, or power, will secure men from the common

diseases and disasters of human life; palaces and thrones lie as open to the arrests of sickness and death as the meanest cottage.

III. We may wonder that the king of Syria, in his sickness, should make Elisha his oracle.

1. Notice was soon brought him that *the man of God* (for by that title he was well known in Syria since he cured Naaman) had come to Damascus, v. 7. “Never in better time,” says Ben-hadad. “Go, and enquire of the Lord by him.” In his health he *bowed in the house of Rimmon*, but now that he is sick he distrusts his idol, and sends to enquire of the God of Israel. Affliction brings those to God who in their prosperity had made light of him; sometimes sickness opens men's eyes and rectifies their mistakes. This is the more observable,

(1.) Because it was not long since a king of Israel had, in his sickness, sent to enquire of the god of Ekron (~~1102~~2 Kings 1:2), as if there had been no God in Israel. Note, God sometimes fetches to himself that honour from strangers which is denied him and alienated from him by his own professing people.

(2.) Because it was not long since this Ben-hadad had sent a great force to treat Elisha as an enemy (~~1104~~2 Kings 6:14), yet now he courts him as a prophet. Note, Among other instances of the change of men's minds by sickness and affliction, this is one, that it often gives them other thoughts of God's ministers, and teaches them to value the counsels and prayers of those whom they had hated and despised.

2. To put an honour upon the prophet,

(1.) He sends *to* him, and does not send *for* him, as if, with the centurion, he thought himself not worthy that the man of God should come under his roof.

(2.) He sends to him by Hazael, his prime-minister of state, and not by a common messenger. It is no disparagement to the greatest of men to attend the prophets of the Lord. Hazael must go and meet him at a place where he had appointed a meeting with his friends.

(3.) He sends him a noble present, *of every good thing of Damascus*, as much as loaded forty camels (v. 9), testifying hereby his affection to the prophet, bidding him welcome to Damascus, and providing for his

sustenance while he sojourned there. It is probable that Elisha accepted it (why should he not?), though he refused Naaman's.

(4.) He orders Hazael to call him *his son Ben-hadad*, conforming to the language of Israel, who called the prophets *fathers*.

(5.) He puts an honour upon him as one acquainted with the secrets of heaven, when he enquires of him, *Shall I recover?* It is natural to us to desire to know things to come in time, while things to come in eternity are little thought of or enquired after.

IV. What passed between Hazael and Elisha is especially remarkable.

1. Elisha answered his enquiry concerning the king, that he might recover, the disease was not mortal, but that he should die another way (v. 10), not a natural but a violent death. There are many ways out of the world, and sometimes, while men think to avoid one, they fall by another.

2. He looked Hazael in the face with an unusual concern, till he made Hazael blush and himself weep, v. 11. The man of God could outface the man of war. It was not in Hazael's countenance that Elisha read what he would do, but God did, at this time, reveal it to him, and it fetched tears from his eyes. The more foresight men have the more grief they are liable to.

3. When Hazael asked him why he wept he told him what a great deal of mischief he foresaw he would do to the Israel of God (v. 12), what desolations he would make of their strong-holds, and barbarous destruction of their men, women, and children. The sins of Israel provoked God to give them up into the hands of their cruel enemies, yet Elisha wept to think that ever Israelites should be thus abused; for, though he foretold, he did not desire the woeful day. See what havoc war makes, what havoc sin makes, and how the nature of man is changed by the fall, and stripped even of humanity itself.

4. Hazael was greatly surprised at this prediction (v. 13): *What, says he, Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* This great thing he looks upon to be,

(1.) An act of great power, not to be done but by a crowned head. "It must be some mighty potentate that can think to prevail thus against Israel, and

therefore not I.” Many are raised to that dominion which they never thought of and it often proves *to their own hurt*, ^{<2189>}Ecclesiastes 8:9.

(2.) An act of great barbarity, which could not be done but by one lost to all honour and virtue: “Therefore,” says he, “it is what I shall never find in my heart to be guilty of: *Is thy servant a dog*, to rend, and tear, and devour? Unless I were a dog, I could not do it.” See here,

[1.] What a bad opinion he had of the sin; he looked upon it to be great wickedness, fitter for a brute, for a beast of prey, to do than a man. Note, It is possible for a wicked man, under the convictions and restraints of natural conscience, to express great abhorrence of a sin, and yet afterwards to be well reconciled to it.

[2.] What a good opinion he had of himself, how much better than he deserved; he thought it impossible he should do such barbarous things as the prophet foresaw. Note, We are apt to think ourselves sufficiently armed against those sins which yet we are afterwards overcome by, as Peter, ^{<1135>}Matthew 26:35.

5. In answer to this Elisha only told him *he should be king over Syria*; then he would have power to do it, and then he would find in his heart to do it. *Honours change men's tempers and manners*, and seldom for the better: “Thou knowest not what thou wilt do when thou comest to be king, but I tell thee this thou wilt do.” Those that are little and low in the world cannot imagine how strong the temptations of power and prosperity are, and, if ever they arrive at them, they will find how deceitful their hearts were and how much worse than they suspected.

V. What mischief Hazael did to his master hereupon. If he took any occasion to do it from what Elisha had said the fault was in him, not in the word.

1. He basely cheated his master, and belied the prophet (v. 14): *He told me thou shouldst certainly recover*. This was abominably false; he told him he should die (v. 10), but he unfairly and unfaithfully concealed that, either because he was loth to put the king out of humour with bad news or because hereby he might the more effectually carry on that bloody design which he conceived when he was told he should be his successor. The devil ruins men by telling them they shall certainly recover and do well, so rocking them asleep in security, than which nothing is more fatal. This was

an injury to the king, who lost the benefit of this warning to prepare for death, and an injury to Elisha, who would be counted a false prophet.

2. He barbarously murdered his master, and so made good the prophet's word, v. 15. He dipped a thick cloth in cold water, and spread it upon his face, under pretence of cooling and refreshing him, but so that it stopped his breath, and stifled him presently, he being weak (and not able to help himself) or perhaps asleep: such a bubble is the life of the greatest of men, and so much exposed are princes to violence. Hazael, who was Ben-hadad's confidant, was his murderer, and some think, was not suspected, nor did the truth ever come out but by the pen of this inspired historian. We found this haughty monarch (1 Kings 20) *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, but he *goes down slain to the pit with his iniquity upon his bones*, ^{<127>}Ezekiel 32:27.

^{<186>}2 KINGS 8:16-24

THE REIGN OF JEHORAM

We have here a brief account of the life and reign of Jehoram (or Joram), one of the worst of the kings of Judah, but the son and successor of Jehoshaphat, one of the best. Note,

1. Parents cannot give grace to their children. Many that have themselves been godly have had the grief and shame of seeing those that came forth out of their bowels wicked and vile. Let not the families that are thus afflicted think it strange.

2. If the children of good parents prove wicked, commonly they are worse than others. The unclean spirit brings in seven others more wicked than himself, ^{<116>}Luke 11:26.

3. A nation is sometimes justly punished with the miseries of a bad reign for not improving the blessings and advantages of a good one.

Concerning this Jehoram observe,

I. The general idea here given of his wickedness (v. 18): *He did as the house of Ahab*, and worse he could not do. His character is taken from the bad example he followed, for men are according to the company they

converse with and the copies they write after. No mistake is more fatal to young people than a mistake in the choice of those whom they would recommend themselves to and take their measures from, and whose good opinion they value themselves by. Jehoram chose the house of Ahab for his pattern rather than his father's house, and this choice was his ruin. We have a particular account of his wickedness (2 Chronicles 21), murder, idolatry, persecution, everything that was bad.

II. The occasions of his wickedness. His father was a very good man, and no doubt took care to have him taught the good knowledge of the Lord, but, 1. It is certain he did ill to marry him to the daughter of Ahab; no good could come of an alliance with an idolatrous family, but all mischief with such a daughter of such a mother as Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel. The degeneracy of the old world took rise from the unequal yoking of professors with profane. Those that are ill-matched are already half-ruined.

2. I doubt he did not do well to make him king in his own life-time. It is said here (v. 16) that he *began to reign, Jehoshaphat being then king*; hereby he gratified his pride (than which nothing is more pernicious to young people), indulged him in his ambition, in hopes to reform him by humouring him, and so brought a curse upon his family, as Eli did, *whose sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not*. Jehoshaphat had made this wicked son of his viceroy once when he went with Ahab to Ramoth-Gilead, from which Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year (^{<1125>}1 Kings 22:51) is made Jehoram's second (^{<1217>}2 Kings 1:17), but afterwards, in his twenty-second year, he made him partner in his government, and thence Joram's eight years are to be dated, three years before his father's death. It has been hurtful to many young men to come too soon to their estates. Samuel got nothing by *making his sons judges*.

III. The rebukes of Providence which he was under for his wickedness.

1. The Edomites revolted, who had been under the government of the kings of Judah ever since David's time, about 150 years, v. 20. He attempted to reduce them, and gave them a defeat (v. 21), but he could not improve the advantage he had got, so as to recover his dominion over them: *Yet Edom revolted* (v. 22), and the Edomites were, after this, bitter enemies to the Jews, as appears by the prophecy of Obadiah and ^{<1370>}Psalm 137:7. Now Isaac's prophecy was fulfilled, that this Esau the elder should

serve Jacob the younger; yet, in process of time, he should *break that yoke from off his neck*, ^{<0124>}Genesis 27:40.

2. Libnah revolted. This was a city in Judah, in the heart of his country, a priests' city; the inhabitants of this city shook off his government *because he had forsaken God*, and would have compelled them to do so too, ^{<4210>}2 Chronicles 21:10, 11. In order that they might preserve their religion they set up for a free state. Perhaps other cities did the same.

3. His reign was short. God cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but forty years old, and had reigned but eight years. *Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days*.

IV. The gracious care of Providence for the keeping up of the kingdom of Judah, and the house of David, notwithstanding the apostasies and calamities of Jehoram's reign (v. 19): *Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah*. He could easily have done it; he might justly have done it; it would have been no loss to him to have done it; yet he would not do it, for David's sake, not for the sake of any merit of his which could challenge this favour to his family as a debt, but for the sake of a promise made to him that he should always have a lamp (that is, a succession of kings from one generation to another, by which his name should be kept bright and illustrious, as a lamp is kept burning by a constant fresh supply of oil), that his family should never be extinct till it terminated in the Messiah, that Son of David on whom was to be *hung all the glory of his Father's house* and in whose everlasting kingdom that promise to David is fulfilled (^{<4127>}Psalm 132:17), *I have ordained a lamp for my anointed*.

V. The conclusion of this impious and inglorious reign, v. 23, 24. Nothing peculiar is here said of him; but we are told (^{<4219>}2 Chronicles 21:19, 20) that he *died of sore diseases* and *died without being desired*.

^{<1125>}2 KINGS 8:25-29

REIGN OF AHAZIAH

As among common persons there are some that we call *little men*, who make no figure, are little regarded, as less valued, so among kings there are some whom, in comparison with others, we may call *little kings*. This

Ahaziah was one of these; he looks mean in the history, and in God's account vile, because wicked. It is too plain an evidence of the affinity between Jehoshaphat and Ahab that they had the same names in their families at the same time, in which, we may suppose, they designed to compliment one another. Ahab had two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, who reigned successively; Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson names Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson names Jehoram and Ahaziah, who, in like manner, reigned successively. Names indeed do not make natures, but it was a bad omen to Jehoshaphat's family to borrow names from Ahab's; or, if he lent the names to that wretched family, he could not communicate with them the devotion of their significations, *Ahaziah — Taking hold of the Lord*, and *Jehoram — The Lord exalted*. Ahaziah king of Israel had reigned but two years, Ahaziah king of Judah reigned but one. We are here told that his relation to Ahab's family was the occasion, 1. Of his wickedness (v. 27): *He walked in the way of the house of Ahab*, that idolatrous bloody house; for his mother was Ahab's daughter (v. 26), so that he sucked in wickedness with his milk. *Partus sequitur ventrem — The child may be expected to resemble the mother*. When men choose wives for themselves they must remember they are choosing mothers for their children, and are concerned to choose accordingly.

2. Of his fall. Joram, his mother's brother, courted him to join with him for the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead, an attempt fatal to Ahab; so it was to Joram his son, for in that expedition he was wounded (v. 28), and returned to Jezreel to be cured, leaving his army there in possession of the place. Ahaziah likewise returned, but went to Jezreel to see how Jehoram did, v. 29. Providence so ordered it, that he who had been debauched by the house of Ahab might be cut off with them, when the measure of their iniquity was full, as we shall find in the next chapter. Those who partake with sinners in their sins must expect to partake with them in their plagues.