

CHAPTER 13

This chapter brings us again to the history of the kings of Israel, and particularly of the family of Jehu. We have here an account of the reign,

I. Of his son Jehoahaz, which continued seventeen years.

1. His bad character in general (v. 1, 2), the trouble he was brought into (v. 3), and the low ebb of his affairs (v. 7).
2. His humiliation before God, and God's compassion towards him (v. 4, 5, and 23).
3. His continuance in his idolatry notwithstanding (v. 6).
4. His death (v. 8, 9).

II. Of his grandson Joash, which continued sixteen years. Here is a general account of his reign in the usual form (v. 10-13), but a particular account of the death of Elisha in his time.

1. The kind visit the king made him (v. 14), the encouragement he gave the king in his wars with Syria (v. 15-19).
2. His death and burial (v. 20), and a miracle wrought by his bones (v. 21). And, lastly, the advantages Joash gained against the Syrians, according to his predictions (v. 24, 25).

12 2 KINGS 13:1-9

THE REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ

This general account of the reign of Jehoahaz, and of the state of Israel during his seventeen years, though short, is long enough to let us see two things which are very affecting and instructive: —

I. The glory of Israel raked up in the ashes, buried and lost, and turned into shame. How unlike does Israel appear here to what it had been and might have been! How is its crown profaned and its honour laid in the dust!

1. It was the honour of Israel that they worshipped the only living and true God, who is a Spirit, an eternal mind, and had rules by which to worship him of his own appointment; but by *changing the glory of their*

incorruptible God into the similitude of an ox, the truth of God into a lie, they lost this honour, and levelled themselves with the nations that worshipped the work of their own hands. We find here that the king followed the sins of Jeroboam (v. 2), and the people departed not from them, but walked therein, v. 6. There could not be a greater reproach than these two idolized calves were to a people that were instructed in the service of God and entrusted with the lively oracles. In all the history of the ten tribes we never find the least shock given to that idolatry, but, in every reign, still the calf was their god, and they separated themselves to that shame.

2. It was the honour of Israel that they were taken under the special protection of heaven; God himself was their defence, the shield of their help and the sword of their excellency. Happy wast thou, O Israel! upon this account. But here, as often before, we find them stripped of this glory, and exposed to the insults of all their neighbours. They by their sins provoked God to anger, and then he *delivered them into the hands of Hazael and Benhadad, v. 3. Hazael oppressed Israel v. 22.* Surely never was any nation so often plucked and pillaged by their neighbours as Israel was. This the people brought upon themselves by sin; when they had provoked God to pluck up their hedge, the goodness of their land did but tempt their neighbours to prey upon them. So low was Israel brought in this reign, by the many depravations which the Syrians made upon them, that the militia of the kingdom and all the force they could bring into the field were but *fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and 10,000 footmen, a despicable muster, v. 7.* Have the thousands of Israel come to this? *How has the gold become dim!* The debauching of a nation will certainly be the debasing of it.

II. Some sparks of Israel's ancient honour appearing in these ashes. It is not quite forgotten, notwithstanding all these quarrels, that this people is the Israel of God and he is the God of Israel. For,

1. It was the ancient honour of Israel that they were a praying people: and here we find somewhat of that honour revived; for Jehoahaz their king, in his distress, *besought the Lord (v. 4),* applied for help, not to the calves (what help could they give him?) but to the Lord. It becomes kings to be beggars at God's door, and the greatest of men to be humble petitioners at the footstool of his throne. Need will drive them to it.

2. It was the ancient honour of Israel that they had *God nigh unto them in all that which they called upon him for* (<BHD>Deuteronomy 4:7), and so he was here. Though he might justly have rejected the prayer as an abomination to him, yet *the Lord hearkened unto Jehoahaz*, and to his prayer for himself and for his people (v. 4), and *he gave Israel a saviour* (v. 5), not Jehoahaz himself, for all his days Hazael oppressed Israel (v. 22), but his son, to whom, in answer to his father's prayers, God gave success against the Syrians, so that he recovered the cities which they had taken from his father, v. 25. This gracious answer God gave to the prayer of Jehoahaz, not for his sake, or the sake of that unworthy people, but in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham (v. 23), which, in such exigencies as these, he had long since promised to have respect to, <BHD>Leviticus 26:42. See swift God is to show mercy, how ready to hear prayers, how willing to find out a reason to be gracious, else he would not look so far back as that ancient covenant which Israel had so often broken and forfeited all the benefit of. Let this invite and engage us for ever to him, and encourage even those that have forsaken him to return and repent; *for there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.*

<1230> 2 KINGS 13:10-19

THE REIGN OF JOASH, KING OF ISRAEL

We have here Jehoash, or Joash, the son of Jehoahaz and grandson of Jehu, upon the throne of Israel. Probably the house of Jehu intended some respect to the house of David when they gave this heir-apparent to the crown the same name with him that was then king of Judah.

I. The general account here given of him and his reign is much the same with what we have already met with, and has little in it remarkable, v. 10-13. He was none of the worst, and yet, because he kept up that ancient and politic idolatry of the house of Jeroboam, it is said, *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*. That one evil was enough to leave an indelible mark of infamy upon his name; for, how little evil soever men saw in it, it was, *in the sight of the Lord*, a very wicked thing; and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth. It is observable how lightly the inspired penman passes over his acts, and his might wherewith he warred, leaving it to the common historians to record them, while he takes notice only of the

respect he showed to Elisha. One good action shall make a better figure in God's book than twenty great ones; and, in his account, it gains a man a much better reputation to honour a prophet than to conquer a king and his army.

II. The particular account of what passed between him and Elisha has several things in it remarkable.

1. Elisha fell sick, v. 14. Observe,

(1.) He lived long; for it was now about sixty years since he was first called to be a prophet. It was a great mercy to Israel, and especially to the sons of the prophets, that he was continued so long a burning and shining light. Elijah finished his testimony in a fourth part of that time. God's prophets have their day set them, some longer, others shorter, as Infinite Wisdom sees fit.

(2.) All the latter part of his time, from the anointing of Jehu, which was forty-five years before Joash began his reign, we find no mention made of him, or of any thing he did, till we find him here upon his death-bed. He might be useful to the last, and yet not so famous as he had sometimes been. The time of his flourishing was less than the time of his living. Let not old people complain of obscurity, but rather be well pleased with retirement.

(3.) The spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and yet he was not sent for to heaven in a fiery chariot, as Elijah was, but went the common road out of the world, and was *visited with the visitation of all men*. If God honour some above others, who yet are not inferior to them in gifts or graces, who shall find fault? *May he not do what he will with his own?*

2. King Joash visited him in his sickness, and *wept over him*, v. 14. This was an evidence of some good in him, that he had a value and affection for a faithful prophet; so far was he from hating and persecuting him as a troubler of Israel that he loved and honoured him as one of the greatest blessings of his kingdom, and lamented the loss of him. There have been those who would not be obedient to the word of God, and yet have the faithful ministers of it so manifested in their consciences that they could not but have an honour for them. Observe here,

(1.) When the king heard of Elisha's sickness he came to visit him, and to receive his dying counsel and blessing; and it was no disparagement to him,

though a king, thus to honour one whom God honoured. Note, It may turn much to our spiritual advantage to attend the sick-beds and death-beds of good ministers and other good men, that we may learn to die, and may be encouraged in religion by the living comforts they have from it in a dying hour.

(2.) Though Elisha was very old, had been a great while useful, and, in the course of nature, could not continue long, yet the king, when he saw him sick and likely to die, wept over him. The aged are most experienced and therefore can worst be spared. In many causes, one old witness is worth ten young ones.

(3.) He lamented him in the same words with which Elisha had himself lamented the removal of Elijah: *My father, my father*. It is probable he had heard or read them in that famous story. Note, Those that give just honours to the generation that goes before them are often recompensed with the like from the generation that comes after them. He that watereth, that watereth with tears, shall be watered, shall be so watered, also himself, when it comes to his own turn, ^{<0125>}Proverbs 11:25.

(4.) This king was herein selfish; he lamented the loss of Elisha because he was as the chariot and horsemen of Israel, and therefore could be ill spared when Israel was so poor in chariots and horsemen, as we find they were (v. 7), when they had in all but fifty horsemen and ten chariots. Those who consider how much good men contribute to the defence of a nation, and the keeping off of God's judgments, will see cause to lament the removal of them.

3. Elisha gave the king great assurances of his success against the Syrians, Israel's present oppressors, and encouraged him to prosecute the war against them with vigour. Elisha was aware that therefore he was loth to part with him because he looked upon him as the great bulwark of the kingdom against that common enemy, and depended much upon his blessings and prayers in his designs against them. "Well," says Elisha, "if that be the cause of your grief, let not that trouble thee, for thou shalt be victorious over the Syrians when I am in my grave. *I die, but God will surely visit you*. He has the residue of the Spirit, and can raise up other prophets to pray for you." God's grace is not tied to one hand. He can bury his workmen and yet carry on his work. To animate the king against the Syrians he gives him a sign, orders him to *take bow and arrows* (v. 15), to intimate to him that, in order to the deliverance of his kingdom from the

Syrians, he must put himself into a military posture and resolve to undergo the perils and fatigues of war. God would be the agent, but he must be the instrument. And that he should be successful he gives him a token, by directing him,

(1.) To shoot an arrow towards Syria, v. 16, 17. The king, no doubt, knew how to manage a bow better than the prophet did, and yet, because the arrow now to be shot was to have its significancy from the divine institution, as if he were now to be disciplined, he received the words of command from the prophet: *Put thy hand upon the bow — Open the window — Shoot.* Nay, as if he had been a child that never drew a bow before, *Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands*, to signify that in all his expeditions against the Syrians he must look up to God for direction and strength, must reckon his own hands not sufficient for him, but go on in a dependence upon divine aid. *He teacheth my hands to war*, ^{<91834>}Psalm 18:34; 144:1. The trembling hands of a dying prophet, as they signified the concurrence and communication of the power of God, gave this arrow more force than the hands of the king in his full strength. The Syrians had made themselves masters of the country that lay eastward, ^{<12083>}2 Kings 10:33. Thitherward therefore the arrow was directed, and such an interpretation given by the prophet of the shooting of this arrow, though shot in one respect at random, as made it,

[1.] A commission to the king to attack the Syrians, notwithstanding their power and possession.

[2.] A promise of success therein. It is the *arrow of the Lord's deliverance, even the arrow of deliverance from Syria*. It is God that commands deliverance; and, when he will effect it, who can hinder? The arrow of deliverance is his. He shoots out his arrows, and the work is done, ^{<91834>}Psalm 18:14. *“Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, where they are now encamped, or where they are to have a general rendezvous of their forces, till thou have consumed those of them that are vexatious and oppressive to thee and thy kingdom.”*

(2.) To *strike with the arrows*, v. 18, 19. The prophet having in God's name assured him of victory over the Syrians, he will now try him and see what improvement he will make of his victories, whether he will push them on with more zeal than Ahab did when Benhadad lay at his mercy. For the trial of this he bids him *smite with the arrows on the ground*: *“Believe them brought to the ground by the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and laid at*

thy feet; and now show me what thou wilt do to them when thou hast them down, whether thou wilt do as David did when God *gave him the necks of his enemies, beat them small as the dust before the wind,*" ~~<1810>~~ Psalm 18:40, 42. The king showed not that eagerness and flame which one might have expected upon this occasion, but smote thrice, and no more. Either out of foolish tenderness to the Syrians, he smote as if he were afraid of hurting them, at least of ruining them, willing to show mercy to those that never did, nor ever would, show mercy to him or his people. Or, perhaps, he smote thrice, and very coldly, because he thought it but a silly thing, that it looked idle and childish for a king to beat the floor with his arrows; and thrice was often enough for him to play the fool merely to please the prophet. But, by contemning the sign, he lost the thing signified, sorely to the grief of the dying prophet, who was angry with him, and told him he should have smitten five or six times. Not being straitened in the power and promise of God, why should he be straitened in his own expectations and endeavours? Note, It cannot but be a trouble to good men to see those they wish well to stand in their own light and forsake their own mercies, to see them lose their advantages against their spiritual enemies, and to give them advantage.

~~<1231>~~ 2 KINGS 13:20-25

THE DEATH OF ELISHA

We must here attend,

I. The sepulchre of Elisha: he died in a good old age, and they buried him; and what follows shows,

1. What power there was in his life to keep off judgments; for, as soon as he was dead, the bands of the Moabites invaded the land — not great armies to face them in the field, but roving skulking bands, that murdered and plundered by surprise. God has many ways to chastise a provoking people. The king was apprehensive of danger only from the Syrians, but, behold, the Moabites invade him. Trouble comes sometimes from that point whence we least feared it. The mentioning of this immediately upon the death of Elisha intimates that the removal of God's faithful prophets is a presage of judgments coming. When ambassadors are recalled heralds may be expected.

2. What power there was in his dead body: it communicated life to another dead body, v. 21. This great miracle, though very briefly related, was a decided proof of his mission and a confirmation of all his prophecies. It was also a plain indication of another life after this. When Elisha died, there was not an end of him, for then he could not have done this. From operation we may infer existence. By this it appeared that the Lord was still the God of Elisha; therefore Elisha still lived, for *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*. And it may, perhaps, have a reference to Christ, by whose death and burial the grave is made to all believers a safe and happy passage to life. It likewise intimated that though Elisha was dead, yet, in virtue of the promises made by him, Israel's interests, though they seemed quite sunk and lost, should revive and flourish again. The neighbours were carrying the dead body of a man to the grave, and, fearing to fall into the hands of the Moabites, a party of whom they saw at a distance near the place where the body was to be interred, they laid the corpse in the next convenient place, which proved to be Elisha's sepulchre. The dead man, upon touching Elisha's bones, revived, and, it is likely, went home again with his friends. Josephus relates the story otherwise, That some thieves, having robbed and murdered an honest traveller, threw his dead body into Elisha's grave, and it immediately revived. Elijah was honoured *in* his departure. Elisha was honoured *after* his departure. God thus dispenses honours as he pleases, but, one way or other, the rest of all the saints will be glorious, ^{<3110>} Isaiah 11:10. It is good being near the saints and having our lot with them both in life and death.

II. The sword of Joash king of Israel; and we find it successful against the Syrians.

1. The cause of his success was God's favour (v. 23): *The Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them in their miseries and respect unto them*. The several expressions here of the same import call upon us to observe and admire the triumphs of divine goodness in the deliverance of such a provoking people. It was of the Lord's mercies that they were not consumed, because he would not destroy them as yet. He foresaw they would destroy themselves at last, but as yet he would relieve them, and give them space to repent. The slowness of God's processes against sinners must be construed to the honour of his mercy, not the impeachment of his justice.

2. The effect of his success was Israel's benefit. He recovered out of the hands of Benhadad the cities of Israel which the Syrians were possessed of, v. 25. This was a great kindness to the cities themselves, which were hereby brought from under the yoke of oppression, and to the whole kingdom, which was much strengthened by the reduction of those cities. Thrice Joash beat the Syrians, just as often as he had struck the ground with the arrows, and then a full stop was put to the course of his victories. Many have repented, when it was too late, of their distrusts and the straitness of their desires.