

December 05, 2005 – Subject: God the Preserver of Man

DEAR FRIENDS: Mary Baker Eddy gave her students 26 subjects for weekly Bible Lessons, to be covered twice yearly. Flowing through the year in her order of the subjects, we hereby present fresh views of each one by outstanding Christian Scientists. In this way, we hope to partake with you of new unfoldments of her infinite revelation.

Our selection this week is from – The Bible as Our Life, Book-2, by Peggy M. Brook.

The Miracles of Elisha-III (II Kings 6:1-8:6)

THE CRY of the sons of the prophets recorded in the opening verse of Chapter 6 of II Kings is one that every sincere spiritual thinker utters at some period in his spiritual journey: “The place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go... unto Jordan... and let us make a place there, where we may dwell.”

The sons of the prophets were theological students, and up to this point they had represented religious thought confined in creed and dogma, but here they were beginning to realize that Truth is universal and that their thought must expand to dwell in Jordan, “the river of God,” the river that typifies in the Scriptures a process of spiritual education in the one universal Science of spiritual values. As we have seen, it was the Jordan in which Naaman had the humility to wash and was cleansed from the leprosy of pride and separateness. It was the Jordan in which John the Baptist baptized his followers before they could accept the universal Christ mission of Jesus, which opened the way for men out of the rigidity or straitness of the law into the universality of the Gospel. Jesus himself allowed John to baptize him in the Jordan, though he truly had no need to do so, but he was the Way-shower for all men, and therefore he undertook this baptism of spiritual education, saying, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.”

The recovery of the borrowed axe

When the sons of the prophets came to the Jordan, they began to fell wood to make themselves dwellings. It is related that one of them accidentally let an axe head fall into the water and he was

distressed and cried, “Alas, master! For it was borrowed.” He called to the man of God, showed him the place where it fell, and Elisha then cut a stick from a tree and threw it into the water. This caused the axe head to float so that the man could grasp it again and continue his work.

Is this a lesson that if any man partakes of the process of universal spiritual education, this awakening desire must come as a living impulsion “out of his own loins”? It cannot be “borrowed.” To be carried along merely by a popular urge to be universal in thought can have no firm basis. The move towards the universal conception of Truth is something that is born of individual conviction and a real understanding of the innate oneness of being. If it is not, one is always liable at some point to lose one’s spiritual hold in this direction because one has been influenced by personal sense instead of being led by a living individual understanding of the universal nature of divine Principle.

The comforting factor in this incident, though, is that it shows salvation forever at hand. Elisha, who means “God is salvation,” is always present to redeem the situation. Right at the place where the mistake occurred is the fact of Principle—a stick from the tree—which, used by the prophet or spiritual sense, brings the specific truth needed to the surface again so that it can be grasped and the building continued. So even if our desire to be universal and build on a wider basis has a “borrowed” element about it and has not developed naturally from our own spiritual conviction, there is always an Elisha to redeem it if we are honest and in earnest.

Elisha at Dothan

In the Scriptural record, immediately after this incident, we hear of the king of Syria again warring with Israel. Elisha, through prophetic insight, foresaw the Syrians’ plans and warned the king of Israel not to pass a certain place, where he knew he would be attacked. The king of Syria discovered that it was Elisha who was revealing his secret intentions and so he set out to capture him at Dothan.

Syria stands for the human element, unilluminated by the spiritual, and this element—consciously or unconsciously—wars against the spiritual. Human knowledge and merely human desires, aims, and

ambitions are the persistent enemies of true spiritual progress, even as the Syrians were the persistent enemies of Israel. But alert spiritual vision has the divine insight to detect exactly where the danger lies, so that all that represents the spiritual idea is preserved. Human belief may then pursue this spiritual vision and try to overwhelm it, but it is powerless before the allness of the spiritual. This fact is beautifully illustrated in the well-known story of Elisha and his servant at Dothan, which means “two wells” – an interesting meaning when one realizes that Elisha was all the while proving the salvation of God both divinely and humanly. His very mission began with his desire for “a double portion” of Elijah’s spirit, namely, spiritual understanding and the natural proof of that understanding in human experience.

The Syrians with all their “horses, and chariots, and a great host” came by night to Dothan and “compassed the city about.” Human belief often surrounds us with its impressive outward appearance and claims to have hosts of people believing in it and supporting it. Moreover, it operates by night – in the darkness of unenlightened thinking. When the morning came, Elisha’s servant saw the Syrian host and was afraid, but Elisha said, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” Spiritual vision can never be overwhelmed by the threatening potentialities of human belief because spiritual vision realizes the fundamental reality and consequent all-encompassing nature of the spiritual, the very essence of which is Love. It was this vision that made Daniel feel safe in the lions’ den, and enabled the three Hebrew young men to walk unharmed through the fiery furnace. It was this vision that enabled Jesus not only to say to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above,” but also to prove that statement through resurrection and ascension against the whole gamut of human belief let loose in the form of hatred and crucifixion. Nothing is irresistible, nothing is fundamental, but Love’s plan of salvation.

Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes might be opened to behold the allness of the spiritual, and the young man’s eyes were opened so that he saw that “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” What a wonderful lesson lies in this incident! When we seem to be hedged in on every side by fearful, finite

suggestions of human belief, we do not need to run away or summon up tremendous forces of will power to meet the enemy, but merely to “open our eyes” to what is really governing the whole situation. We do not have to create spiritual reality or make it operate, any more than we could make the sun shine and be warm. Spiritual reality is already omnipresent and omnipotent and what we have to do is to draw our mental blinds aside to feel the warm radiance of the Truth that is Love.

The eyes of Elisha’s servant were opened, but the eyes of the Syrians became blinded. The story relates that Elisha caused them to become temporarily blinded whilst he led them into the midst of Samaria, where their vision was restored and they were fed and sent back to their master. When anyone realizes the power of the spiritual in any situation, human belief is seen to be blind and powerless. The human is completely in the hands of the spiritual and spiritual vision leads it to the place where it is surrounded by the spiritual and where it realizes that it is the spiritual that gives to the human any vision it has, and that it is the spiritual that feeds and sustains the human. This realization gives to the human its proper place of subordination to the divine.

The siege of Samaria

Before Elisha passes from the picture, he is once more involved with the defeat of the Syrians at Samaria. This time they attack the capital of Israel, and there is a siege which results in grievous famine in the city, so much so that women are eating their sons.

It is believed that Elisha persuaded the king of Israel to hold out against the enemy thus far and so the king, beside himself with anxiety, curses Elisha, and wants to kill him.

Often when human beliefs besiege us on all sides, threatening to overwhelm us, and when there appears to be a complete famine of spiritual sense and no future in the situation at all, the temptation may come to wish that we had never heard of Truth and to turn against it. The children of Israel were constantly at this point in their journey through the wilderness, and murmured against Moses. Might it not also have been the pressure of disappointed material hopes and a famine of spiritual sense that made Judas turn against Jesus?

In Samaria, in contrast with the desperate situation of famined sense and in keeping with the calm attitude of spiritual vision, the Scriptures relate, "But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him." As at Dothan, so in Samaria, Elisha refused to be panicked. How can the vision of the allness of the spiritual ever be pushed or pressed or panicked? Elisha merely prophesied that the next day food would be sold in the gate of Samaria once again. This prophecy was not credited. Limited thought can never accept spiritual prophecy. Nevertheless it proved itself to be true.

The story says that through divine intervention the Syrians were made to hear the noise of chariots, horses, and a great host, and they fled. So finally the siege ended without a fight. Elisha's prophecy that there would be food sold in the gate of Samaria the next day was proved true and all limited thought was trodden underfoot. God can always furnish a table in the wilderness, for there are no limits to the blessed power of divine Love, since it is All.

The Shunammite's house and land restored

A little incident is recorded in Chapter 8 of II Kings which is said to be out of chronological order, but which nevertheless has its place here, illustrating that no matter what famine there is or what land of human belief we may have to dwell in temporarily, we can never lose our Christ inheritance if we are faithful. Here Elisha told the Shunammite to go and sojourn in the land of the Philistines because of a famine in her land. This she did for seven years, at the end of which time she returned and pleaded with the king of Israel to restore to her her house and her land. This request was granted, everything was restored and all the fruits of the land were also given to her.

The Shunammite expressed the same type of spiritual consciousness as Joseph, who also had to dwell in the land of an enemy and experienced a famine of seven years' duration. Though he seemed to be deprived of his inheritance in Canaan, it was restored to him richly in Egypt, where he became ruler. The Shunammite had already experienced very vividly the restoring power of the spiritual when her son had died and Elisha brought him back to life, so she knew the truth of the Psalmist's words, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." When through faithfulness to the spiritual we experience the restoring, in all its

living nature, of a new-found vision which seemed to be lost, then we realize that everything that is our true inheritance irresistibly belongs to us and nothing can keep it from us.

It was seven years of famine that this woman endured in the land of the Philistines. Joseph experienced seven lean years and seven fat years in Egypt. Naaman had to dip himself seven times in the Jordan. This symbol permeates so many of these stories, teaching through positive or negative illustrations that a living understanding of the great spiritual fundamentals of being as symbolized in the days of creation feeds and sustains man, preserves and protects him, enabling him to prove his completeness as the perfect expression of an infinite divine Cause.

It seems fitting that Elisha's final prophecies and his passing from the scene should be preceded by this story of restoration, for it is as though the work of Elijah, the great Restorer, was symbolically fulfilled at the conclusion of Elisha's mission. Spiritual understanding fulfils itself in proof of that understanding, and the real proof is not creating harmony where there was discord, or health where there was sickness, but rather is it the restoring of man through understanding to his true estate of wholeness which in reality he has never left.

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