

1 "Elisha a Type of Christ and His Followers"  
2 *Sermons on Subjects of the Day* - sermon 13  
3 St. John Henry Newman  
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5 "And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." 2 Kings ii. 9.

6 THERE is so much alike at first sight in the history of Elijah and Elisha, that it is not  
7 surprising if many of us (as I suppose is the case) confuse them one with the other. Yet  
8 if we examine the sacred narrative carefully, we shall find that they differ from each  
9 other as widely as those children in the market-place, described by our Lord, the figures  
10 of Himself and St. John Baptist, who first piped and then mourned. Certainly there are  
11 many things which correspond in their respective histories. Both wrought miracles; both  
12 withstood kings; both, at God's bidding, visited in mercy the heathen in their  
13 neighbourhood; both lived in one age and one country, and apparently with one  
14 principal design in God's Providence, viz. that of witnessing against idolatry. Even the  
15 same miracles were wrought by the one and the other; both multiplied oil; both raised a  
16 dead child: so far they resemble each other.

17 Yet they differ in many important respects. Elijah led an ascetic and solitary life, and  
18 was the great Reformer of Israel; he was a preacher of repentance, and the avenger of  
19 God's honour upon false gods and their worshippers. What the kings Hezekiah and  
20 Josiah did in Judah, that work Elijah the Prophet did in Israel, and by the same weapon,  
21 the sword. On the other hand, Elisha lived in the world, mixed with all classes of people,  
22 had greater political influence (as we now call it), and the higher invisible gifts.

23 Of Elijah it is said, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins."  
24 [2 Kings i. 8.] We read of him first as miraculously fed by ravens in concealment, then  
25 living on the oil and meal miraculously increased; and this for three years: next, as  
26 showing forth the great miracle on Mount Carmel before all the people, of calling down  
27 fire from heaven on the sacrifice, and as slaughtering the four hundred and fifty  
28 prophets of Baal; then, as fleeing to the wilderness, sustained miraculously by an Angel,  
29 going forty days and nights without food; then as returning and denouncing judgment  
30 upon Ahab; then as calling fire from heaven upon the messengers of Ahaziah; and,  
31 lastly, as taken up without dying in a whirlwind. Such is the course of his history, very  
32 mysterious throughout, as if he did not live on earth, but only appeared from time to time  
33 for special purposes. Like Melchizedek, he has neither beginning of days nor end of life;  
34 he is introduced abruptly, as "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead,"  
35 [1 Kings xvii. 1.] and he is taken away as suddenly. His special characteristics, however,  
36 are, on the one hand, his austere mode of life; on the other, his destruction of idolatry.

37 Elisha, on the other hand, cannot be called a preacher of repentance or a reformer: as if  
38 Elijah had done the work for him, as far as it was attainable. Moreover, he lived in  
39 public, in known dwellings; he presided in the schools of the Prophets; and he had  
40 dealings with the kings of Israel, Judah, Edom, and Syria.

41 The difference between the two Prophets is marked in the circumstance that Elijah, and  
42 not Elisha, is taken as the type of St. John the Baptist, our Lord's forerunner; and from  
43 our knowledge of what St. John was, we may form some idea of Elijah's office. The  
44 Baptist prepared the way for Christ; such seems to have been Elijah's office, with  
45 reference to the age which succeeded him. Before his ministry, Baal's prophets had the  
46 supremacy, and the true prophets were hid in caves, and fed with bread and water;  
47 Elijah reversed the state of things, reinstated the Lord's Prophets, and then he was  
48 withdrawn. Thus he prepared the way for Elisha. Elijah then, as being a forerunner, a  
49 reformer, a preacher of repentance and righteousness, was the type of St. John the  
50 Baptist; but of whom is Elisha the type? On this subject I proceed to say a few words.

51 We need not of course be surprised, even if the Prophet Elisha was not the type of any  
52 servant of God then to come. Yet God's providences are so marvellously conducted in  
53 the way of figure and token, that certainly it does seem likely that Elisha is meant to  
54 represent some person or persons in the times of the Gospel, as Elijah is the type of St.  
55 John. Nor is it to the purpose to object that Scripture is silent on the subject, for  
56 Scripture omits to tell us that Isaac is a type of Christ, or Joseph, or Job, or Jeremiah;  
57 yet we can scarcely doubt that all these were such; and as the Apostle had much to say  
58 (which he did not say) about Melchizedek, there is no reason why he might not also  
59 have had somewhat to say about Elisha too, had it so happened. Since specimens of a  
60 typical correspondence between the histories of the Old and of the New Testament are  
61 given us in Scripture, it is arbitrary to say that the correspondence ends with these  
62 specimens; probable, on the other hand, that we are intended dutifully to avail ourselves  
63 in our expositions of Scripture of the clue which Scripture itself has put into our hands.

64 Still, though Elisha be the representative of some Christian office or ministry, it does not  
65 follow that there should be any very accurate and conclusive correspondence between  
66 type and antitype. Thus Elijah, we know, represents the Baptist; yet there are points in  
67 his history which are unlike St. John, and more like Christ himself. The Baptist did no  
68 miracles; Elijah even raised the dead, and so far was a type of Christ rather than of the  
69 Baptist. Again, when he ascended on high, he was rather a type of Christ than of  
70 Christ's forerunner.

71 We cannot, then, have such certainty in typical expositions which we make for  
72 ourselves, as we feel when Scripture has supplied them; but it is a great mistake to  
73 suppose that religion is only occupied with such facts and doctrines as are certain. Faith  
74 has its duties towards what is probable or doubtful, as well as towards the express  
75 teaching of Scripture. Whom then does Elisha represent? does he prefigure Christ? All  
76 the Prophets are types of Christ, as being Prophets; and it is true besides that Elisha is  
77 the type of Christ, in some remarkable points of his history peculiar to himself. For  
78 instance, when he came from Jordan, gifted by the hand of Elijah with the power of the  
79 Spirit, surely he resembled our Lord, as baptized by St. John in Jordan, and receiving  
80 the Spirit in consequence. And when his bones after his death revived a dead man, he  
81 typified (one cannot doubt) the Everlasting Saviour, whose body, dying on the cross, is  
82 our life and resurrection. Yet, in spite of these parallels, one may hardly call Elisha a  
83 special type of Christ any more than Elijah.

84 Whom then does Elisha represent? in other words, What is the lesson for Christian  
85 times deducible from Elisha's history? What light does that history throw upon the  
86 present condition of the Church, and the present duties of us members of it? I think we  
87 may say that, as Elijah represents the Baptist, Christ's forerunner, so Elisha prefigures  
88 Christ's successors, His servants which come after Him and inherit His gifts; Christ  
89 Himself being exactly represented by neither, coming between them, or (if at all)  
90 represented by both at once, when the one was departing, and the other taking his  
91 place; at once the Antitype of Elijah ascending into heaven, and of Elisha standing by  
92 Jordan, and receiving the gift of the Spirit.

93 Let Elisha then be taken to be the figure of Christ's favoured servants and followers, and  
94 thus be made to throw light upon their duties and privileges. By Christ's favoured and  
95 special servants, I do not merely mean His ministers, such as bishops and others, but  
96 all who in any measure have upon them eminent marks of the Lord Jesus; such as  
97 evangelists, confessors, solitaries, founders of monastic orders, doctors, and the like. Of  
98 all these, the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets,  
99 the noble army of martyrs, Elisha is the type. Let us go through some points of the  
100 resemblance.

101 1. Though Elijah was so great a prophet, yet Elisha had a double portion of his spirit.  
102 This seems to have its parallel in the Christian history. Our Saviour says, that though  
103 "among those that were born of women, there was not a greater than John the Baptist,  
104 yet he that was least in the kingdom of heaven," that is, the Christian Church, "was  
105 greater than he." This is explained by our being told by the Evangelist, that the Spirit  
106 was not given till Christ was glorified. St. John "was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from  
107 his mother's womb;" [Luke i. 15.] yet even this extraordinary gift was as nothing  
108 compared with that Presence of the Spirit which Christ's followers received, and by  
109 which they are regenerated. It is indeed a double, or rather a sevenfold portion of the  
110 Spirit, and gives us powers, in proportion to our faith, above all that we can anticipate or  
111 comprehend. This then is a first point of resemblance. Christ's followers, like Elisha,  
112 begin their divine career from the waters of Jordan, with the power of the Holy Ghost  
113 upon them.

114 2. Next I observe on the especial communion, or (as I may call it) citizenship, which  
115 Elisha enjoyed with the unseen world. Elijah thought himself solitary, though he was not  
116 so; the world invisible was hid from him. Though ministered to by Angels, though  
117 sustained miraculously by Almighty God, yet, like St. John Baptist, when he sent to ask  
118 Christ, "Art Thou He that should come?" he seemed to himself one against many. But  
119 Elisha had the privilege of knowing that he was one of a great host who were fighting  
120 the Lord's battles, though he might be solitary on earth. To him was revealed in its  
121 measure the comfortable Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints. His eyes were  
122 purged to see sights which the world could not see; and that so clearly, that he could  
123 even comfort his attendant, who felt that fear which had overtaken Elijah when he fled  
124 from Jezebel. Hear Elijah's words—"I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take  
125 it away." [1 Kings xix. 10.] On the other hand, when Elisha's servant, on finding the host  
126 of the Syrians round about them, said to the Prophet, "Alas! my master, how shall we

127 do?" Elisha answered, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with  
128 them." [2 Kings vi. 15-17.] And then he besought Almighty God to give to his servant for  
129 an instant a glimpse of that glorious vision which he in faith, or by inspiration, enjoyed  
130 continually. He "prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see.  
131 And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold the mountain  
132 was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." How well does this vision  
133 correspond to that blessed privilege which, as the Apostle assures us, is conferred upon  
134 us Christians. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the Living God, the  
135 heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general  
136 assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the  
137 Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of  
138 the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that  
139 of Abel!" An innumerable company of Angels, and the Spirits of the just;—we dwell  
140 under their shadow; we are baptized into their fellowship; we are allotted their  
141 guardianship; we are remembered, as we trust, in their prayers. We dwell in the very  
142 presence and court of God Himself, and of His Eternal Son our Saviour, who died for  
143 us, and rose again, and now intercedes for us before the Throne. We have privileges  
144 surely far greater than Elisha's; but of the same kind.

145 3. Another gift bestowed upon Elisha, and on the Christian Church which he prefigured,  
146 that is on her saints, and at times on her rulers, is the gift of discerning of spirits. Of our  
147 Saviour it is said, "He knew what was in man;" He knew the thoughts of His disciples;  
148 He knew what was happening in other places. Of His fulness His disciples received. St.  
149 Peter detected Ananias; St. Paul speaks as if he could have been in spirit at Corinth,  
150 while in the flesh he was absent. And in all ages the Catholic Church is promised an  
151 instinctive perception of Christian truth, detecting the grosser or the more insidious  
152 forms of heresy, though at a distance, as if by some subtle sense; and thus transmitting  
153 the faith of the Gospel pure and inviolate to the latest times. "The anointing," says St.  
154 John, "which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man  
155 teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no  
156 lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." [1 John ii. 27.] Now observe  
157 how this spiritual perception was granted in figure unto Elisha. When Gehazi, after  
158 taking the silver and raiment from Naaman, stood before Elisha, the prophet said to him,  
159 "Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet  
160 thee?" [2 Kings v. 26.] At another time he was enabled to reveal to the king of Israel all  
161 the plans of the king of Syria: "The heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this  
162 thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us  
163 is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king; but Elisha,  
164 the Prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy  
165 bedchamber." [2 Kings vi. 11, 12.] When the king of Israel determined to put him to  
166 death, and sent a messenger for that purpose, "Elisha sat in his house, and the elders  
167 sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him; but ere the messenger came to  
168 him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away  
169 mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the  
170 door; is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" [2 Kings vi. 32.] Further, when  
171 he saw Hazael, the captain of the king of Syria, "he settled his countenance steadfastly,

172 until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my  
173 lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of  
174 Israel;" [2 Kings viii. 11, 12.] he saw in his face his future fortunes. Still more remarkable  
175 are his words when he could not discover the trouble which weighed upon the  
176 Shunammite, as implying that such ignorance was unusual with him. "Her soul is vexed  
177 within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." [2 Kings iv. 27.]

178 4. A further power vouchsafed to Elisha, in which he seems to have surpassed Elijah his  
179 predecessor, was the power of inflicting spiritual censures and judgments. I mean, that  
180 the punishments he awarded were accomplished, not by earthly, but by supernatural  
181 means. Elijah indeed called down fire from heaven on the messengers of Ahaziah; but  
182 his great judgment upon the worshippers of Baal was effected by the sword. But  
183 Elisha's recorded judgments and censures were of a supernatural kind, bringing out into  
184 clearer view that characteristic of the spiritual priesthood which was to come, which  
185 Elijah only obscurely betokened. For instance, when he passed through Bethel, little  
186 children came out of the city and mocked him, saying, "Go up, thou bald head!"—"and  
187 he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the Name of the Lord; and  
188 there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of  
189 them." [2 Kings ii. 23, 24.] When Gehazi was convicted, he smote him with leprosy [2  
190 Kings v. 27.]; when the Syrians encompassed him, he "prayed unto the Lord, and said,  
191 Smite this people, I pray Thee, with blindness. And He smote them with blindness,  
192 according to the word of Elisha." [2 Kings vi. 18.] And when the unbelieving lord scoffed  
193 at his prophecy of plenty during the siege of Samaria by the Syrians, he said, "Behold,  
194 thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof;" [2 Kings vii. 2.] and  
195 accordingly, he was trampled to death in the gate by the people, as they went out to  
196 profit by the plenty, when this came to pass by the Syrians fleeing and leaving their  
197 camp behind them. This seems to be the meaning of the words, "Him that escapeth  
198 from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." In like manner, under the Gospel, St. Paul  
199 smote Elymas with blindness; and St. Peter pronounced God's judgment upon Ananias  
200 and Sapphira, who, like Gehazi, were guilty of covetousness and lying; and St. Paul  
201 bade deliver the incestuous Corinthian to Satan. Nay, to all the ministers of Christ is  
202 committed the awful power of retaining and remitting sins, according to the words,  
203 "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye  
204 retain, they are retained." [John xx. 23.]

205 5. Further: Elisha's person seems to have been gifted with an extraordinary sanctity and  
206 virtue. Even the touch of his relics after his death raised a dead man. Our Saviour had  
207 this power, as all others, in its fulness; virtue went out of Him. And His Apostles  
208 inherited it in their measure. We are told that "the people brought forth the sick into the  
209 streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter  
210 passing by might overshadow some of them." [Acts v. 15.] And of St. Paul,—that "God  
211 wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto  
212 the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil  
213 spirits went out of them." [Acts xix. 11, 12.] Here, moreover, we see the superiority of  
214 the Apostles to Elisha; for on one occasion, when the Shunammite's son was dead,  
215 Elisha apparently tried the like means, but was not answered. He sent Gehazi forward

216 with his staff, to lay it on the child's face; "and Gehazi passed on before them, and laid  
217 the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing;" [2 Kings iv.  
218 31.] though it may be that the employment of the hypocritical Gehazi was the cause of  
219 the disappointment, if it was one.

220 6. Further; there is much in Elisha's miracles—nay, and in Elijah's in a degree—typical  
221 of the Christian sacraments. Naaman's cleansing in Jordan is a manifest figure of Holy  
222 Baptism, in which the leprosy of the soul is washed away by water. Again, the  
223 multiplying of the oil is, like the miracle of the loaves, a type of Holy Communion, in  
224 which Christ is given to us again and again without failing, all over the world,—to all who  
225 believe,—to each of them wholly and entirely, though He is on the right hand of God in  
226 heaven. At another time, Elisha multiplied twenty loaves of barley and some corn, so as  
227 more than to suffice for one hundred men.

228 7. Again, I might say much on what I alluded to in the beginning of these remarks—I  
229 mean, Elisha's close connexion and intercourse with matters of this world, in which he  
230 resembles Christ and His Church. Elijah, like the Baptist, lived out of the world; but  
231 Elisha was intimately connected with the great political movements (as we now call  
232 them) of the day. It was through him that Jehoshaphat and Joram gained the victory  
233 over the Moabites. It was through him that Jehu was raised to the throne, and Jezebel  
234 and Joram slain. He interfered in the counsels of Benhadad, king of Syria; and his last  
235 act in his "sickness, whereof he died," was to promise Joash king of Israel three  
236 victories over the Syrians [2 Kings xiii. 14-19.]. Yet he pretended to no earthly power in  
237 all this; he acted from God, and on supernatural claims; thus answering to our Lord's  
238 account of His kingdom, as being not of this world, else would His servants fight [John  
239 xviii. 36.].

240 8. Lastly, it is well to notice the dignity and state which he assumed in his dealings with  
241 men, high and low; in which he was a fit type of that Holy Church Catholic to whom it is  
242 promised, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish; yea, those  
243 nations shall be utterly wasted."

244 For instance, consider his conduct to the Shunammite. She was "a great woman," as  
245 Scripture tells us, wealthy and honourable; he was a poor man and a wanderer. She, in  
246 her piety, finding him pass by often, constrained him to eat bread at her house, and  
247 gave him a room in it. If this were now to take place, she would be called the patron of  
248 Elisha, and he would be thought highly indebted to her, and bound to look up to her. But  
249 what was the actual bearing of Elisha and this pious woman towards one another? they  
250 both felt that his presence conveyed far more to her than any thing she could do for him.  
251 Accordingly, in spite of her riches and his poverty, he in her house acted as the lord,  
252 and she as the servant. We read that, "it fell on a day that he came thither, and he  
253 turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this  
254 Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him,  
255 Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us, with all this care; what is to be  
256 done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?  
257 And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be

258 done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily, she hath no child, and her husband is old.  
259 And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said,  
260 About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." [2 Kings iv.  
261 11-16.] Such a deportment would in this day be called pride in such as Elisha,—so  
262 different are God's ways and our ways. It would indeed have been gross pride and  
263 arrogance, had he so acted as from himself; but he was in his day a steward of the  
264 mysteries of God, and only behaved himself as became his rank and his office as  
265 God's representative. Again; consider his conduct towards Naaman, which so  
266 grievously offended the proud Syrian. Instead of waiting upon him, He sent him a mere  
267 message to wash in Jordan. Thus he magnified his heavenly office, to remind Naaman  
268 that there was a God in Israel; whereas Naaman and his master had considered him a  
269 mere servant of the king of Israel, bound to do whatever he was bidden to do. Consider,  
270 too, his conduct to the messenger of Jehoram, already referred to, when he "sat in his  
271 house and the elders with him;" and to Joash, on his death-bed, with whom "the man of  
272 God was wroth," because "he smote thrice and stayed." [2 Kings v. 10; vi. 32, 33; xiii.  
273 14-19.] What have we here but a figure of that Church to whom kings were to "bow  
274 down with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of her feet"? [Isa. xlix. 23.]

275 To conclude. These remarks lead us to this reflection. If Elisha be in spirit still among  
276 us, I mean, if the Church of Christ, viewed in her rulers, her confessors, her ascetics,  
277 and her doctors, be represented in the prophetic writings, such as Elisha is described in  
278 the history of Israel, how much have we to learn before we gain a clear and simple view  
279 of its real character! What a veil is on the eyes of men who treat it as a mere institution  
280 of this world! Surely, we are under a supernatural dispensation, though we do not  
281 realize it; and did we realize it, we should be given to see it, I mean we should doubtless  
282 have more sensible proofs given us of it. God asks of us, first, faith, and then He  
283 vouchsafes to give us sight. Did we believe that we were under His immediate  
284 governance, He would reward us by tokens of such a privilege which we know not of at  
285 present. Did we cry out, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" the waters would divide.  
286 Never then, my brethren, come to Church, or to Holy Communion, never be present at a  
287 baptism, marriage, or burial, or at any other rite, without feeling that there is a great deal  
288 more there than you see. Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's Name,  
289 He is in the midst of them. Believe that, were your eyes opened, as the young man's  
290 were, you would see horses and chariots of fire round about. God's arm is not  
291 shortened, though man does not believe. He does His wonders in spite of us. Elijah  
292 went to heaven by miracle, and one man only saw it; but a miracle was done  
293 nevertheless. Angels are among us, and are powerful to do any thing. And they do  
294 wonders for the believing, which the world knows nothing about. According to our faith,  
295 so it is done unto us. Only believe, and all things are ours. We shall have clear and  
296 deeply-seated convictions on our minds of the reality of the invisible world, though we  
297 cannot communicate them to others, or explain how we come to have them.

298 Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.