

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

FIFTH YEAR, 1877. MARCH.

BEST QUARTER: STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

B. C. 896. LESSON XI. THE SPIRIT OF ELISHA; or, Power from God. 2 Kings 2: 13-25. March 18.

EXPLANATORY.

HE. Elisha the son of Shaphat, once a prosperous farmer of Abel-meholah; for the past nine years the companion and servant of Elijah. In character and life almost a perfect contrast with his predecessor; not a wanderer, but a quiet citizen, of gentle, sympathetic disposition. 2 Kings 8, 11. On terms of friendship with kings. 2 Kings 13, 14. God raises up workers according to his need, and employs them according to their nature. Took up. His grasp of Elijah's mantle shows his faith in God's call. Mantle of Elijah. Once before that robe of skin had rested on his shoulders. 1 Kings 19, 19. Then it was a token of his summons, now it is the sign of his authority as chief of the prophetic order. Fell from him. The old Gileadite needs not that mantle in the land whither he has gone. So we drop our robes of flesh as we mount up from earth to heaven. Went back. No time for weeping. Instantly he enters upon his new work. Let us spend our strength, not in sorrowing over departed saints, but in striving to follow their example.

SMOTE THE WATERS. The words may signify that he struck twice, once before speaking, and again after. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? The utterance, not of doubt or inquiry, but of exultant faith. Elijah had left the land, but Elijah's God was still living in Israel, to make his foes tremble and his followers rejoice. The mantle of Elijah is nothing, but his God is every thing. We may wear the robes, and copy the manners of departed heroes, but all in vain unless their God gives us power. Parted. Those waters had parted before the ark of God, (Josh. 3, 15, 16,) and before that mantle in Elijah's hands, now they obey it when held by Elisha, showing that all the power of the master was vested in his servant.

SONS OF THE PROPHETS. Young men in training for teachers of religion, which were to view. Literally "which were at Jerico, opposite;" across the river from the scene of Elijah's ascension, but near enough to witness Elisha's return. The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. They marked in his very look the signs of inspiration, and on his shoulder the badge of authority. There is something about the man called of God which reveals his vocation and makes others feel it in his presence. Bowed themselves. The men trained up in the schools bow before the man taken from the plow. Whom God has called his people must honor.

STRONG MEN. Vigorous, and able to make, if need be, a long and close search. Peradventure, Perhaps. The Spirit of the Lord. God's messengers were sometimes carried away suddenly and mysteriously to new fields of duty. Cast him. They could not realize that their master was taken up bodily into heaven. And no wonder, for such a miracle had not transpired for more than two thousand years. They probably suppose that he might have perished in the whirlwind, and that his body had been tossed mangled upon the earth. Ye shall not. Elisha, who alone had witnessed the ascension, well knew the uselessness of the search. To him it appeared as a sort of unbelief, not to be sanctioned.

ASHAMED. Led some might suppose his motive for refusing was neglect of his master, and a secret unwillingness to have him brought back. He said, Send. A good and wise man will yield for the sake of peace that which is contrary to his judgment, provided it be not contrary to his conscience. Found him not. No conviction is so sure as that gained by hard work and severe experience. Their doubt only attested the accession of Elijah, as the disciples unbelief proved all the more clearly the resurrection of Christ.

HE TARRIED AT JERICO. This city seems to have been his permanent abode. Elijah had passed among men like a flashing meteor. Elisha dwelt among men as the beneficent sunshine. Did I not say. Not boasting, but as a gentle reproof for their unbelief, and an injunction in future, to trust more implicitly in his judgment.

MEN OF THE CITY. Probably the elders or rulers, who spoke in behalf of its people. Said unto Elisha. They had not made application to Elijah, because he was not a resident in the city, and perhaps his sternness repelled them; but came to Elisha as a genial, friendly townsman. Situation. Pleasant. On a broad plain, five miles north of the Dead Sea, green with groves of palm, and shaded by the Quarantania mountains from the setting sun. The world is like Jerico, beautiful, but blighted by its deadly fountain, man's sinful heart. The water is naught and the ground barren. The water salt, and injurious to the land, causing vegetation to perish. Some think that the word "barren" (literally, "causing to miscarry") indicates that the water had a tendency to produce untimely births. AND HE SAID. He would test their faith and obedience by what seemed a strange command. A new cruse. A dish used in cooking or serving food. Near to show that there was nothing in the vessel possessing curative power, or to suggest an idea of purity and freshness. Salt, which would naturally increase the evil, as not far off the barren beach of the Dead Sea exhibited. He would show that in God's hands the most unpromising instruments are mighty. Moreover, salt is a symbol of incorruptibility, of life in death, of the germ of good in a world of evil. Matt. 5, 13.

SPRING OF THE WATERS. No avail to purge the stream while the source remains impure. We must search out the heart-spring; if that fountain be cleansed, all the issues of life will be clean. Cast the salt in. "A miracle within a miracle," as said the old rabbins; to heal the waters, and to heal them by the very element of barrenness. Thus saith the Lord. The true prophet is careful to keep himself in the background, and to give all honor to the mighty Worker. Not any more. What God does, is done once for all, thoroughly, and forever. So the transformation of the redeemed heart is complete and permanent.

UNTO THIS DAY. A large spring still flows near the site of Jericho, called "Ain es Saltan," which is generally believed to be the one healed by Elisha. Its water is transparent, sweet and cool; the only fresh water found on the plain.

UNTO BETHEL. In the same town stood the calf-idols of Jeroboam, and the school of the prophets. Even there at the head quarters of idolatry were found a faithful few. By the way. By the usual road; probably the ascending defile of Wady Suweinit, now well shaded, then a dense forest, the home of wild beasts. Little children. The word here used may denote young people of all ages, from infancy to manhood. The most of them were, no doubt, half grown boys, perhaps the scholars just out of some idolatrous school, early taught to scoff at the God of Israel. Mocked him. To this day the traveler in the Orient sometimes finds crowds of boys screaming offensive names, and, perhaps, hurling stones after him. Go up. Ridiculing the ascension of Elijah, and contemptuously calling upon his successor to follow him. Bald head. A term of reproach in the East, where baldness often comes from leprosy, and applied even to those with hair. In this conduct irreverence toward age, contempt for religion, and blasphemy toward God; a near approach to the sin against the Holy Ghost.

LOOKED ON THEM. Not in anger at their taunt to himself, but their contempt for his office and God's cause. Cursed them. Not in his own name, or by his own authority, but by divine order, and in the name of the Lord. God sometimes commands his messengers to curse as well as to bless. Only on this occasion do we find Elisha a minister of wrath. He must show in the outset that Elijah's sword of justice, though sheathed, was not lost. Two she-bears. Ravenous and dangerous. God has instruments of punishment on every hand—fire, flood, famine, wicked men, and wild beasts. Tare. Did not eat, but tore in pieces. A warning that the sins of the young, as well as the old, are noticed by God. Elisha did not summon the bears; he simply pronounced the curse. The destruction was God's work, and its indorsement.

TO MOUNT CARMEL. Probably for meditation and preparation. To Samaria, the royal residence, where service was awaiting him. Elisha, unlike his predecessor, appears on terms of friendliness with monarchs. But Ahab was now dead and his successors on the throne were men of very different character; all less determined Baaites, and some of them friendly to the old religion.

PRAYER. More things are wrought by prayer Than the world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice Rise like a fountain for me, night and day; For what is men better than sheep or goats, That nourish a blind life within the brain; If, knowing God, they lift no hands of prayer. Both for themselves, and those who call them friends, For so the whole round earth is every way Bound by gold chains about the feet of God. —Tennyson.

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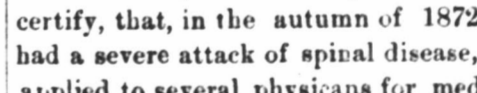
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