

CRITICAL NOTES.

BY PROFESSOR W. W. DAVIES.

We have no exact data to determine the time of this lesson. It is said (2 Sam. 4. 4) that Mephibosheth was five years old when Jonathan, his father, was killed on Gilboa, and we are told in the twelfth verse of this chapter that he had a young son. From this it has been inferred that he could not have been younger than twenty years of age; or in the seventh or eighth year of David's reign at Jerusalem, about 1040 B. C. The question of Hebrew chronology is shrouded in mystery, consequently no one ought to dogmatize on the subject. This incident is not mentioned in Chronicles.

Verse 1. Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul? It seems strange that he had lost sight of the child of his bosom friend Jonathan. We must, however, remember that David and Jonathan had seldom seen each other during the last few years of the latter's life. Besides the rivalry between Ishbosheth and David would preclude much intercourse between the two families, and then Mephibosheth was timid and weak to a fault. **That I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake.** Notice the form of the question above. David's gratitude to Jonathan was such that he was anxious to help any of his relations. The account of the covenant between David and Jonathan should be read at this point. (See 1 Sam. 20. 12, 17.)

2. Ziba. From the meager data in regard to this man, it is evident that he was a friend of Saul, and had shrewdly managed to retain control of some of his possessions. His character is not above reproach. (See 2 Sam. 16. 1-4, and 19. 24-30.)

3. The kindness of God. This is most probably a Hebraism, meaning exceeding great kindness. Comp. "mountain of God" in the sense of high mountain (Psalm 68. 15). Others take it to mean such kindness as God himself would show, "unfailing, unsought, unlimited." **Which is lame on his feet.** The story of the crippling of the young prince is told in chap. 4. 4, where we learn that Mephibosheth's nurse, on hearing of the death of Jonathan in the Philistine war, fled with her charge; in her efforts to rescue the child, it seems that he fell in such a way as to cripple him for life. The fact that the young prince was crippled and helpless was perhaps sufficient reason why he made no effort to gain the throne of his grandfather, which would have naturally fallen to Jonathan, his father, had he lived.

4. Behold, he is in the house of Machir. It is evident, from 2 Sam. 17. 27-29, that Machir was a man of great wealth, as well as of a noble heart. Why he was attached to Mephibosheth we are not told; but was he not one of God's noblemen who

did much good with little parade? Years after this, when David was a fugitive before Absalom, Machir came to his aid, mindful perhaps of the king's kindness to Mephibosheth. **Lo-debar.** This place was beyond Jordan not far from Mahanaim. Its exact location, however, has not been discovered, for that reason it is not possible to say whether Machir belonged to Gad or Manasseh.

6. Mephibosheth. He is called Merib Baal in 1 Chron. 8. 34, and Meri-baal in 1 Chron. 9. 40. It is difficult to say which is the original, or why the change was made. Yet there are other instances of substituting *baal* for *bosheth*, or vice versa, as Esh-baal and Ish-bosheth (1 Chron. 8. 33; 2 Sam. 2. 8); Jerub-baal and Jerub-besheth (Judg. 6. 32; 2 Sam. 11. 21). Mephibosheth signifies "Dispenser of shame," and Meribbaal, "Hero of Baal," or "The Lord's Hero." There was a time when the title "Baal" was given to the God of Israel, for the name is often found in compound forms "in the families of both Saul and David."—*Driver. Fell on his face.* This was the usual posture of a subject in the presence of a king. There is no need, therefore, in thinking that he was afraid that David was about to put him to death as the last representative of Saul's family. David in his memorable interview with Jonathan fell on his face. (See 1 Sam. 20. 41.)

7. Fear not. If Mephibosheth had any fears that David, like an oriental despot, would put him to death, these fears are at once dispelled with the assurance that kindness is to be shown for his father's sake. **Will restore thee all the land of Saul.** In most cases the possessions of the late king would pass as crown lands into the hands of the new ruler. Compare the words of Nathan, who says to David, "I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives," etc. (12. 7). Whether David had taken them or whether they had been given to some distant relatives, they are now restored to the rightful owner. **Thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.** Thus he is treated as one of his own sons or most intimate friends.

8. A dead dog. No animal was treated with more contempt in the East than the dog. A dead dog would be doubly despised, for here "the vileness of a corpse is added to the vileness of a dog."—*Kittó.* (Comp. 2 Sam. 3. 8; 16. 9; and 1 Sam. 24. 14.) A dead dog is a dog which can do no harm, therefore unworthy of notice.

9. Thy master's son. "Son" is used here as often in the sense of descendant or grandson, as "father" is employed for "grandfather" in verse 7.

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