



LESSON XI.—SEPT. 11.

Elijah Taken up into Heaven.

II. Kings ii., 1-11.

Golden Text.

He was not; for God took him. Genesis v., 24.

Home Readings.

Monday, Sept. 5.—II. Kings ii., 1-11.
Tuesday, Sept. 6.—Heb. xi., 1-10.
Wednesday, Sept. 7.—Deut. xxxiv., 1-12.
Thursday, Sept. 8.—Acts i., 1-11.
Friday, Sept. 9.—Luke ix., 28-36.
Saturday, Sept. 10.—Rev. xix., 1-16.
Sunday, Sept. 11.—II. Kings i., 2-16.

1. And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.
2. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el.
3. And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.
4. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.
5. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.
6. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.
7. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.
8. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.
9. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.
10. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.
11. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

INTRODUCTION.

After the events of the last lesson, in which the prophet was commanded to anoint his successor, Elijah passed into a period of several years of less prominent activity. 'The sons of the prophets' mentioned in the account of Elijah's life would make it appear that the great prophet might have devoted some time to the instructing of Elisha and other prophets.

If you will read the remaining three chapters of I. Kings and the first chapter of II. Kings, which comprise the Scripture intervening between the last lesson and this, you will learn of the war of Ben-hadad, King of Syria, against Israel, of the incident of Naboth's vineyard, of the disastrous campaign

of Ahab and Jehoshaphat against the King of Syria, of Ahab's death, of the death of Ahaziah his son and successor.

The latter, like his father, was a Baal worshipper, and, being rebuked by Elijah, sought to take him, but failed. At the time of this lesson Jehoram, son of Ahab, was king of Israel.

We come now to the wonderful scene which closed the earthly life of the great prophet Elijah. The taking away of Elijah recalls the passing of Enoch, who 'was not; for God took him.' Genesis v., 24.

The time was in the early part of the ninth century before Christ.

THE LESSON STUDY.

The Appointed Time. 1. 'When the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind.'

This verse is the very opposite of one we read a few weeks ago, wherein Elijah exclaimed, 'Now, O Lord, take away my life.' But then he was fugitive, out there alone in the desert, and completely disheartened by apparent failure.

But God was better to Elijah than Elijah was to himself. Joseph Parker says, 'There is a great doctrine of Providence here. Not when Elijah would go, but when the Lord would take him.'

When this time came he and Elisha went out from Gilgal, a place a few miles northwest of Bethel. Elisha had for years ministered unto Elijah, being at once his servant and disciple. As the hour of Elijah's triumph approached they were found setting out on their last journey together.

Elisha Will not Leave his Master. 2, 3, 'I will not leave thee.'

As they journey along the great prophet asks his companion to tarry, as the Lord has sent him to Bethel, but Elisha most solemnly assures his master that he will not leave him.

Just why Elijah made this request is not stated. Various reasons are suggested, but the fact that, at critical moments in Bible history others have been drawn to declare themselves by suggestions of various kinds, would indicate that Elisha was being tested, and his longing for a blessing sharpened, by this seeming coldness and discouraging request on Elijah's part.

The angel that wrestled with Jacob asked to be released that he might go but Jacob was only made determined to have a blessing first. Joseph led on his brethren by his seeming harshness, until the time for reunion came. So it was also in the case of the Syrophenician woman, who besought Christ to heal her daughter.

At Bethel there was a school of the prophets. 'These ancient colleges,' says Taylor, 'were under the superintendence of a recognized prophet, who was called the father, while the students were styled his children or sons.'

When Bethel was reached these 'sons of the prophets' came out and asked Elisha if he knew that God was about to take away his master. Elisha's answer not only shows that he did know it, but also shows the reason for his unwillingness to be parted from Elijah at this time. Elisha longed for a blessing and would not be put off.

Just how these men all knew about the wonderful event that was near we do not know, but the spiritually minded are often in possession of truths that the worldly miss altogether. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.'

Two more Tests for Elisha. 4-7. 'And they two stood by Jordan.'

At Bethel, Elijah again asks Elisha to tarry, as he is to go on to Jericho, but again Elisha positively declines to be left behind.

You notice that the great event just at hand has not been freely spoken of as yet. There was some awed whispering between Elisha and the sons of the prophets at Bethel, but Elisha bade them be silent. The same thing occurs at Jericho. It is too solemn and serious a crisis in the lives of these good men for idle speculation. They know what is coming and are silent.

At Jericho Elijah makes his last test of the fidelity and earnestness of his faithful companion, soon to be his successor. But Elisha is firm, and they journey on together toward Jordan.

Fifty of the sons of the prophets, realizing that the journeys of Elijah were nearing the end, took a position from which they could see the two as they passed on to the Jordan.

The Jordan Divided. 8. 'So they two went over on dry ground.'

A last miracle was now performed, perhaps as an indication or symbol of how the work of Elijah had prepared the way for that of Elisha to follow. Rolling together his mantle, the badge of his office, Elijah smote the river and the waters separated. This was at least near the place where they had separated from the Israelites, under Joshua, over five centuries before, when they entered the land.

Elisha's Prayer. 9, 10. 'Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.'

When they were over the Jordan, Elijah no longer seeks to test Elisha, but asks him plainly what he shall do for him before he is taken away. Elisha's prayer for 'a double portion of thy spirit' shows the nature of the man, and the fact that he realized his need of more human wisdom for the duties that he is now to take up.

According to Jewish law the eldest son received a double portion of the inheritance. Elisha was the spiritual son and successor of Elijah, and asks for the double portion of the spirit of the great prophet.

'Thou hast asked a hard thing,' said Elijah, for, spiritual gifts cannot be passed on at will from one to another. Christ himself could not grant the chief seats in his kingdom to James and John when their mother requested this honor.

'Nevertheless,' says Elijah, and Elisha's hope was stimulated again, 'if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.' Elisha was no longer bidden to tarry anywhere, but was encouraged to keep close to his master to the end, to be alert and watchful.

Elijah Taken up into Heaven. 11. 'And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.'

After the request of Elisha, the two men went on and talked, Elisha perhaps receiving final counsel and encouragement from the great man to whom he had been so faithful. Then suddenly the supreme moment came. The fiery chariot and horses appeared and Elijah was swept away in a whirlwind, to be seen no more of men until the Transfiguration, nearly a thousand years later.

The next verse of this chapter records the fulfilment of Elijah's prayer, for he saw what took place.

The life of Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, is full of lessons. Take your pencil and write down a few of his striking characteristics, the notable events in his life, the contrast between his life and that of Ahab, the similarity of his experiences and the spiritual experiences of yourself.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Sept. 11.—Topic—What the Bible teaches about heaven. John xiv., 1-3; Rev. xxi., 1-8.

Junior C. E. Topic.

JOSEPH IN THE PALACE.

Monday, Sept. 5.—A sorrowful father. Gen. xxxvii., 29-36

Tuesday, Sept. 6.—God with Joseph. Gen. xxxix., 1-6.

Wednesday, Sept. 7.—Joseph in prison. Gen. xxxix., 20-23.

Thursday, Sept. 8.—Joseph and the dreamers. Gen. xl., 1-23.

Friday, Sept. 9.—Pharaoh's dream. Gen. xli., 1-13.

Saturday, Sept. 10.—Joseph's interpretation. Gen. xli., 15-36.

Sunday, Sept. 11.—Topic—From a prison to a palace. Gen. xli., 14, 37-46.

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