

✻ The Sunday School ✻

BIBLE LESSON.

Abridged from Peloubets' Notes.

Second Quarter.

ELIJAH THE PROPHET.

Lesson II. July 10.—1 Kings 17:1-16.
Read the whole Chapter. Commit Vs. 2-6.

GOLDEN TEXT.

And the barrel of meal wasted not,
neither did the cruse of oil fail, according
to the word of the Lord, 1 Kings 17:16.

EXPLANATORY.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF THE COURSE OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL from the division to Ahab, about seventy years. 1. Jeroboam's worldly policy brought forth bitter fruits both for himself and his kingdom. His golden bulls used as symbols of Jehovah soon led the people to real idolatry and to the immoralities and cruelties of heathen worship. All this weakened the kingdom. Jeroboam's dearly beloved son was taken sick. His wife went in disguise to a prophet for help.

2. When Jeroboam died, after a reign of twenty-four years, revolution followed revolution, in dark, restless times.

3. Then Omri came to the throne. He was a strong ruler and impressed himself on the surrounding nations, as we learn from the inscriptions on the Moabite Stone and the Black Obelisk. But as to idolatry, he followed in the steps of Jeroboam. His wisest work was his founding of Samaria, beautifully situated for commerce, for fertility, for defense, and for government. Stanley says, "As Constantine's sagacity is fixed by his choice of Constantinople, so is that of Omri by his choice of Samaria."

4. The next king was the son of Ahab, who was like Nebuchadnezzar's, with head of gold and feet of clay, a brilliant king with great weaknesses, a mixture of wisdom and folly. He was a great warrior. His greatest mistake was his marriage, for the sake of political alliance, with the heathen princess, Jezebel of Tyre, who left a terrible mark on the annals of the nation.

II. THE MORAL STATE OF THE KINGDOM WHEN ELIJAH APPEARED.—Ten years of Ahab's rule, according to Wm. Smith, had passed.

1. Politically, the kingdom seemed to flourish in a measure under Ahab's worldly wise policy. He was a good general. "Success was a cardinal virtue." They worshipped the goddess of victory.

2. Religiously, "it was the darkest night of Israel's spiritual declension." The public religious worship of Jehovah was almost annihilated.

III. ELIJAH THE PROPHET OF THE LORD.—V. 1. The worse the times, the greater the need of reformers and prophets. God raises up some one who can see the needs and the remedy, and he inspires and consecrates him to the work. Such was Elijah. "The loftiest and sternest spirit of the true faith is raised up face to face with the proudest and fiercest spirit of the old Asiatic paganism."

1. AND ELIJAH THE TISHBITE. (1) His name means "my God is Jehovah." A fitting name, Professor Green says, "but a striking coincidence between the name and the career does not disprove the historical character of the former, as appears from 'Winfield' Scott, 'Victor' Emmanuel, or Queen Victoria." (2) "His origin." WHO WAS OF THE INHABITANTS OF GILEAD. "The Tishbite" may mean "of Tishbe." The only Tishbe mentioned in history is in Galilee, in which case Elijah, though a native of Galilee, had become a citizen of Gilead, east of the Jordan, as many a leading citizen of our capitals originated in some unknown country village of this or other countries. "His appearance." "He was, tradition tells us, a man of short stature, of rugged countenance. He was 'a lord of hair'—the thick black locks of the Nazirite (for such he probably was) streamed over his shoulders like a lion's mane, giving him a fierce and unkempt aspect." "Elijah had not stooped to alter his ordinary dress, which was the dress of the desert, by which he was always known. His brown limbs, otherwise bare, were covered with a heavy mantle, the skin of a camel or a sheep worn with the rough wool outside, and tightened round his loins by a leathern girdle." Such was the dress of his successor, John the Baptist. "His training." He grew strong and hardy in body and mind, in close contact with nature; like Moses in the wilderness, seeing "every bush afire with God," his heart was open to divine influences.

IV. ELIJAH'S MESSAGE TO AHAH. THE FAMINE.—V. 1. SAID UNTO AHAH. With a sudden abruptness, almost like a flash of lightning from a clear sky, the prophet of God appears before Ahab in his palace at Samaria, with a message from Jehovah. This must have required great faith and courage. AS THE LORD (Jehovah, as LORD always means when

printed in capitals in our Bible) GOD OF ISRAEL LIVETH. As certainly as God lives, as sure as the laws of nature he has ordained. BEFORE WHOM I STAND. As an officer, and ambassador bearing his authority. THERE SHALL NOT BE DRY NOR RAIN. The fertility of Palestine is entirely dependent upon the regularity and copiousness of the rains, and during the long intervals between them, upon the heavy dews. BUT ACCORDING TO MY WORD. Not according to his own caprice or judgment, but till the Lord, when he saw that the famine's work was done, should make known his will through his servant, Elijah, thus proving that he was his servant.

V. ELIJAH'S EXPERIENCES DURING THREE YEARS, AND THEIR MEANING.—Vs. 2-16. First. At Cherith. Elijah immediately left Ahab's presence, and hid himself, till God's time came for his message to be delivered.

3. GET THREE HENCE, AND TURN THREE EASTWARD, I. E., toward the Jordan and Gilead, his own country. AND HIDE THYSELF BY (rather, "in") THE BROOK (the torrent course, or wady) CHERITH, THAT IS BEFORE JORDAN. "Before" may mean "towards," I. E., on the west side, or "to the east of," in Gilead beyond Jordan. "It is probable that Cherith is to be sought in the region east of the Jordan, where, indeed, Eusebius and Jerome place it."

4. For drink he had THE BROOK. For food, I HAVE COMMANDED THE RAVENS TO FEED THEE. Farrar and many critics think this is a highly poetic expression, a metaphor, "conveying the lesson that the prophet was maintained by marked interventions of that providence of God which is itself in all its workings supernatural."

But equally simple and more natural is the literal statement. If, as is probable, the nests of the crows were among the rocks around Elijah, their maternal instinct would be God's command to them to bring food within reach of the prophet.

Second. At Zarephath. "Time." "Two or more years." When the brook dried up Elijah could no longer remain at Cherith. In some way, we know not how, God made known to him where he should go. Possibly, too, if he remained too long in one place, Ahab might discover his abode.

9. ARISE, GET THEE TO ZAREPHATH. The name (meaning "smelting house") points to furnaces or workshops for the refining of metals. Greek, "Sarepta" (Luke 4:26). WHICH BELONGETH TO ZIDON. On the shore between Tyre and Sidon. Here the prophet would be safe from Ahab, who would scarcely think of looking for Elijah in the territories of Jezebel's father in the house of a peasant. I HAVE COMMANDED. Put it in her heart.

10. GATE OF THE CITY, or village. Even the smallest village must be defended by walls in those days. THE (or a) WIDOW WOMAN. The widow showed by the oath, "as Jehovah thy God liveth," that she was a worshipper of the true God. GATHERING OF STICKS. For her fire. FETCH ME . . . A LITTLE WATER. His first need after his long walk through the famine-stricken land would be water. The gift of water to the thirsty is always regarded as a sacred duty in the East. "Never yet during many years' residence in Syria, and many a long day's travel, have I been refused a draught of water by a single individual of any sect or race. The bedawy in the desert has shared with me the last drop in his water-skin."

12. AS THE LORD THY GOD LIVETH. She recognized Elijah as a prophet. I HAVE NOT A CAKE. "The more common bread used in all the interior, particularly in the rural districts, is a flat cake of unleavened dough, no thicker than a pancake, of a circular or oval form, and ten or twelve inches in diameter." BARREL, An earthen jar. In the East, the people kept their corn in earthen jars to protect it from insects which swarm in the heat of the sun. AND A LITTLE OIL. Olive oil. To eat with the bread, something as we eat butter. A CRUSE. A bottle, probably earthenware. TWO STICKS. That is, a few, as we say "two or three." DRESS IT. Prepare it for eating. THAT WE MAY EAT IT, AND DIE. The famine prevailed there, and she was in the last extremity.

13. FEAR NOT. Do not be troubled, but take heart, and trust God. MAKE ME THEREOF A LITTLE CAKE FIRST. This must have seemed very strange and hard to her at first, "amazingly cool," but the favor was not asked from the selfishness of the prophet. It was a test of her faith in the promises of God, whether she were worthy of the help Elijah offered. And this faith was necessary in order to make the provision for her wants a real blessing to her spirit.

14. FOR THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL. Now comes the promise on which she was to rest. THE BARREL OF MEAL SHALL NOT WASTE. In some way the loss should be supplied.

15. AND SHE WENT AND DID. She had faith, and her faith produced good works. DID EAT MANY DAYS. "Between two and three years."



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