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SOLOMON TO ELISHA

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SOLOMON TO ELISHA

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SOLOMON TO ELISHA

I.

LIFE OF SOLOMON.

HIS PARENTAGE—EDUCATION—ACCESSION TO THE THRONE.

READ 1 Kings i. 5-53 and ii. ; 1 Chronicles xxix. 20-30.

Parentage.—Solomon was the son of David by his wife Bathsheba. His name means "the Peaceful," corresponding with the name Frederick (*Friedereich*, rich in peace); it was probably given him by his father as emblematic of the peace which prevailed at the time of his birth, and predictive of the peace which should characterise his reign—in contrast to the period of strife and conflict through which David himself had won his way to the throne. He was the first Jewish king "born in the purple."

He received from Nathan another name, *Jedidiah*, *beloved of the Lord*, the prophet regarding the birth of this younger son of Bathsheba as a sign of the restoration of God's favour to the house of David, which had been forfeited by the sin of his parents; this sin had been punished by the death of the elder child of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel xii.).

Education.—Probably from his earliest years he was brought up under the influence and direction of Nathan, the prophet who rebuked David for his sin, and who also welcomed the birth of Solomon as an indication that the sin was done away. At an earlier period this same Nathan had foretold to David that the Lord would make him an house (2 Samuel vii. 11), and he may have been Divinely taught that this promise of continuance to the house of David would have its fulfilment through Solomon and his posterity. There is a Jewish tradition that

Nathan was the son, or the adopted son, of Jesse, and so the uncle of Solomon. Such a relationship to the royal house would account for his predominating influence in the affairs of the kingdom.

Accession to the Throne.—Solomon was far from the eldest of the many sons of David, and so had no claim to the throne on the score of primogeniture. We cannot say at what time he was marked out by David as his successor. Bathsheba, in the latter days of David's reign, refers to an oath given at an earlier period, and with the knowledge of Nathan, that Solomon should reign after him and sit upon his throne (1 Kings i. 13). This pledge with reference to Solomon may have become known or suspected, and may have led to the attempts first of Absalom (2 Samuel xv.), and subsequently of Adonijah, to secure for themselves the crown before the death of their father.

Adonijah, after the death of Absalom, apparently stood next in succession to the throne, and, like Absalom, was commended to the people by his personal beauty. The story of his attempt to secure the succession is given in 1 Kings i. He enlisted on his side the old partisans of his father, Joab, the commander-in-chief of the army, and Abiathar, the priest. Zadok, a priest of the elder branch of the sons of Aaron; and Benaiah, a priest-warrior; and Nathan were on the side of Solomon. Adonijah commenced his operations by making a show of royal dignity in chariots, and horsemen, and footmen, and by preparing a feast for his supporters, from which Solomon and his friends were excluded. Such acts on the part of Adonijah excited the suspicions of the opposing faction, and led them to take prompt means to counteract his policy. Bathsheba gained access to the king, now enfeebled by old age, and informed him of the suspicious actions of Adonijah, which indicated his designs on the crown. At the same time she reminded him of the oath by which he had pledged himself to make Solomon his successor. Nathan also came in to substantiate Bathsheba's statements and enforce her appeal. David ratified the promise which he had previously given of Solomon's succession, and gave orders to Zadok, and Nathan and Benaiah, to take measures for carrying out the course to which he had pledged himself. Solomon was accordingly placed on the royal mule, attended by the royal body-guard (the Cherethites and the Pelethites), and conducted to Gihon, on the outskirts of the city (perhaps identical with Siloam). Here the sacred oil from the tabernacle was poured upon his head by Zadok the priest, whereby he was set apart as "the Lord's anointed"; the blowing of trumpets announced his coronation to the people, and their shouts, "God save King Solomon!"

proclaimed their acceptance of the one whom David had designated as his successor, while their festive rejoicing indicated that the appointment fell in with the popular wish.

Adonijah and his party were within hearing of the sound of the trumpet which proclaimed Solomon's accession, and they heard from a messenger, Jonathan the son of Abiathar, of what had taken place at Gihon, and moreover that Solomon's acceptance by the people as their king had been reported to David, and that the appointment had been solemnly ratified by him. Terror-stricken by these tidings Adonijah's party dispersed, and Adonijah himself, in fear of his life, sought sanctuary by laying hold of "the horns of the altar." Solomon showed a spirit of mercy which became one destined to be a great king; he promised pardon to Adonijah so long as he remained loyal, and received his homage as a subject.

Subsequently David gathered a "congregation" representing the entire people, and solemnly presented to them Solomon as his successor, who should fulfil the design which had been constantly present to his mind, but which he had never been able to carry into effect, of building a House for the Lord. On this occasion Solomon was "made king the second time," and his accession was celebrated with sacrifices of enormous magnitude (1 Chronicles xxix.).

The death of David left Solomon in possession of the throne. Adonijah, aspiring to the hand of the queen consort, Abishag, indicated ambitious designs which were thought to be inconsistent with his professions of loyalty to the new sovereign, and was accordingly put to death by Solomon's orders. So also were Joab, and Shimei, the old enemy of David; Abiathar, who had filled the office of high priest, was deposed from the exercise of his functions, and Zadok appointed to succeed him. Thus was fulfilled the degradation of the house of Eli (from whom Abiathar was descended), foretold in 1 Samuel ii. 27-36; in the person of Zadok, the "faithful priest," the priesthood reverted to the elder branch of the house of Aaron (the family of Eleazar), from which it had at some time, and for some reason not recorded, been diverted.

Solomon's Kingdom.—Solomon succeeded to a kingdom bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, on the East by the River Euphrates, extending on the south to the land of the Philistines and the border of Egypt, while on the north it stretched beyond Damascus (1 Kings iv. 21). It included a number of tributary principalities, the rulers of which "brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." In this extended sovereignty was fulfilled the promise which God made to Abraham (Genesis xv.

18). To maintain the dignity and splendour of his monarchy Solomon had the treasures which had been accumulated during the reign of his father.

II.

LIFE OF SOLOMON—(continued).

THE VISION AT GIBEON—SOLOMON'S WISDOM—THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

READ 1 Kings iii. and iv. 29-34; x. 1-13, and 23-25.

Solomon at Gibeon.—At an early period in his reign Solomon paid a royal visit to one of the great sanctuaries of his kingdom. This was at Gibeon in Benjamin; here were stationed the Tabernacle of the Lord (now separated from the Ark), and the altar of burnt offering (1 Chr. xvi. 39, 40), and thus the place acquired a sanctity only inferior to that of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where the Ark was set up. It was known as "the great high place," chief of those national places of worship in which religious rites were performed prior to the building of the Temple.

The visit of the king was celebrated by the offering of a thousand victims upon the altar. In the night that followed this stately sacrifice, God appeared to Solomon in a dream, as He had before appeared to His favoured servants Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and others. In this vision the Most High offered him his choice of all the things that men desire—"Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon's response to this request indicated a disposition of humility and trust in God which augured well for the character of his rule. He recalled the mercy shown to his father David; he recognised the vast responsibility which attached to him as the sovereign of so great a people; he recognised also his own personal insufficiency for the task laid upon him—"I am but a little child"; *I know not how to go out or come in*"; accordingly his request was for the gift of "an understanding heart," which should fit him for his duty of government.

God indicated His approval of the choice thus made by Solomon; He promised him the gift he asked for, "a wise and an

* Some authorities have interpreted this phrase, perhaps too literally, as indicating that Solomon was at the time not more than from twelve to fifteen years old. But allowance must be made for a hyperbolical mode of speech customary with Orientals.

understanding heart," which would raise him in this respect far above all preceding or succeeding monarchs; and, because he had asked for no meaner gifts (such as riches or honour) it was promised that these also should be his, and that they should be accompanied with length of days, if only he continued to walk in the steps of his father David.

Solomon at Jerusalem.—After this religious observance at one of the great national sanctuaries Solomon proceeded to the other, which had an equal or greater sanctity. Before the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem he "offered up burnt offerings and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants," thus by a service of thanksgiving inaugurating his accession to the throne.

Judgment of Solomon.—The sacred historian records after this the well-known instance in which Solomon's practical wisdom was displayed. He was called upon to decide between two mothers, each claiming as her own a living child. In the absence of any proof as to which was the rightful mother, Solomon ordered the child to be divided in two, and half to be given to each. But this decision, as the king had no doubt anticipated, brought out the real mother; the one was willing to acquiesce in the partition, which would at least secure her from being defeated in her contention, but the maternal instinct of the other cried out against harm being done to her child, and thus the real mother was made manifest. By the sentence of the king her child was given up to her unhurt.

Solomon's Wisdom and Writings.—Solomon's wisdom is described in 1 Kings iv. 29-31, where he is said to have excelled in this respect the wise men of the East and the Egyptians, and, moreover, to have risen above the four great sages of his day—Ethan and Heman, and Chalcol and Darda.

His writings, as summarised in this chapter, are (a) *Proverbs*, of which he is said to have been the author of three thousand; from these the "Book of Proverbs" may be a selection. (b) *Songs*, of which he is said to have written a thousand and five; the "Song of Solomon" and some of the Psalms may be included under this head. (c) *Works on Natural History*, on trees and animals, of which we have no complete specimens, though the books attributed to Solomon display a wonderful acquaintance with natural phenomena, and a vivid appreciation of their beauty and mystery.

Visit of the Queen of Sheba.—In connection with Solomon's fame for wisdom we may refer to the visit of the Queen of Sheba, narrated in 1 Kings x. This royal personage probably reigned over a people in Arabia, descended from Shem, and so of the same

stock as Abraham and the Patriarchs who were Solomon's progenitors. The Queen had "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the Name of the Lord;" she had heard, that is, of the reputation which Solomon had acquired in various departments, and had been told of his wisdom and riches as gifts of Jehovah, whom he worshipped. Drawn by these reports, "she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (St. Matt. xii. 42). She came, in Oriental fashion, bringing with her gifts of gold and precious stones, with the design of gauging by her own tests the wisdom of the world-famed king; but none of her "hard questions"* proved too hard for Solomon; "he told her all her questions; there was not anything hid from the king, which he told her not."

The magnificence of his buildings and the splendour of his court further impressed the Queen, so that "there was no more spirit in her." She acknowledged that the reports which she had heard in her own land of Solomon's greatness and splendour had been far exceeded by the reality—"the half was not told me." She acknowledged Jehovah, the God whom Solomon worshipped, as the Giver of the wisdom and riches which were bestowed for the benefit both of him and of his people. After an exchange of royal presents the Queen of Sheba returned to her own country.

Her visit is referred to by our blessed Lord as an example of earnestness and zeal in the pursuit of wisdom, in contrast to the contemptuous indifference of the people of His own generation and their disregard of greater privileges placed within their reach: "The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold a greater than Solomon is here" (St. Matt. xii. 42). Does she not also condemn us for our slackness in availing ourselves of the opportunities of religious teaching which are afforded us?

The Queen of Sheba was but one of many who were attracted to Jerusalem by the fame of Solomon; in the words of the sacred historian, "All the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart" (1 Kings x. 24).

* These *hard questions* are literally *riddles*—such trials of intellectual acuteness and facility in response as are commonly practised amongst Oriental people. An example of such *riddles* is found in the puzzle which Samson set (Judges xiv.).

III.

BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

PREPARATIONS FOR BUILDING—THE TEMPLE AND ITS FURNITURE.

READ 1 Kings v., vi., vii.; 2 Chronicles ii., iii., iv.

Preparations for Building.—As soon as David was established in Jerusalem, he expressed his desire to build a House in which should be enshrined the Ark of God, the visible sign of God's presence (2 Samuel vii.). But this pious design he was not allowed to carry out himself; the work and the glory were to be reserved for the son who should succeed him on the throne.

David, however, occupied himself during his lifetime in amassing materials, gold and silver, and precious stones to be employed in the construction of the great Sanctuary of the Nation. To this end the people "offered willingly with perfect heart," giving of their best and costliest possessions for the service of the Great King (1 Chronicles xxix.).

Solomon and Hiram.—Solomon, on his accession to the throne, continued the preparations which his father had begun. In this he enlisted the assistance of the King of Tyre, Hiram, who had given similar assistance to David, and who probably held his throne as a feudatory of the King of Israel. Hiram sent an embassy apparently to congratulate Solomon on his accession, and the messengers carried back a request to their master that he would give the help that was needed by Solomon in his great undertaking. This help included both the provision of materials and the services of artificers for the work of building.

(a) *Materials.*—The Forest of Lebanon, which was in Hiram's territory, yielded rich store of cedars and firs. These were cut down in the forest, conveyed to the neighbouring sea, and floated down in rafts to Joppa, from which they could be readily carried to Jerusalem. Moreover, there were in Hiram's territory stone quarries in which "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones" were quarried and shaped for the substructure of the Temple. For the unskilled labour required in the felling of trees and the bearing of burdens Solomon employed the native Canaanites, who still survived in the land, but were apparently reduced to a condition of slavery. No fewer than 153,600 of these Canaanite slaves were thus engaged (2 Chron. ii. 17, 18). Solomon also raised a levy of his own people, to the number of 30,000, who would possibly exercise some superintendence over the slave labourers in the Forest of Lebanon; in order that their service might not be unduly burdensome, he divided them into

three parties of ten thousand each, these taking successive turns for the period of a month; thus, each contingent would be two months at home and one month on duty in the forest (1 Kings v. 13-18).

(b) *Artificers*.—Solomon also obtained from Hiram the services of skilled workmen to execute the more artistic works of the building. The name of one of these is given Hiram or Huram—identical with that of the monarch whose servant he was. He was sent in answer to Solomon's request for "a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave . . ." (2 Chron. ii. 7). The esteem in which he was held by both the sovereigns he served is indicated by the title "Father" given to him in relation both to Hiram and Solomon (2 Chron. ii. 13, margin of R. V. and iv. 16).

Hiram the king, and his subjects engaged in the service of Solomon, were recompensed by supplies of corn and oil, the products of the rich land of Israel. Cf. Acts xii. 20, where it is said that the country of Tyre and Sidon was "nourished"—*i.e.* maintained in corn supplies—by the country of King Herod, showing that then, as in earlier times, Tyre depended upon Palestine for its food supply.

Site of the Temple.—This is stated in 2 Chronicles iii. 1 to have been "at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite." The appearance of the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan, or Araunah, marked the cessation of the pestilence by which David's sin in numbering the people was punished. It gave to the place a sacred character, which David recognised by building there an altar and offering burnt-offerings and peace-offerings (2 Samuel xxiv. 25), and may have contributed to its subsequent selection as the site of the Temple.

It is probable that it was also the place of a still more momentous event—*viz.* Abraham in figure receiving his son from the dead (Genesis xxii. 2, and Heb. xi. 17).

Plan and Construction of the Temple.—Solomon's Temple was a building 60 cubits long by 20 cubits broad (*i.e.* about 90 feet by 30 feet). It was divided into two unequal parts (corresponding in some respects to the chancel and nave of one of our churches)—the larger chamber, known as the Holy Place, occupying two-thirds of the area; and the smaller, the Holy of Holies or the Oracle, occupying the remaining third. The height of the Holy Place was 30 cubits (45 feet); that of the Holy of Holies 20 cubits (30 feet). The Holy of Holies thus formed a

cube of 30 feet in length and breadth and height. It should be noticed that the dimensions of the Temple are in each direction just double those of the Tabernacle made by Moses. A striking feature of the Temple was the Porch, the height of which is said to have been 120 cubits—*i.e.* 180 feet ("the height of the steeple of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields"). Connected with this Porch were the two pillars of brass, *Jachin* ("He shall establish") and *Boaz* ("In it is strength")—these expressing symbolically the pious thoughts of Psalm xlii., "God is our hope and strength"; "God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed."

Round the Temple was the "Inner Court" (1 Kings vi. 36) or "Court of the Priests," enclosed by a wall, and covering a space of about an acre. On this was placed the Great Altar of Sacrifice. Outside this first court was the "Outer Court." Abutting on the Temple itself were three stories or tiers of chambers, probably occupied by the priests engaged in the Temple service.

The Temple was built of stone "made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the building" (1 Kings vi. 7). The interior was lined with boards of cedar, and this panelling, as well as the floor and the partition separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, were overlaid with gold.

Furniture of the Temple.—In the Holy of Holies, which contained the Ark, were placed two colossal figures, *Cherubim*, overlaid with gold, whose wings extended so as to meet on one side over the Ark, while on the other sides they touched the enclosing walls. In the Holy Place were the Altar of Incense, ten tables of Shewbread, and ten Golden Candlesticks. Outside, in the court, in addition to the Altar of Burnt Offering already mentioned, there was a "Molten Sea," a huge laver made of brass, for purposes of ablution, and ten smaller lavers.

The building of this magnificent House of the Lord occupied seven and a half years.

IV.

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEMPLE—THE CEREMONIES OF THE DEDICATION.

READ 1 Kings viii. and ix. 1-9; cf. 2 Chronicles v.-vii.

The Temple a Type of the Christian Church.—St. Paul takes the Temple to be a figure or type of the spiritual society of believers in Christ, which is "built upon the foundation of the

apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in Whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians ii. 20-22). So also St. Peter (1 Peter ii. 4, 5): "To Whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house . . ." The reference to "the stone disallowed of men" corresponds with the similar phrase in Psalm cxviii. 22, "The stone which the builders refused," both applying to our Lord. A Jewish tradition tells that when the materials were prepared for the building of the Temple, a stone which the builders had cast aside as useless was afterwards found to be fitted for the place of highest dignity, the corner of the building*; a type of Him Who was "despised and rejected of men," but proved to be worthy of the highest place in earth and heaven.

Transfer of the Ark and Tabernacle.—The building of the Temple, as has been said, took seven and a half years; but after its completion nearly a year was allowed to elapse before it was dedicated to its sacred use. Possibly this interval was required for preparation for the august ceremonial of the Dedication; or the delay may have been designed to bring the Dedication into the seventh month (1 Kings viii. 2), in which was the great Feast of Tabernacles.

The first act in the Dedication was the bringing of the Ark from the temporary tabernacle, or tent, on Mount Zion, in which it had been deposited by David [see "Life of David," in this series, p. 48]. The removal was effected with great pomp, and with numberless sacrifices, in which Solomon and the elders (or chiefs) of the nation, and the priests took part. The Ark was deposited in the Oracle, or Most Holy Place, where it was placed under the wings of the Cherubim. The staves by which the Ark had been carried in its progress from place to place were "drawn out," so as to be visible to the priests who ministered in the Holy Place. This withdrawal of the staves was an indication that the period of movement was over, and that Israel had now become a settled nation with a permanent shrine for the worship of Jehovah.

It is expressly said that "there was nothing in the Ark save the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb" [see Exodus xxv. 16]. "The golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's

* See Benham on St. Matthew xxi. 42 (National Society's Depository).

rod that budded," mentioned in Hebrews ix. 4 as amongst the contents of "the Holiest of all," were laid up beside or before the Ark.

At the same time that the Ark was removed, the old Tabernacle of the Congregation, which had been for many years stationed at Gibeon, was also removed to the Temple; it had fulfilled its purpose as the receptacle of the Sacred Ark, and was now apparently reverently preserved, with its sacred furniture, as a venerable relic of past times.

The Manifestation of God's Presence.—The enshrining of the Ark in its sacred seat, as the priests left the Temple, was celebrated by a great burst of music and song, the refrain of which was "Praise the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." At this moment "the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud." The Shechinah, the symbol of the Divine Presence, which had accompanied the Israelites through their wanderings, filled the Temple, as it had aforesaid filled the Tabernacle (Exodus xl. 34-38). Thus the Psalmist addresses the Most High, "Thou, that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth" (Psalm lxxx. 1; cf. Isaiah xxxvii. 16, &c.).*

The Blessing of the People by Solomon; His Prayer of Consecration.—In the solemn ceremonies that attended the consecration of the Temple, Solomon occupied a "scaffold" or platform four or five feet high, erected in the Temple Court. From this raised position he invoked a blessing on the people, reminding them of the promise made to his father, David, which had been fulfilled in the building of this house unto the Name of the Lord. Then, turning from the assembled multitudes, and turning towards the altar, he kneeled down upon his knees and spread forth his hands towards heaven, and in a sublime prayer besought God's continual Presence in the Temple dedicated to His service. When the people sinned, when they suffered defeat at the hand of their enemies, when the land was visited with drought and dearth, in all the vicissitudes of their personal and national life, might they seek this sacred place with an assured confidence that God would hear. Yea! even in captivity might the thought of this holy house be a stay and strength to them. And might the blessings

* Cf. Acts vii. 47-50 "Solomon built Him an house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet. *Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?*" (Isaiah lxvi. 1, 2).

of the Temple worship be extended also to "the stranger, not of God's people Israel," who should yet be brought to pray in this place (1 Kings viii.).

At the close of this prayer the Divine approval was signified by the descent of fire from heaven, which consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and a renewed manifestation of the Presence of God was vouchsafed in "the glory of the Lord, which filled the house" (2 Chronicles vii. 1-3).

Sacrifices reckoned by tens and hundreds of thousands were offered by the king and his subjects,* and thus "the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord." Solomon at this time received from God an assurance of perpetuity for his house provided that he walked in the steps of his father David. A great feast was held extending over twice seven days, the latter period coinciding with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Questions on Lessons I.-IV.

1. Give an account of the proceedings by which Solomon was established on the throne as successor to King David.
2. Narrate the circumstances under which the special gift of wisdom was bestowed upon Solomon. In what ways did he give evidence of his possession of this gift?
3. Give some account of the plan and construction of the Temple. In what respects may it be regarded as a type of the Church of Christ? Quote passages of the New Testament in which this typical aspect of the Temple is referred to.
4. Give an account of the ceremonies of the dedication of the Temple. What signs did God give of His acceptance of the service then offered to Him? Show that this justifies the dedication of Christian churches to God's service.

* The idea that the king on this occasion, and on others, performed the priest's ministerial office is manifestly impossible. At all times he who brought the sacrifice was said to "offer" it (see Leviticus ii. 1). The priest accepted it in the name of the Lord. — *Bishop Barry, in Ellicott's "Commentary."*

SOLOMON.

HIS GLORY AND HIS DOWNFALL.

READ I Kings ix., x. (11-29), xi.

Solomon's Glory.—Our Blessed Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, referring to the "lilies of the field," contrasts their beauties with the magnificence of Solomon's court—"Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (St. Matthew vi. 29). Our Lord's words are in accord with the common opinion of the Jews, which regarded Solomon and his surroundings as the pattern of all that was most splendid. Jewish tradition represented his attendants as clothed in purple, and with their hair glittering with gold dust. His "glory" was shown in other ways—in the number and magnificence of his palaces; in the costliness of the vessels and furniture of his house; in the largeness of his revenue; in the pomp of his progresses; in the magnitude of his fortifications and other buildings.

Solomon's Downfall.—The writer of the Book of Chronicles, evidently a loyal and devoted adherent of the court, gives us no hint of the disasters and troubles of Solomon's later life. These we find recorded in the Book of Kings. The circumstances which contributed to Solomon's exaltation amongst the kings of the nations contributed also to his moral failure and to the consequent decline of his kingdom. His downfall may be traced to three causes:—

(a) *Polygamy.*—The desire to be as other kings led him to form alliances with neighbouring sovereigns, and even to contract marriages within their families. For the first time since the Exodus Israel was allied with Egypt, and to cement the alliance Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh. But besides this, he "loved many strange women . . . women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites"—the last of these being of the old Canaanite stock, into which God had expressly forbidden His people to marry. Polygamy—the marrying of more wives than one—is a breach of God's primeval institution of marriage, and wherever it has been practised it has brought evils in its train. In the case of David, "the sword never departed from his house" because of sins which mainly sprang from this evil custom; and, as Solomon sinned in this respect beyond his father, so did he bring greater troubles upon his country.

(b) *Idolatry.*—The first consequence of Solomon's marriages with foreign wives was that he was allured into the idolatrous

practices of the several nations from which they came: "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings xi. 4). His Zidonian wives enticed him to the worship of their goddess Ashtoreth (or *Astarte*), a deity corresponding to Venus in the Roman mythology, whose rites were connected with the grossest forms of sensuality and impurity. So his Ammonite wife claimed his allegiance for her god, Milcom (or *Moloch*), "the abomination of the Ammonites," who was worshipped with human sacrifices, whose worshippers "sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils." And again his Moabite wife engaged him in the worship of Chemosh, "the abomination of Moab," the war god—like the Roman Mars—who presided over their wars. And Solomon was not content with a private connivance at the idolatries of his heathen wives, and a private sharing in the worship of their false gods; but he went so far as to build "high places" for Chemosh and for Moloch, and that in "the hill that is before Jerusalem," probably the Mount of Olives, which fronted Mount Moriah and the Temple of Jehovah. It is sad to contrast this flagrant violation of the Divine commands with the piety which Solomon exhibited at Gibeon, and with the lofty strains of devotion poured forth at the Dedication of the Temple. "The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice [once at Gibeon, and once after the completion of the Temple], and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods" (1 Kings xi. 9, 10).

(c) *Extravagance*.—A third cause of Solomon's downfall was his lavish expenditure on buildings and on other things contributing to the magnificence and splendour of his court. The materials for the Temple had been provided in large part (at least) by the piety of his father David; but the building of palaces and fortifications; the construction and equipment of a navy; the furnishing of the royal palaces on such a scale of magnificence as is described; the provision of a great stud of horses and a great force of cavalry—these things necessarily imposed a heavy burden, partly of forced labour and partly of taxation, on his people. In the first instance (as we saw in the account of the building of the Temple), the native Canaanites were forced into the service, but even then a levy of 30,000 Israelites had to be made to carry on the work. Such forced labour would be continually in demand throughout the reign of Solomon, and the demand would no doubt be resented by a people unaccustomed to work under these conditions from

the time that they left the "house of bondage" in Egypt. In 1 Kings iv. 6 mention is made of Adoniram as "over the tribute."* This may indicate the supervision of the forced labour; or it may possibly indicate the exaction of a forced loan.

Thus Solomon's deviations from the path of duty towards God, coupled with his oppressive actions towards his subjects, worked out their appointed punishment. "The Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, *I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant*" (1 Kings xi. 11).

Troubles of Solomon's later Years.—The full penalty of Solomon's sins was not to be paid in his lifetime; he remained to the end the king of a politically undivided kingdom. But there were indications of coming troubles—adversaries whom "the Lord stirred up against Solomon." These were Hadad the Edomite, who had found a refuge in Egypt during the days when the kingdom of Israel was strong, but took advantage of its weakness to return; and Rezon, who ruled in Syria; and last, one of Solomon's own subjects, Jeroboam, whose history we shall most suitably study in connection with the reign of Solomon's successor.

Death of Solomon.—Amidst these troubles, the fruits of his own transgressions, Solomon died after a reign of forty years. His life shows us how great position, splendid opportunities, great endowments, fail to confer true greatness on one who has not continually the fear of God before his eyes.

* An officer having a like duty—*Adoram*, possibly identical with the above—is mentioned as an officer of David (2 Samuel xx. 24). It is thought that David's numbering of the people may have been with a view to the exaction of forced labour (which would account for its unpopularity with Joab and others), and that Adoram may have had charge of the levy which had this end in view. At the beginning of the following reign Adoram, "who was over the tribute," is stoned to death in a popular rising (1 Kings xii. 18).

VI.

REHOBOAM AND JEROBOAM.

JEROBOAM—ACCESSION OF REHOBOAM—DISRUPTION OF THE KINGDOM.

READ 1 Kings xi. 26-40; xii. Cf. 2 Chronicles x. and xi. 1-7.

Jeroboam.—In the last lesson reference was made to the troubles of Solomon's later life, which followed in the way of natural consequence upon his violation of the Divine Law. One of the leaders of the popular disaffection was Jeroboam, whose history (so far as it is included in the period of Solomon's reign) is given in 1 Kings xi. 26-40.

His name, "the son of Nebat," which clings to him throughout the sacred narrative, indicates his parentage; he belonged to the tribe of Ephraim; his father had been a "servant" of Solomon, and his mother was left a widow. His merit as a strong and capable person ["a mighty man of valour"] had raised him to a position of eminence amongst the men of his tribe. Solomon "made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph," these words probably indicating that he was a labour-master, or superintendent, having charge of the enforced service exacted from the tribe of Ephraim. No doubt this enforced service gave rise to discontent and dissatisfaction, and Jeroboam apparently cast in his lot with the disaffected, though this action was hardly consistent with loyalty to the king, by whom he had been appointed to his office.

Under these circumstances he received an intimation that he was the appointed agent in carrying out a Divine plan for the punishment of Solomon's transgressions. The intimation was conveyed to him by the prophet Ahijah in one of those symbolical acts of which we have many examples in the Scripture narrative. Ahijah, who is called the Shilonite (from Shiloh, the old dwelling-place of the Tabernacle of the Lord), met Jeroboam on his way out from Jerusalem. Divesting himself of his new robe, he tore it in twelve pieces; ten of these he gave to Jeroboam as a sign that the northern ten tribes should come under his sway, while the two parts that were retained indicated that the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (henceforth tending to coalesce into one, verses 32 and 36) should remain to the house of David.

Jeroboam's Rebellion against Solomon, and Flight into Egypt.—Encouraged by this communication from the prophet of the Lord, and impatient of waiting for the carrying out in its season of the Divine plan, Jeroboam "lifted up his hand against the

king," probably placing himself at the head of a popular rising. A section of the history, which is found only in the Septuagint version, represents him as also affecting a royal state, with chariots and horses, such as Absalom exhibited when he was aiming at succession to the throne (2 Samuel xv. 1). His suspicions being excited by these signs of ambition and disloyalty on the part of his servant, Solomon sought to kill him. Jeroboam took refuge in Egypt; here he obtained a friendly reception from King Shishak, who was a monarch of a new dynasty alien from that of the king with whose family Solomon had contracted an alliance at the beginning of his reign. According to the Septuagint, Shishak gave a princess of his house in marriage to Jeroboam.

Accession of Rehoboam.—Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, his mother being Naamah, an Ammonitess. On his accession to the throne he went to Shechem, the chief city of Ephraim and the capital of the northern part of the kingdom, to complete his inauguration to the sovereignty. Probably this recognition of the capital of the northern tribes indicates a desire to conciliate those tribes; it shows that the separation in thought and heart between the two portions of the kingdom, which existed in the times of David, had not yet been obliterated.

Disruption of the Kingdom.—Jeroboam had returned from his residence in Egypt, and is now summoned to be the mouthpiece of his tribe, and of the tribes that acted with it, in making a protest against the evils under which they suffered. They complained of the heavy burdens laid upon them in Solomon's time, from which they now sought relief—"Thy Father made our yoke grievous; now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." Rehoboam asked for three days to consider the petition thus presented to him. Meantime he consulted the old councillors of the kingdom; their advice was that he should yield to the popular demands, and thus establish his rule more firmly for the time to come. But, as this apparently ran counter to his own views, he took counsel also with the young men who were his contemporaries. Their advice was diametrically opposed to that of their elders; instead of a policy of conciliation, they recommended one of uncompromising adherence to the course which Solomon had pursued, and the assertion of claims even beyond his. This unwise advice Rehoboam adopted. When, at the expiration of the appointed days, Jeroboam and his following again appeared before him, he answered them roughly, refusing any remission of their burdens, and threatening them with still more severe

treatment than that of which they complained—"My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

Such high-handed and despotic action led to the disruption of the kingdom. The northern tribes separated themselves from the "house of David," and the cry of insurrection which had been raised after the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel xx. 1) was again heard:—

What portion have we in David?

What inheritance in Jesse's son?

To your tents, O Israel!

Now see to thine own house, O David!

Adoram, the agent of Rehoboam in the collection of the tribute, or in the exaction of the enforced labour, was put to death by the incensed Israelites. Rehoboam made good his retreat to Jerusalem, and Jeroboam was appointed king of the northern tribes. "*The cause was from the Lord*"; the ambition of Jeroboam and the obstinacy of Rehoboam contributed to the carrying out of the events foretold by the prophet Ahijah.

Rehoboam collected an army of 180,000 men to bring back to their allegiance his revolting subjects, but the prophet Shemaiah was commanded to order the disbanding of this great force, and to confirm what had already been indicated by Ahijah as to the Divine purpose.

At the same time Jeroboam proceeded to solidify and strengthen the kingdom which he had acquired for himself. He fortified his capital Shechem, and also a position at Peniel, on the east of the Jordan. But in his worldly wisdom, he thought that the purpose of God would be frustrated if the people continued to go up to the national Sanctuary at Jerusalem for the observance of their stated religious rites. To obviate this danger he established sanctuaries at the two extremities of his kingdom, at Dan and Bethel, as rivals to the house of God at Jerusalem. Here he made "calves of gold," objects for the people to worship, thus reproducing the idolatry of the wilderness. For the service of these idol shrines "he made priests of the lowest of the people" ("from among all the people," R.V.), disregarding the Divine command which limited the priesthood to the tribe of Levi.

VII.

REHOBOAM AND JEROBOAM—(continued).

JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRIES—THE TWO PROPHETS—DEATH OF
ABIJAH, SON OF JEROBOAM.

READ 1 Kings xii. 32–xiv. 18.

Jeroboam's Idolatrous Worship.—In connection with the worship of the Golden Calf at Bethel, Jeroboam had instituted a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. This was unauthorised by any Divine command, the month being that which Jeroboam had "devised of his own heart"; but probably it was an imitation of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was held on the same day of the *seventh* month. It will be remembered that the Feast of Tabernacles was connected with the dedication of Solomon's Temple, and this feast appointed by Jeroboam may have been intended to inaugurate the worship of his idol shrine.

The Prophet of Judah.—Jeroboam's violation of the Law of God was not suffered to go unreprieved. A "man of God" was sent out of Judah to announce the destruction and desecration of the altar which Jeroboam had set up. His prophecy was fulfilled in the reign of Josiah, when the high place was broken down and the bones of the priests that had ministered thereat were burned upon the altar (2 Kings xxiii. 15, 16). But on the instant two signs were given of the truth of the Prophet's prediction—(a) At his word the altar at which the king stood was shattered, and the ashes of the sacrifice that had been offered were scattered on the ground; thus the futility of the sacrifices to idols was demonstrated; (b) when Jeroboam put forth his hand to order the seizure of the daring prophet, his hand was withered, and thus was shown the powerlessness of the earthly monarch when arrayed against the might of Jehovah. Subsequently on the king's entreaty his hand was restored by the prophet's intercession, and Jeroboam offered rewards and hospitable entertainment to the messenger by whom his sin had been reprieved. The prophet, however, refused the compliment that was offered; he could have no part with this leader of revolt against the God he served; a command had been given him to eat no bread and drink no water until he had fulfilled the duty assigned to him, but to return by another way to the place from which he had been sent.

The Prophet of Bethel.—The sacred narrative brings to our notice another prophet, resident in Bethel. His sons, who had

been present at the idolatrous service, reported to their father the striking incidents which had occurred, and the words of firm resolution in which the man of God that came out of Judah refused the invitation of the king. To break down this resolution of his brother prophet, and so to lead him to a violation of the command given him by God, was the task which the prophet of Bethel proposed to himself. With this design he followed the prophet of Judah; overtaking him, he falsely alleged that an angel had brought him a message reversing the direction that had been given with respect to his return. Thus he seduced him from the path of duty and succeeded in bringing him back to his house at Bethel.

Afterwards, when the prophet of Judah had accepted the hospitality offered to him with such an evil motive, the prophet of Bethel was made the instrument to pronounce against him the sentence on his wrongdoing: "Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord . . . thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." The sentence was fulfilled when the prophet of Judah resumed his homeward journey; he was met by a lion, which slew him, but showed the supernatural direction under which it acted in that it neither devoured the carcase nor tore the ass. The prophet of Bethel, hearing what had happened, fetched back the body of the prophet he had so grossly deceived, and, with much lamentation, laid his body in his own grave; at the same time he laid a charge upon his sons to bury him beside the prophet of Judah, anticipating the desecration of the graves which was foretold in the message delivered to Jeroboam, and hoping to secure his own remains from this indignity (see 2 Kings xxiii. 17, 18).

If we ask why the prophet of Judah was so severely punished for acting on a direction which came from one who was professedly a prophet of the Lord, and which was represented as being a message from God—the reason may lie in some previous faltering, or weakening of purpose, in the man of God himself. It is significant that the other prophet found him "sitting under an oak," as though resting himself, instead of hastening homeward without delay—as the message from God (1 Kings xiii. 9) seems to imply that he ought to have done. No temptation, however specious, will prevail unless there is something within ourselves answering to it; and, on the other hand, when one is inwardly disposed to what is wrong, he will not be at a loss to find reasons for deviating from the path of rectitude. The moral of his history is taught in the verse of the "Christian Year":—

*The grey-haired saint may fall at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove;
Heaven only binds us fast
To the bright shores of love.*

We may be puzzled, again, at finding a prophet of the Lord (as the prophet of Bethel plainly was) acting such a base and wicked part. Though he was a prophet of the Lord, and though God used him as an instrument to pronounce His sentence of punishment upon his brother prophet, we are not called upon to excuse his wickedness. Balaam and Caiaphas are examples of other wicked men, who were, nevertheless, made to deliver true messages from God. The prophet of Bethel showed a want of firmness of religious principle in continuing to reside at Bethel, when "out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers," and so "strengthened the kingdom of Judah" (2 Chr. xi. 16, 17). Though he did not himself join in the idolatrous services, yet he allowed his sons to be present at them. The fact that a prophet was sent from Judah to denounce the idolatry of the king was in itself a reflection on his own unfaithfulness to duty. And so his falsehood and deceit, practised on a brother prophet, were only the outcome of a false and depraved life. If the less guilty of the two was punished with what seems the severer punishment, we must remember that we do not know *all*; years of remorse, if he repented, might be a heavier punishment to the prophet of Bethel than the sudden, painless death of the other; and, if he did not repent, we know that his punishment is with God.

Further Warning addressed to Jeroboam.—Jeroboam received a further warning in connection with the illness of his son Abijah. Desiring to know the issue of his son's sickness, he sent his wife to the prophet Ahijah, from whom he had received the announcement of his designation to the kingdom. Ahijah resided at the ancient sanctuary of Shiloh, old and blind. The wife of the king was sent to him disguised, carrying in her hand such an offering for the prophet as a peasant woman might bring. But Ahijah was miraculously informed of her disguise, and denounced the punishment that should fall upon Jeroboam and his house because of the idolatries by which he had "made Israel to sin." The son concerning whom she had come to inquire would die, but his early death was really a mercy for him, because in him only were there found good dispositions, and he alone of the house of Jeroboam should "come to the grave." The prophet's prediction was fulfilled in the death of Abijah.

VIII.

THE KINGS OF THE DIVIDED KINGDOM.

READ 1 Kings xiv. 19-xvi. 34; cf. 2 Chronicles xi.-xvii.

The following table will be found useful in following out the history of the contemporary monarchs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel:—

B.C.	Kings of Judah	B.C.	Kings of Israel
976	1. Rehoboam	975	1. Jeroboam
	SHEMAIAH <i>prophesied</i>		ABIJAH <i>prophesied</i> } }
958	2. Abijam or Abijah		
955	3. Asa		
	AZARIAH and HANANI	954	2. Nadab
	<i>prophesied</i>	953	3. Baasha
			JEHU, son of Hanani, <i>prophesied</i> } }
		930	4. Elah
			5. Zimri
		929	6. Omri (Tibni)
		918	7. Ahab
914	4. Jehoshaphat	897	8. Ahaziah
	JEHU, son of Hanani, and ELIEZER <i>pro-</i> <i>phesied</i>	896	9. Jehoram (Joram)
889	5. Jehoram		ELISHA <i>prophesied</i> } }
885	6. Ahaziah		
			<i>The brackets indicate that the names enclosed within them are those of sovereigns belonging to the same family. Thus it will be seen that four different families or dynasties bore rule in the Northern Kingdom during this period of less than a hundred years.</i>
	<i>All the above monarchs were of the House of David</i>		

KINGS OF JUDAH.

1. Rehoboam.—The reign of Rehoboam was marked by idolatry and shameless immorality. He and his people were punished by

the invasion of the kingdom by Shishak, king of Egypt, who plundered the temple and the palace which Solomon had built. Amongst the spoils were the shields of gold which Solomon had made as ornaments for his palace (1 Kings x. 16, 17); these were replaced by brazen shields, which were carried in procession before Rehoboam when he went to the house of the Lord. The change to the baser metal was an indication of the departing glory of the kingdom, and also a sign of the empty vanity of the king. Rehoboam died after a reign of seventeen years. The prophet **Shemaiah** flourished in his reign, and was the appointed instrument in announcing to the people the cause of Shishak's invasion (2 Chronicles xii. 5-8).

2. **Abijah**.—Rehoboam was succeeded by his son, **Abijam** or **Abijah**. He waged war with **Jeroboam**, king of Israel, and, though he was greatly outnumbered in respect of forces, he succeeded in defeating **Jeroboam**; by this victory he extended the frontier of his kingdom, possessing himself of **Bethel** and other towns, which had hitherto been included in the northern kingdom. His victory is ascribed to the Divine help given because of the greater piety of the people of Judah—"the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles xiii.).

3. **Asa**, the son of **Abijah**, succeeded, and continued the reformation in religion and morals which seems to have commenced in the reign of **Abijah**. His reign opened with a period of peace, purchased by **Abijah's** victories, extending over ten years. **Asa** used this opportunity to strengthen his kingdom, and to root out the idolatries which had been established; in connection with the latter he deposed the Queen Mother **Maachah** from her dignity because of her idol worship. Subsequently, relying on the support of the God whom he served, he gained a victory over the **Ethiopians** under their king **Zerah**. On this he received congratulations from the prophet **Azariah**, son of **Oded**, and was promised a continuance of the Divine support, so long as he remained faithful.

At a later period he had to contend against **Baasha**, King of Israel, who invaded his territory with the view of retrieving the losses sustained by his predecessor **Jeroboam**. In this instance **Asa** did not exhibit the faith which he had shown in his former time of trial; he purchased the aid of **Benhadad**, King of Syria—using as his bribe the silver and gold obtained by the spoliation of the Temple of God. **Baasha**, thus placed between two foes, was compelled to desist from his aggression, but the action of **Asa** was displeasing to God, and was denounced by the prophet **Hanani**. From this time the character of **Asa** deteriorated; he

put Hanani into prison and oppressed the people. Suffering from a disease in the feet, "he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians," and died after a reign of forty-one years.

4. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, succeeded to the throne, and revived the best traditions of the House of David. He took measures for the religious instruction of his people by sending princes, and with them priests and Levites, through the cities of Judah to teach them from the Book of the Law of the Lord. The Arabians and Philistines became tributary to him, and he acquired great power and wealth. His great mistake was in forming an alliance with Ahab, the idolatrous and depraved king of Israel; this alliance was cemented by the marriage of his son Jehoram with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The further history of Jehoshaphat and that of his successors will be treated in connection with that of Ahab and his family.

KINGS OF ISRAEL.

1. Jeroboam.—The main features of Jeroboam's reign have already been treated of in Lessons VI. and VII. His idolatries won for him the appellation which is commonly attached to his name, "who made Israel to sin." On the whole, the extent and power of his kingdom suffered diminution during his reign of twenty-one years.

2. Nadab, his son, succeeded to the throne. After a brief reign of less than two years he was slain by one of his generals, Baasha, who seized the crown. On his accession he put to death all of the house of Jeroboam, thus fulfilling the prediction which the prophet Ahijah had made to the wife of Jeroboam (1 Kings xv. 29, 30).

3. Baasha reigned for twenty-three years. His wars with Asa have been already referred to in the note on the life of that king. He was reproved for his wickedness by the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani (probably the same *Hanani* who is mentioned in connection with King Asa). The same punishment was denounced upon him as that which he had already been instrumental in bringing upon the family of Jeroboam.

4. Elah, the son of Baasha, after a reign of less than two years, was assassinated by Zimri, one of his officers, as he was "drinking himself drunk in the house of his steward."

5. Zimri, succeeding to the throne, put to death all the house of Baasha, in accordance with the prophet Jehu's prediction. After a reign of only seven days he also became the victim of a military insurrection headed by Omri. In despair of his life, he went into the royal palace, and, setting fire to it, died in the flames. This was the ground of the taunting question asked by

Queen Jezebel of a later usurper, "Had Zimri peace who slew his master?" (2 Kings ix. 31).

6. Omri, on his accession, had at first to contend against a rival leader—Tibni—but eventually established his position as monarch. He made Samaria his capital in place of Tirzah, which had been the capital of Baasha, as Shechem had previously been that of Jeroboam. He reigned twelve years.

7. Ahab, the son of Omri, succeeded. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and established the worship of her idol deity *Baal* in Samaria.* Of him it is written that "he did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings xvi. 33). The prevailing irreligion was evidenced by the rebuilding of Jericho in defiance of the curse laid upon such an act by Joshua (Joshua vi. 26). Hiel the Bethelite, who undertook this perilous task, paid the penalty which Joshua had foretold; his first-born son (Abiram) died when the foundations were laid, and his youngest (Segub) when the gates were set up and the work completed (1 Kings xvi. 34).

Questions on Lessons V.—VIII.

1. "The Lord was angry with Solomon." How had Solomon provoked God to anger, and what was his punishment?

2. Give an account of the early history of Jeroboam, and narrate the circumstances which led to the disruption of the kingdom after the death of Solomon.

3. "It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord." Narrate the incident connected with these words. What lessons may be drawn from it?

4. Write brief notices of Asa, Ahijah (the prophet), and Omri.

IX.

ELIJAH.

THE DROUGHT—ELIJAH AND AHAB—THE SCENE ON CARMEL.

READ 1 Kings xvii. and xviii. (to verse 40).

The Drought in Israel.—Elijah's Prayer.—Elijah is first introduced in the sacred narrative in connection with a drought of

* With this was connected the worship of the *Asherah* (translated in A.V. "grove"), which probably represented the Zidonian goddess Astarte or Ashtaroth (see 1 Kings xvi. 33 R.V.).

three years, brought upon Israel because of Ahab's sins. In 1 Kings he is represented as foretelling to Ahab this visitation from God: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (xvii. 1). But St. James tells us this visitation not only followed upon Elijah's prediction, but was an answer to his prayer: "Elias . . . prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (St. James v. 17). From a comparison of the two passages we should gather that Elijah had previously denounced the idolatry and wickedness of Ahab's government, and that the drought was sent because of the king's disregard of his warnings.

We have no particulars as to Elijah's history prior to this time; he is spoken of as "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead." This indicates either that his birthplace was Tishbe, in the country to the East of Jordan, or, as no place of the name of Tishbe in Gilead is spoken of elsewhere, the word Tishbite more probably means Converter,* in anticipation of the great event at Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 37; Mal. iv. 6).

The severity of the drought led him to take shelter in his own land, where the brook, or mountain torrent of Cherith, still undried, supplied him with drink, while the ravens were taught of God to bring him his portion of bread and flesh each morning and evening.

The continued lack of rain caused the drying-up of the brook Cherith, and Elijah was driven further from home to seek for sustenance, and probably also to find a place more secure from Ahab's vengeance. His retreat was to Zarephath or Sarepta (as it is called in the New Testament),† a town between Tyre and Sidon, where God had commanded a widow woman to provide for his needs. The famine consequent upon the drought had extended to these northern regions; Elijah found the widow to whom he was sent reduced to great straits; her barrel of meal and cruse of oil contained no more than would suffice for a single cake, which she was preparing as a last meal for herself and her son before death should overtake them. Elijah bade her prepare the cake for him, and assured her that "the barrel of meal should not waste nor the cruse of oil fail" till God should send rain upon the earth. This woman, belonging to a heathen

* See Lightfoot's *Exercitationes* on St. Luke i. 17.

† See St. Luke iv. 26. Our Lord refers to the sending of Elias [or Elijah] to the widow of Sarepta as an indication of God's regard *even then* for the people outside the Land of Israel.

nation, was yet impressed by the prophet's words, and did according to his bidding; she was rewarded by the fulfilment of the promise; her scanty store was miraculously multiplied, and supplied the needs of her household for many days.

The Raising of the Son of the Widow of Zarephath.—The faith of the woman of Zarephath, by which she had been induced to give up her last morsel of food at the bidding of the prophet, was subjected to a further strain. Her son fell sick, and was stricken with death. Her first impulse was to attribute this to the prophet's presence, whereby she had been made conscious of sin and apprehensive of evils which she felt she had most justly deserved. "She said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" Elijah, sympathising with her sorrow and not heeding her implied reproach, took the child to his room, and with earnest pleading besought of God that the life of the child might be restored. His prayer was answered, and the child was restored alive to his mother. By this second miracle the faith of the woman was established; she acknowledged Elijah as a man of God, and professed her belief in the truth of the message which he was commissioned to deliver.

Elijah and Ahab.—As the three years of drought and famine drew to their close, Elijah was commanded again to seek the presence of Ahab. The king, accompanied by the "governor" (or steward) of his house, Obadiah, was engaged in a survey of the country, to find out, if it were possible, some traces of vegetation which had survived the drought, whereby the royal horses and mules might be kept alive; for this purpose they had separated, each taking one half of the country as the area of his search. As Obadiah was thus engaged Elijah met him, and startled him with the mandate, "Go, tell thy lord, behold, Elijah is here." Through every land, as Obadiah said, Ahab had been seeking Elijah, no doubt with the object of wreaking vengeance on him for the national suffering and loss which he attributed to his agency. Now Obadiah was directed to announce Elijah's presence to the enraged king. But what security had he that, while he went to report this, the prophet might not transport himself to some place of hiding, as he had done aforetime, and so leave him exposed to the king's fury? Such a fate would be an ill recompense for the service he had rendered in secreting and feeding a hundred of the Lord's prophets during the persecution by Jezebel. To this remonstrance, urged by Obadiah, Elijah answered with a solemn pledge to await the coming of Ahab.

On meeting the prophet, Ahab addressed him as the "troubler of Israel"; but Elijah threw back the charge on the idolatrous

monarch, saying that the troubles came from the forsaking of God and the worship of Baalim, of which Ahab and his house had been guilty. To settle the questions at issue he proposed a meeting between himself as the representative of the one true God, and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Ashtaroth * maintained by Jezebel. It is significant of Elijah's commanding influence that Ahab, who had up to this time been seeking him with deadly purpose, at once acquiesced in the proposal that he made.

The Meeting on Mount Carmel.—The meeting took place on the summit of Mount Carmel, in the tribe of Manasseh, a lofty headland, with a look-out in one direction over the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and in the other over the great central plain of Palestine, the Plain of Esdraelon. Here Elijah faced the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal,† and the people stood by to see the issue of the controversy. To them Elijah appealed to make up their minds to worship *either* Jehovah or Baal, which ever should establish a rightful claim upon their worship, and no longer to "halt between two opinions," to "limp," as it were, first on one leg and then on the other, in an attitude of helpless indecision.

The question of supremacy between Jehovah and Baal was to be settled by a simple and decisive test. Each of the opposing parties was to be provided with a bullock, and each was to prepare the victim and lay it on the wood ready to be made a burnt offering. No fire was to be applied to the wood, but each party was to appeal to the God whose cause he represented to manifest His divinity, and "the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God." Such an appeal commended itself to the minds of the people, and they answered Elijah's proposal with the words, "It is well spoken."

The priests of Baal prepared their offering, and from morning till noon rent the skies with their entreaties, "O Baal, hear us!" In their excitement they leaped about (R. V.) the altar, and as Elijah roused them to fury with his mockery of their vain offering, they gashed themselves with knives and lancets. But though this was continued till "the time of the evening sacrifice" (three o'clock in the afternoon) "*there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.*"

Elijah meantime had repaired a dilapidated altar which the

* See note on Lesson VIII.

† For some reason the four hundred prophets of Ashtaroth do not appear to have shared in the final stages of the controversy.

piety of former ages had erected on this spot, constructing it of *twelve* stones in remembrance of the Twelve Tribes of undivided Israel, and on this he placed the wood and the victim prepared for sacrifice. Thrice he drenched both wood and victim with water, so that the water ran over and filled the trench which he had dug round the altar.* Then, at the time of evening sacrifice, an hour hallowed by the devotion offered to the true God in the Temple at Jerusalem, Elijah addressed an impassioned appeal to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, begging that He would vindicate both His own glory and the mission of His servant. The appeal was answered in the coming down of fire from heaven, which consumed the sacrifice and the altar itself, and licked up the water in the trench. The people, witnessing this miracle, fell on their faces, with the cry, "JEHOVAH, He is the God; JEHOVAH, He is the God!"

The day's work was not completed till the false prophets who had dishonoured God by their idolatries, and perverted the people by their degraded and licentious rites, had paid the penalty of their wickedness. Not one of them was suffered to escape; by Elijah's orders they were hurried down the mountain to the banks of the river Kishon, and there put to death. Such an extermination was necessary for the vindication of the truth of God.

X.

ELIJAH—(continued).

ELIJAH'S PRAYER FOR RAIN—HIS FLIGHT FROM JEZEBEL—
HOREB—THE CALL OF ELISHA.

READ 1 Kings xviii. 41-xix. 21.

Termination of the Drought.—The majesty of Jehovah having been vindicated by the scene on Mount Carmel, and a heavy blow having been dealt to the worship of the false gods by the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, Elijah predicts that the curse which has lain upon the land for more than three years is about to be withdrawn. Already to his spiritually quickened ear "there is a sound of abundance of rain," and he bids Ahab go up to Carmel, where a feast has been prepared

* The water might have been supplied from a well still found in the neighbourhood of *El-Maharrakah* ["The Burning" or "The Sacrifice"], the traditional scene of the incident.

for him. Ahab, unmoved by the appalling events of which he had been the spectator, went to feast; the prophet went to pray. On one of the heights of Carmel "he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." Then he prayed for rain, as St. James tells us (v. 18). The answer was slow in coming. Again and again he sent his servant* to look over the sea for some indication that his prayer was in the way of being answered, and again and again he was disappointed; it was not till the seventh time of sending that the servant brought back the news, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." This was the sign for which the prophet waited. The boy was sent to Ahab with a message, bidding him prepare his chariot with all speed for a return to his capital. But before he could get upon his way the "little cloud" expanded into a dark storm cloud, the wind blew up from the sea on the west, and in a deluge of rain Ahab returned to Jezreel. "The hand of the Lord was on Elijah"; carried forward and speeded by a Divine energy, he kept pace with Ahab's chariot horses and ran before him to the entrance of Jezreel.

Jezebel's Vengeance.—Ahab reported to Jezebel the incidents of Mount Carmel, and told how the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal had perished at the Kishon under the hand of Elijah. The proud daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians was not likely to bear with patience this insult to herself and to her national religion; and she bound herself by an oath, imprecating doom upon herself if she did not do with Elijah as he had done with the prophets.

Elijah a Fugitive.—To escape the vengeance of the enraged queen, Elijah fled to Beersheba, the border town of the kingdom of Judah, ninety-five miles from Jezreel. Leaving there his faithful servant, he went himself a day's journey into the wilderness. Here a deep despondency succeeded to the tension under which he had laboured. He sat down under a juniper tree, and requested for himself that he might die; he felt that the victory which he had achieved for the cause of God on Mount Carmel had effected nothing; he, the champion of the cause of Truth, was an exile, fleeing for his life from the rage of the queen, "no better than his fathers," as little able to effect any enduring good

* Tradition says that this servant of Elijah was the son of the widow of Sarepta, whom the prophet had miraculously restored to life. He is identified also by Jewish tradition with the prophet Jonah.

as they were. With these thoughts he fell asleep, and was roused by an angel, who bade him "Arise, and eat" of food which had been miraculously prepared for him. Refreshed by this meal, the prophet lay down and slept again. A second time he was waked from his slumbers and bidden again to eat and so to fortify himself for toils which still lay before him. "In the strength of that meat he went forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the Mount of God."

Elijah at Horeb.—After a journey of two hundred miles through the desert, Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, reached the sacred mountain hallowed by associations with the history of the great lawgiver, Moses. He found shelter in "a cave," perhaps the "clift of the rock" in which God placed Moses (Exodus xxxiii. 22); and here he heard the Divine voice addressing to him the question, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* The question was an evidence that he was still remembered of God, and at the same time it conveyed a rebuke of the petulance and faithlessness which had led the prophet to forsake the path of duty, and to neglect the calls for further service in the land of Israel. Elijah replied with a complaint like that to which he had given utterance under the juniper tree in the wilderness of Beersheba; he referred to the zeal which he had exhibited in the cause of God, and to the fruitlessness of his efforts: "I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away." Then the great powers of Nature were brought into exercise to awe the mind of the prophet; a great and strong wind, an earthquake, a fire successively appalled him, but "the Lord was in" none of these; afterwards came "a still small voice," and Elijah, recognising in this a communication from the Most High, went out to the mouth of the cave. Again the question is addressed to him, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* and again he answers as before. But now his despondent complaining is corrected by the assurance that he does not stand *alone* as he had supposed; there are still "seven thousand in Israel" who have not "bowed unto Baal." He is bidden to resume the duties of the prophetic office to which God has called him; in his own country, to anoint one Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to execute vengeance on the wicked house of Ahab, and to succeed to the throne of Israel; in the country beyond his own, to anoint Hazael to be King of Syria; and also to provide for one to succeed himself in the prophetic office by anointing to this office Elisha, the son of Shaphat. Each of these would have his appointed task to fulfil in carrying out the righteous judgments of the Lord—"Him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."

The Call of Elisha.—Of the three duties thus assigned to him Elijah in person fulfilled but one—the appointment of his coadjutor and successor, to whom was to be left the carrying out of the other two. As Elijah retraced his steps from the solitude of the Wilderness, he came to Abel-meholah in the valley of the Jordan; Elisha, the future prophet, was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, with no thought apparently of the great destiny to which he was to be summoned. Elijah, passing by, without a word cast upon him his mantle—a sign of adoption to sonship or discipleship which Elisha understood. He only asked to be allowed a brief leave-taking with his parents and friends; with this, and a sacrificial feast, in which his neighbours shared, he abandoned his old peaceful pastoral life, and engaged himself as the servant or minister of the great prophet of Israel.

 XI.

ELIJAH—(continued).

NABOTH'S VINEYARD—AHAB'S DEATH.

READ 1 Kings xxi., xxii.

Ahab and Naboth.—The previous narrative has shown Ahab breaking the first and second commandments by his idolatrous worship, and the sixth by his persecution of the prophets of the Lord. This chapter (xxi.) shows him breaking the tenth commandment by his uncurbed desire to possess himself of the property of one of his subjects, and conniving at the breaking of the sixth as a means to the acquisition of the possession which he coveted.

Naboth the Jezreelite was the possessor of a vineyard which bordered on the king's palace; this provoked Ahab's cupidity by its fitness to be turned into a garden of herbs as an extension of the royal domain. Ahab proposed to acquire possession of the coveted property either by exchange or purchase; but Naboth refused to part with it on any terms, holding it sacred as a part of his paternal inheritance (Numb. xxxvi. 7). Ahab, disappointed in his desire, returns to his house sullen and angry. Jezebel, hearing the story of the king's frustrated purpose, taunts him with his weakness, and takes it upon herself to gain for him the object of his desire. With daring unscrupulousness, she writes letters in the king's name to those in authority in Naboth's city, bidding them take measures to bring about Naboth's death. They were to proclaim a Fast, as if desiring to

ward off from the city some impending calamity; Naboth was to be "set on high" as a prisoner on his trial, and two false witnesses ("sons of Belial"—i.e. "children of lawlessness or worthlessness," base and abandoned men) suborned to charge him with blasphemy against God and the king. The obsequious magistrates carried out implicitly the directions of the haughty queen, and Naboth was stoned to death in accordance with the law for the punishment of blasphemy. Jezebel had accomplished her wicked design, and with pride in her success she salutes Ahab with the words: "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive but dead." Ahab, not stopping to inquire by what means the man who stood in the way of his designs had been removed, went down from his palace to take possession of the property thus unjustly acquired.

Elijah and Ahab.—But in the moment of gratification in the accomplishment of his desire he is met by the prophet Elijah, who was commissioned by God to reprove him for his wrongdoing. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"* was the cry of the king in the presence of the prophet who had again crossed his path, and who had come, Ahab was sure, to rob him of all pleasure in his acquisition. Elijah reproached him for his wrongdoing, and denounced the punishment that would come upon him for his wickedness. Evil should follow him because of this act of injustice, and, because of the idolatry "wherewith he had made Israel to sin," his house should be exterminated, as had been the houses of Jeroboam and Baasha his predecessors. A special and signal punishment, moreover, was reserved for the wicked queen who had been the instigator of his worst acts—"The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." Terror-stricken by this denunciation, Ahab humbled himself before God, and the threatened penalty was, by the Divine mercy, postponed till a later reign.

Death of Ahab.—This was brought about in the course of a war with the Syrians. A previous chapter (1 Kings xx.) tells us of an invasion of Israel by Benhadad King of Syria. In the first instance success attended the Syrian forces; Samaria was invested, and Ahab was compelled to come to terms with the invaders. The exorbitant and increasing demands, however, of the victorious Syrians roused in Ahab some kingly feeling; he

* Ahab's fear of Elijah is very marked. Compare his exclamation on a former occasion, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (xviii. 17.)

appealed to the patriotism of his subjects, and, aided by the Divine assistance, he turned the tables upon his enemies and compelled them in their turn to sue for peace. This was granted on condition that the acquisitions made by the Syrians during the reign of an earlier king (Baasha) should be restored to Israel.

The promise made by Benhadad remained unfulfilled for three years, and Ahab took measures, in alliance with Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to recover the town of Ramoth-gilead, which had been retained by the Syrians in violation of their compact. Before entering upon the war Jehoshaphat desired to ascertain if the matter on which they were about to engage was according to God's will, and so he said to the King of Israel, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day." Ahab collected four hundred of his court prophets, to whom he submitted the question, "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" Their unanimous answer accorded with what they knew to be Ahab's wish;—"Go up: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king."

Jehoshaphat, however, was not satisfied with this response; these prophets had spoken only in the name *Adonai*, which might represent any of the heathen deities; Jehoshaphat desired guidance from one who was a prophet of Jehovah, and who would speak in Jehovah's Name. Of such there was but one to be found in the kingdom of Ahab, Micaiah the son of Imlah, and Ahab had had a previous experience of his prophecies which did not incline him to seek counsel of him again: "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Micaiah, however, was sent for. The messenger who was sent to bring him into the royal presence besought him to accommodate his utterances to those of the great body of prophets who had "declared good unto the king"; but Micaiah's answer was: "What the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak."

Meanwhile the allied kings had seated themselves in state, each in his royal robes and each on his throne by the gate of Samaria. Zedekiah, apparently one of the four hundred prophets, made horns of iron, as symbols of strength and victory, foretelling that with these the king should push the Syrians till he had consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied of victory as before, this time speaking in the holy Name of Jehovah, from which they had previously shrunk.

Micaiah is now introduced into the presence of the kings; at first he answered Ahab's question with a mocking repetition of the words that had been used by the court prophets, "Go, and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." The mockery was too patent to escape the notice of Ahab, and

once more he appeals to Micaiah, adjuring him to speak only that which is true. Then he is answered in quite a different strain. Micaiah describes his vision of "all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd," and moreover declares that the words of promise spoken by Ahab's prophets have proceeded from a "lying spirit" whom God has permitted to deceive them. Micaiah is smitten by Zedekiah, and is consigned to a prison by Ahab, but he persists in repeating his message of woe.

Undeterred by this warning, Ahab and Jehoshaphat proceed on their expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead. To escape the threatened doom Ahab disguises himself by putting off his royal robes. Jehoshaphat goes into the battle in kingly attire, and, being mistaken for the King of Israel, nearly pays with his life the penalty for his association with his wicked neighbour. Ahab is mortally wounded by an arrow shot "at a venture" by one of the soldiers of the enemy; he withdraws from the fight, but conceals the deadly nature of his wound and is stayed up in his chariot till the evening. Then the Israelites find that they have lost their leader and king; the armies disperse, and the dead body of the king is conveyed to his capital, Samaria. Here the blood that had dripped from his wound was washed from his chariot in the Pool of Samaria, and thus was fulfilled the denunciation of Elijah: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (1 Kings xxi. 19).

Ahab's reign seems to have been externally one of considerable success and splendour (1 Kings xxii. 39), but it was stained by idolatry more flagrant than that of Jeroboam, and by crimes to which Ahab was incited by his wicked queen; so that the sacred historian writes, "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (xxi. 25).

XII.

JEHOSHAPHAT.

READ 2 Chronicles xvii.-xx. Cf. 1 Kings xxii. 48-50.

We now turn from the history of the Northern Kingdom, which has mainly occupied our attention in the last three lessons, to that of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, King of Judah, has been already mentioned in connection with the history of Ahab; we now proceed to a more detailed account of his reign, which is furnished in 2 Chronicles

xvii.-xx. It is to be noted that this Book of Chronicles is mainly occupied with the histories of the successors of David who were kings of Judah, while it almost entirely ignores the history of the kingdom of Israel.

Jehoshaphat's Religious Reforms and Political Movements.—At the beginning of his reign Jehoshaphat took measures to strengthen himself against the growing power of the Northern Kingdom by garrisoning his cities and those which had been captured from Israel in the reigns of his predecessors. His actions were governed by strong religious motives; he removed the idolatrous "high places and Asherahs"*; he also provided for the religious instruction of the people, sending round princes and Levites to teach them from "the book of the law of the Lord." His vigorous policy secured him the respect of his neighbours; they "made no war against him"; while the Philistines and Arabians acknowledged his supremacy by bringing him presents. He expended his resources in public works, "building castles and cities of store," and he organised a standing army under the command of five generals.

Alliance with Ahab.—Jehoshaphat, whose previous policy towards the Northern Kingdom had been one of watchful precaution, now contracts an alliance with the powerful king Ahab. Thus the two kingdoms which had been severed by the dispute at Shechem some sixty years before are now reconciled. Politically this alliance was probably a wise measure, as it enabled the two kingdoms to oppose a united force to the aggressions of Syria; but it brought the pious Jehoshaphat into association with the idolatrous house of Ahab, and neutralised the efforts which he had made for the religious reform of his people.

The alliance was cemented by the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The kinship is indicated by the recurrence of like names in the succeeding kings of Judah (Jehoram and Ahaziah) and Israel (Ahaziah and Jehoram); see table in No. VIII.

We saw in the last lesson how Jehoshaphat, in pursuance of his alliance with Ahab, was led to join him in his expedition against Syria for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead; in this expedition Ahab was killed and Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped a like fate.†

* It is said in 2 Chronicles xx. 33: "The high places were *not* taken away." Probably this refers to high places used for the irregular or unauthorised worship of Jehovah, the others that *were* taken away being those used for idolatrous worship.

† The Chronicler refers this deliverance of Jehoshaphat to the interposition of God on his behalf—"the Lord helped him; and

On his return from the war he was reprov'd for his unholy alliance by the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, probably the same who was sent some thirty years previously to reprove Baasha, king of Israel; his father Hanani fulfilled a like mission to Aza, king of Judah.

At a later period in his reign, Jehoshaphat (in spite of the prophet's warning) joined in an enterprise with Ahaziah, the son and successor of Ahab. Their plan was to form a navy of "Tarshish-ships,"* huilt at Ezion-geber, at the head of the Red Sea, to trade for gold with Ophir; but the ships were wrecked, and a prophet, Eliezer, the son of Dodavah, was commissioned to tell Jehoshaphat that this indicated the Divine disapproval of his alliance with the wicked house of Ahab; so Jehoshaphat refused to have anything more to do with the undertaking.

Jehoshaphat's Further Reforms.—Jehoshaphat added to the measures which he had previously taken for strengthening and reforming his people by making a personal survey of his kingdom; he appointed judges in every city, and charged them to exercise their office with a sense of responsibility to God, Whose vicegerents they were. He established also at Jerusalem a court, partly lay and partly clerical in its composition, consisting of priests and Levites and of "the chief of the fathers of Israel"—i.e. the heads of the families or clans.

Wars with Neighbouring Nations.—Jehoshaphat had in the course of his reign to meet an invasion of the Moabites and Ammonites and Edomites. Fearful of the formidable host arrayed against him, he sought help of the Lord; he proclaimed a Fast, and in the presence of the assembled people offered up prayer to God, pleading His former mercies in dispossessing the inhabitants of the land, and recalling also the opposition which these same nations (the Moabites and others) had offered to God's people in ancient times. In answer to this prayer, the Levite Jahaziel was commissioned to assure Jehoshaphat of victory over his foes, a victory which should be secured by supernatural means without any effort on their part. Relying on this promise, they went forth to meet their enemies, preceded by a choir of Levites singing praise to God. In the meantime

God moved them to depart from him" (2 Chronicles xviii. 31). Faith "knows nothing of an order of the world which can be separated even in thought from the constant personal activity of Jehovah" (the Rev. C. J. Ball in Ellicott's Commentary).

* This, indicating some particular build of ship, seems to be the meaning of the expression used; not "ships to go to Tarshish," as in 2 Chronicles xx. 36, which would present insuperable geographical difficulties, if Tarshish is identical with Tartessus, in Spain.

the forces of the enemy had been attacked by "ambushments" lying in wait for them, and, confused by the unexpected attack, had slaughtered one another; so the armies of Judah had nothing to do but to gather up the spoils. They celebrated the victory which they had thus marvellously won by a Service of Thanksgiving in the Valley of Berachah ("blessing"), and continued this Service in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem.

After this signal victory Jehoshaphat enjoyed rest. He died after a reign of twenty-five years. It is said of him that "he walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

Questions on Lessons IX.-XII.

1. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are." Continue this quotation from the Epistle of St. James, and illustrate it from the narrative in 1 Kings.

2. Describe the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. What was the sequel of this contest?

3. Annotate, with reference to the context:—

(a) *I am not better than my fathers.*

(b) *Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?*

(c) *I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.*

(d) *I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord.*

4. Describe the religious and civil reforms effected by Jehoshaphat. In what respect was his conduct faulty?

XIII.

AHAZIAH, KING OF ISRAEL.

READ 2 Kings i. Cf. St. Luke ix. 51-56.

Ahab was succeeded on the throne of Israel by his son Ahaziah, who, in his short reign of two years, continued the evil practices of his predecessors. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."

Revolt of Moab.—The sacred historian incidentally mentions the revolt of the Moabites against Israel. We learn from 2 Kings iii. 4, 5 that the name of the Moabite king was Mesha.

This notice has a special interest from the fact that it is illustrated by the Moabite stone,* which records the war of liberation successfully waged by Mesha against the successors of Ahab.

Ahaziah's Accident.—Ahaziah fell from a lattice, or latticed window, on the roof of his palace, into the court below, and sustained serious injuries. Suffering from this accident he had recourse to the gods whom his mother had worshipped, and sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub (*the Lord of Flies*) as to the prospects of his recovery. Elijah is called forth from his retirement, and is commissioned to rebuke this insult to the God of Israel, and at the same time to announce that Ahaziah's accident will prove fatal; "Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Elijah fulfilled his commission, and the emissaries of Ahaziah returned to their master, conveying Elijah's message.

The messengers did not know Elijah, but the king recognised him from the description given, that he was "an hairy man"—*i.e.* one clad in a mantle of uncurried skin—and "girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." Compare this with the description of John the Baptist, who came "in the spirit and power of Elias," and reproduced many of his characteristics; he "had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins" (St. Matthew iii. 4).

* "This wonderful monument, the oldest in the Phœnician character, was discovered at Dibbân, in the land of Moab, August 19, 1868. It measures 3 ft. 10 in. × 2 ft. × 14½ in., and is inscribed with thirty-four lines. From the inscription we learn that Mesha, King of Moab, was originally a tributary of the King of Israel, and from the Bible that he had undertaken to pay him 'an hundred thousand lambs and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool' (2 Kings iii. 4). Mesha refused to send his customary tribute, and Jehoram, Jehoshaphat, and the King of Edom marched against him. The Moabites were surprised and routed with great slaughter, and were obliged to flee to Kir-haraseth (2 Kings iii. 25), when Mesha offered up his son to the god *Kemosh*. Soon after this he attacked the Kings of Israel and Judah, and defeated them, and drove them back into their own possessions" ("Oxford Helps to the Study of the Bible"). Evidently Mesha had been held in check by the strong hand of Ahab, but had taken advantage of the weakness of his successors to assert his independence. It is interesting to find this agreement of the sacred history with a contemporary record discovered nearly 3,000 years after the event. The original of this stone is in the Louvre at Paris; a copy of the inscription is in the British Museum.

Recognising by these signs the ancient enemy of his house, Ahaziah sent a captain with a body of fifty men to arrest him. The prophet was found on the top of a hill—as some think on the top of Mount Carmel, the scene of his former triumph over the prophets of Baal and the idolatrous house of Ahab. The captain of the fifty courteously * bade the prophet come down, but, on the prayer of Elijah, fire descended from heaven and consumed both the captain and his company. The same was repeated when a second captain and a company of fifty men were sent to arrest him. A third captain and fifty were despatched by the king, but in this case the captain threw himself on the mercy of the prophet, beseeching him to spare the lives of himself and his company. Elijah, under the direction of an angel of the Lord, then went fearlessly into the presence of King Ahaziah and delivered to him in person the message which he had previously sent to him by messengers. His sending to inquire of Baal-zebub was tantamount to a declaration that “there was no God in Israel” to whom he might seek, and, in punishment of his transgression, he should die. The prophet’s denunciation was fulfilled, and Ahaziah was succeeded by his brother Jehoram.

“Even as Elias did.”—This action of Elijah towards the emissaries of Ahaziah is referred to in a well-known passage of the New Testament (St. Luke ix. 51-56). Our Lord was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time before His Passion; His way lay through Samaria, and messengers were sent in advance to make such preparations as were needed for his entertainment; but because His face was turned towards Jerusalem, the Samaritans refused to receive Him. “The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans,” and the Samaritans resented our Lord’s action in identifying Himself with the Jews, though on a former occasion they had been willing to receive Him as their Teacher. James and John, the sons of Zebedee (to whom our Lord had given the name *Boanerges*, sons of thunder), were incensed at this slight shown to their Master, and asked, “Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” †

* Some regard the captain’s courteous and seemingly respectful expression (“Thou man of God . . .”) as spoken ironically, and thus justifying the punishment which Elijah invoked upon him; but it is better to think of the great prophet not as avenging an insult or outrage upon himself, but as vindicating the majesty of Jehovah whose messenger he was.

† It ought to be mentioned that the reference to Elijah is not found in the most ancient MSS, and the words italicised, as well as

Our Lord rebuked them for their misdirected zeal: "Ye know not *what manner of spirit* ye are of," He said. They, perhaps, misunderstood their own feelings, and took for holy zeal what was really an outburst of petulance and passion. Our Lord may have meant them to understand also that *the spirit* of the New Covenant was not identical with that of the Old: the ministry of wrath committed to a prophet differed from the "ministry of reconciliation" committed to an Apostle of the Lord. Elias for a sign and a warning might, as God's minister, execute judgment upon men, but "the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

XIV.

ELIJAH—(continued).

ELIJAH AND JEHORAM—THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH.

READ 2 Chronicles xxi. 12-15; 2 Kings ii. 1-18.

Elijah and Jehoram.—Elijah's prophetic work lay almost exclusively in the Northern Kingdom, and was exercised in connection with Kings Ahab and Ahaziah. Only once is he mentioned in the Book of Chronicles, which, as we have seen before (No. XII.), confines itself to the record of the reigns of the kings of Judah. On this one occasion Elijah delivers a message to a king of the Southern Kingdom. Jehoram had succeeded his father Jehoshaphat, or was, perhaps, sharing the throne with him. His marriage with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and the infamous Jezebel, was fatal to the lessons of piety which we may suppose his God-fearing father had taught him; "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife." It was to reprove the wickedness of this apostate king that Elijah, in his old age, sent to him a prophetic writing. He was, perhaps, too weak to encounter him personally, as he had encountered Ahab and Ahaziah, and so his message of woe is committed to writing and sent to Jehoram by some trusty messenger. Because of his idolatries and other sins, trouble shall come upon him and his kingdom, and he shall die of a horrible disease. The prophet's prediction was fulfilled, and Jehoram, after an inglorious reign of eight years, "departed without being desired"—unhonoured and unmourned.

the terms of our Lord's rebuke, are accordingly omitted in the Revised Version of the New Testament.

Last Scenes in the Life of Elijah.—The work of the great prophet of Israel was now approaching completion. He withdraws himself from the Northern Kingdom, which has been the scene of his activities, from the neighbourhood of Samaria and Jezreel and Carmel. The last scenes of his life are associated with places with which he is not shown to have been previously connected. In company with his minister Elisha he is found at Gilgal—not the place connected specially with the history of Samuel, which was near to Jericho, but another of the same name on the western edge of the hills of Ephraim. “From this spot the mountain land of Gilead (his native land), the Great Sea, and the snowy heights of Hermon were all visible, so that the prophet could take from thence a last look at the whole country which had been the scene of his earthly activity.”*

At Gilgal Elijah made an attempt to separate himself from Elisha. Perhaps he felt that craving for solitude which he had shown on other occasions in his life, or perhaps he only desired to test Elisha’s constancy. With whatever motive, he begged Elisha to remain at Gilgal, saying that “the Lord had sent him to Bethel.” Elisha is, however, fixed in his purpose; as the sequel shows, he was Divinely informed of the approach of a great crisis, in which it was fit that he should take his part as a prophet of the Lord; so he declares his intention of staying with Elijah—“As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

The two then come to Bethel, the ancient sanctuary of the nation. Here was a body designated “the sons of the prophets,” a school or guild of men who were being trained with a view to their exercise of the prophetic office. It was, perhaps, for the purpose of visiting this seminary for the religious instruction of those who should hereafter be the guides of the nation that Elijah came to Bethel, and for a like reason that he came subsequently to Jericho. The “sons of the prophets” had been informed of Elijah’s approaching removal; somewhat officiously (as it would seem) they call Elisha’s attention to the loss which he is about to sustain—“Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? Elisha’s answer betrays impatience of their interference—“Yea, I *do* know it;

* The Rev. C. J. Ball, in *Ellicott’s Commentary*. The word Gilgal (meaning a *ring*) was common to several places, the distinctive feature of such places being that they had a sanctuary enclosed within a *ring* or *circle* of stones, such as is found in ancient sanctuaries in our own land—*e.g.* Stonehenge or Avebury.

hold ye your peace." At Bethel again Elijah begs his companion to stay behind while he himself fulfils a mission on which he has been sent to Jericho; and again he is met with the same asseveration of constancy, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

Similar incidents occur at Jericho, the next stage in the prophet's journey. Again the sons of the prophets break in upon Elisha's dignified reserve, and are answered as were those at Bethel. A third time Elijah begs Elisha to follow him no further, and again he is answered as before.

So they come to the Jordan, fifty of the sons of the prophets at Jericho standing to watch them as they stand on the bank. Then Elijah took his mantle, the cloak of skin which he was wont to wear, and rolling it up into the semblance of a rod or staff, he smote with it the waters of the river, and they were parted on either side so that the two went over on dry ground.

The Translation of Elijah.—Elijah is now in the land of Gilead, the land of his birth, and, realising that his departure is at hand, he bids Elisha ask of him a parting gift. Elisha's request is for a "double portion" of his spirit; a "*double* portion" such as was the birthright of a first-born son, but a spiritual and not a material possession. Elijah speaks of this as "a hard thing," a gift which it does not lie with him to bestow; but he gives a sign to Elisha—if God deems him worthy to be a witness of his master's translation, then he may also be counted worthy of the gift which he asks for.

While they are thus conversing the mysterious change comes; in an appearance like that of chariots and horses of fire, Elijah "went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Elisha, grieving over the loss of one who had been to him more than a father, utters the lament, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof"; beyond his own personal loss is the loss to his country of one who was more to be valued than chariots and horsemen; and he rends his garments in token of his grief.

Elisha as Elijah's Successor.—Elisha took up the mantle that had fallen from Elijah, which seems to have been a sort of badge of his official position; using this as Elijah had done, he again divided before him the waters of the Jordan, and the sons of the prophets who had been spectators of the scene recognised Elisha's succession—"The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha," and prostrated themselves before him as their spiritual lord and master. Fifty men were sent by the prophetic school to search the country for any trace of Elijah; Elisha had objected to this, as indicating a want of faith in the miraculous disappearance, of which he had been an eye-witness; when the searchers returned,

after a three days' fruitless search, the truth of Elisha's testimony was confirmed.

The Character and Work of Elijah.—So closed the earthly career of the great prophet of Israel, one who ranks with Moses in the calendar of the saints of the Jewish Church. "There is no personage in the Old Testament whose career is more vividly portrayed, or who exercises on us a more remarkable fascination. His rare, sudden, and brief appearances—his undaunted courage and fiery zeal—the brilliancy of his triumphs—the pathos of his despondency—the glory of his departure, and the calm beauty of his reappearance on the Mount of Transfiguration—throw such a halo of brightness around him as is equalled by none of his compeers in the sacred story" (Sir George Grove in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible").

The Prophet Malachi foretold the reappearance of Elijah the Prophet "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (iv. 5), and Jewish expectation rested upon this promise (St. Matthew xvii. 10). Our Lord taught His disciples that the prediction was fulfilled in the person of St. John Baptist, who went before Him "in the spirit and power of Elias"—"If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come" (St. Matthew xi. 14).* "John came suddenly out of the wilderness of Judæa, as Elijah from the wilds of Gilead. John bore the same strange ascetic appearance as his predecessor; the message of John was the counterpart of that of Elijah" (Edersheim's "Life of Christ").

Elias, representing "the Prophets," with Moses, representing "the Law," appeared in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration with Our Blessed Lord, and spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

* "Still the Jews who have not accepted the Christian faith look for the coming of Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah. At the circumcision of Jewish children, a seat is always left vacant for him. After the wine-cup of each Passover is drunk, the youngest child of a Jewish family opens the door, and all rise and look towards it, thinking that Elijah then enters. . . . When goods were found which no owner claimed, the common saying was, 'Put them by till Elijah comes'" (Geikie's "Hours with the Bible").

XV.

ELISHA.

THE SUCCESSOR OF ELIJAH—HIS MIRACLES—THE SHUNAMMITE.

READ 2 Kings ii. 19-iv. 37.

The Call of Elisha.—Elisha is first mentioned in connection with Elijah's visit to Horeb (1 Kings xix; see Lesson X.); he was then designated to the prophetic office as Elijah's successor. Elijah, on his return from the wilderness, finds Elisha occupied in agricultural work, and calls him from his peaceful home and simple life to undertake the duties, and face the dangers, of a prophet of the Lord. From this time Elisha becomes the companion of the older prophet, fulfilling towards him an office like that which Joshua fulfilled towards Moses. He is spoken of at a later period by one of the servants of Jehoshaphat as "Elisha the son of Shaphat, *which poured water on the hands of Elijah*" (2 Kings iii. 11), this phrase indicating the personal service which he rendered to his master. The filial affection with which he regarded his master is apparent from the incidents of Elijah's Translation, which we considered in the last lesson.

Elisha as Elijah's Successor.—After the Translation of Elijah, Elisha took up his abode, for a time at least, at Jericho. Here he wrought his first miracle (if we omit the dividing of the waters of the Jordan, by which he gave evidence of his right of succession to Elijah). This was the healing, or purifying, of the tainted water of Jericho (2 Kings ii. 19-22). This first exercise of his office has been taken as a sign of his genial and beneficent relation to the people.

Further Miracles Wrought by Elisha.—"The record of miraculous works forms a large part of the history of Elisha given in Holy Scripture. The man who was for years the intimate companion of Elijah, on whom Elijah's mantle descended, and who was gifted with a double portion of his spirit, appears in these records chiefly as a worker of miracles, a predictor of future events, a revealer of secrets and things happening out of sight or at a distance" (Sir George Grove in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible"). Some of these miracles we can only briefly mention; others may be treated more in detail.

Inflicting punishment on the little children, or, rather, *young boys, in the neighbourhood of Bethel* (2 Kings ii. 23-25), Elisha vindicated the honour of his office as God's minister by pronouncing a curse on those who insulted both him and his office by their ribald cries. The curse was fulfilled in the destruction

of these mockers by bears that came out from the wood. Such an appalling evidence of God's displeasure, and such a vindication of His prophet's dignity, was required by circumstances of time and place of which we have little knowledge.

Deliverance wrought for Jehoram, king of Israel, and the allied kings in the war with Moab (2 Kings iii.). This was an incident of the war with Mesha, king of Moab, to which reference was made in No. XIII. Jehoram had enlisted the aid of Jehoshaphat (as his father had done in a previous war), and had also made alliance with the King of Edom. Elisha was consulted by the three kings; he declared that it was only for the sake of Jehoshaphat that he was willing to afford any help. At his bidding trenches were dug, and these were miraculously filled with water, which supplied the needs of the allied forces. Further, the sun shining on these trenches gave them the appearance of being filled with blood, and the Moabites were thus led to believe that the allied forces had quarrelled amongst themselves and slaughtered one another. Acting on this belief they made a rash assault on the camp of Israel, in which they were signally defeated and their country was devastated. Subsequently Mesha offered up his eldest son as a sacrifice to his god Chemosh; horrified by this spectacle, the Israelites abandoned the war and returned to their own country.

Multiplying the Widow's Oil (2 Kings iv. 1-7).—This miracle was wrought on behalf of a widow of one of the "sons of the prophets." Her widowhood had brought her into needy circumstances; an importunate creditor was about to seize her two sons and make slaves of them in compensation for a debt which (perhaps) their father had incurred. Under these circumstances she sought the aid of the prophet. At his bidding her single pot of oil was multiplied many-fold, so as to fill all the vessels she could borrow, and thus she was supplied with means to pay off the debt. [The circumstances of this miracle suggest comparison with those of the miraculous feeding of the household of Zarephath in the time of Elijah.]

The Woman of Shunem.—Elisha's journeyings brought him into association with a lady of rank dwelling at Shunem, a village which he might pass on his way from Samaria to Mount Carmel, where we learn from the subsequent narrative he had a dwelling (iv. 25). This lady, reverencing the prophet as "an holy man of God," proposed to her husband to provide for him "a little chamber" where he might find rest and entertainment whenever he chose to avail himself of it. The prophet, in acknowledgment of this hospitality, desired to confer some boon on his hostess. He would have repaid her kindness by mentioning her

to the king or to the commander-in-chief of the army, but she had no ambition for such honours as they could bestow; "I dwell among mine own people," was her answer. The prophet, however, ascertained through his servant Gehazi that the one distress of this kindly couple was that they had no child; and by God's direction he promised her that she should have a son. This came to pass in accordance with Elisha's prediction.

Raising of the Shunammite's Son.—Some years after, when the child had grown old enough to join his father engaged amongst the reapers in the field, he had a seizure, probably of the nature of a sunstroke, which affected his head, and in a few hours resulted in his death. The mother laid the body in the prophet's chamber that it might not be touched in her absence, and hastened to the prophet's dwelling at Mount Carmel. As she drew near to the place she was espied by the prophet, and Gehazi, his servant, was sent out to greet her. To Gehazi's inquiries after herself and her husband and child she replied only, "It is well"; but when she came into the presence of the prophet, she threw herself at his feet and referred to the gift of a child which had been bestowed upon her at the prophet's request; she spoke, however, with a bitterness which Elisha understood to import the child's death. Accordingly he sent Gehazi to Shunem, bearing his walking-staff, which he was directed to lay upon the face of the child. The mother was not satisfied with the effectiveness of the means proposed for the restoration of her child's life; she wished the prophet to come himself, and vowed that she would not leave him till he did so. Elisha was prevailed upon to do as she wished; they met Gehazi returning, and reporting the fruitlessness of his mission. Elisha himself then went into the chamber where the child was lying dead; by fervent prayer and intense pleading with God he brought back the spirit that had departed. Then he bade Gehazi summon the mother, and gave back to her the son thus restored to life.

XVI.

ELISHA—(continued).

THE HEALING OF NAAMAN—THE PUNISHMENT OF GEHAZI.

READ 2 Kings v.; cf. St. Luke iv. 27.

Naaman.—So far the work of Elisha has been carried on within the limits of his own country; it is now exercised on behalf of a foreigner, who belonged to the kingdom of Syria. The last mention of Syria in the sacred narrative was in connection

with the war with Israel, in which Ahab was killed; now the two nations appear to be on friendly terms.

Naaman was "captain of the host," or commander-in-chief of the Syrian army; he was held in high honour by his sovereign, especially because he had been the means, under God the King of all nations, in "giving deliverance" to his country in some signal engagement. Jewish tradition explains this peculiar honour accorded to Naaman by the statement that he was the "man who drew a bow at a venture" and thus took the life of King Ahab [Lesson No. XI.]. Naaman's greatness and honourable position were, however, marred by the fact that he was a sufferer from the horrible disease of leprosy; such a visitation did not debar him from continuance in his high office, as it would have done had he been a dweller in Israel. It was one of his household who suggested the possibility of his being relieved from the malady under which he suffered—a little maid who had been carried off as a captive by the Syrian army in some border raid, and who was now employed in attendance on Naaman's wife. The little maid, sympathising with the distress of her master, expressed a wish that he were with the prophet (Elisha) in Samaria, seeing that he had the power to "recover him of his leprosy."

The words of the slave girl were reported to Naaman, and he eagerly seized upon the opportunity of healing which was thus suggested. Carrying with him a letter from the king, his master, to the King of Israel (probably Jehoram, the brother of Ahaziah), and costly presents designed for the prophet who was able to exercise such a wondrous power, he set out for the court of Israel. The King of Israel was at first perturbed by the coming of Naaman; he regarded the request made by his powerful neighbour as a mere pretence: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive," he said, "that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." And he indicated his distress and perplexity, according to Oriental usage, by rending his clothes.

Naaman and Elisha.—Elisha, hearing of these circumstances, desired that Naaman should be sent to him, in order that it might be shown that the power of the Most High was with His prophet in Israel. Naaman came to the prophet's house with his stately retinue, and expected to have been received with a deference due to his high station, and to have witnessed some majestic and stately action on the part of the prophet by which his cure would be effected. But instead of this, Elisha sent only a curt message bidding the great general "wash in Jordan seven times,"

and promising recovery from his leprosy as the reward of his obedience. Naaman was offended by the apparent want of respect for himself, as well as by the simplicity of the means proposed for his healing. In his own country were the clear mountain streams, Abana and Pharpar; could not they have availed for his cleansing better than the turbid and muddy waters of the river of Israel? With these questionings "he turned and went away in a rage." But his servants gave him wiser counsel; they appear to have been as keenly interested in his recovery as was the "little maid" at his home. The whole story is an evidence of the kindly and affectionate relations that existed between Naaman and his household. His servants pointed out to him that he would gladly have submitted himself to any more arduous course of treatment which the prophet might have prescribed for his cure, and asked if it was not worth his while to follow out the simple direction that was given him. Moved by these representations, Naaman did as Elisha had bidden him—"Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Naaman's Gratitude.—Rejoicing in his recovery, Naaman now seeks the presence of Elisha; he acknowledges that his healing is due to the God of Israel, and begs Elisha to accept a "blessing," or gift, as a token of his gratitude. Elisha refuses to receive any present, and Naaman then makes a request that he may be allowed to carry back to his own country two mules' loads of the soil of the land which has proved so fruitful in blessing to him; with these he will erect in Syria an altar to the God of Israel, Who shall henceforth be the sole object of his worship. Only he asks that he may be pardoned if he goes through the outward semblance of worship to the Syrian god Rimmon, when he officially attends his royal master in his visits to the idol temple. Elisha does not directly answer his appeal for this permission; but he bids him "go in peace," perhaps conceding something to the difficulty of his position and to the newness of his conversion.

Gehazi.—The offer of gifts which Naaman had made to Elisha provoked the cupidity of the prophet's servant Gehazi. He thought it a mistake that one so able and willing to give liberally should have been allowed to go away without any advantage being taken of his offer. So he hastens after Naaman, and with a feigned message from his master readily obtains from him a magnificent reward. But, skilfully as he had planned and carried out his design, all the circumstances were known to his master; on his return Elisha charged him with his guilt; what

he had done had gone far to spoil the moral effect on Naaman of the miracle wrought on his behalf. In punishment for his offence Elisha declared to Gehazi that the leprosy of Naaman should cling to him and his seed for ever. The prophet's prediction at once began to be fulfilled—Gehazi "went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

Lessons from the Cleansing of Naaman.—(a) God's Providential Care for those outside the Jewish Nation.—Our Lord Himself pointed this out in His discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth (St. Luke iv.), "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, *saving Naaman the Syrian.*" By this saying our Lord indicated the mercy in store for the Gentile nations, and the forfeiture by the Jews of privileges which they had despised and failed to use.*

(b) The Use of Outward Means as Channels for the Conveyance of God's Gifts.—The means prescribed for Naaman's cure was washing in the river Jordan. In this there is a remarkable analogy to the "spiritual washing" in the water of Holy Baptism, by which God bestows upon us the grace of new birth and forgiveness of sins. Now, as in olden times, God calls upon us to use means as a test of our faith and obedience; those who reject the means, because of their seeming inadequacy, act as Naaman was at first disposed to do, and risk the loss of God's blessing.

XVII.

ELISHA—(continued).

ELISHA AND THE SYRIAN INVADERS—THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA
—THE ANOINTING OF HAZAEL AND JERU—THE DEATH OF
ELISHA.

READ 2 Kings vi., vii., viii. 1-15; ix. 1-10; xiii. 14-21.

Elisha and the Syrian Invaders.—The friendly relations noticed in the last lesson as subsisting between the Israelites and their Syrian neighbours were not of long continuance. An invasion of Israel by the Syrian army gave occasion for an exercise of the prophetic power of Elisha. Through his instrumentality the tactics of the Syrian king and the disposition of his forces were repeatedly made known to the King of Israel, who was thus

* Compare what was said as to the sending of Elijah to Zarephath, or Sarepta, Lesson IX.

enabled to escape dangers which threatened him. The King of Syria, being informed of Elisha's action, sent men with horses and chariots to arrest him at DOTHAN, some twelve miles north-east of Samaria. Elisha's servant, seeing the town encompassed by the Syrian troops, was filled with alarm; but Elisha reassured him with the words, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." On Elisha's prayer, the eyes of his servant were opened by God, so that he saw the mountain "full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Elisha further prayed that the Syrians might be stricken with blindness, and when they were thus placed at his mercy he led them into Samaria. There, on the prophet's supplication, their eyes were opened, and they became conscious of the peril in which they stood. The King of Israel would have seized the opportunity of putting to death these enemies of his country, but Elisha forbade this advantage being taken of their helplessness; and at his bidding they were hospitably entertained and sent back to their own country. This act of clemency, coupled with the fear inspired by Elisha's knowledge and power, put an end to such border raids as that here described: "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

Siege of Samaria.—At a later period Samaria was besieged by the Syrians under Benhadad: the inhabitants were reduced to the greatest straits, even to the extent of feeding on their own children. Apparently it was by Elisha's advice that Samaria still held out; Jehoram, witnessing the horrors of the siege, was filled with indignation against the prophet, and sent a messenger to kill him. Elisha, however, was aware of the king's intention. He was found sitting amongst the "elders" of the nation, who had probably come to seek his advice as to the course to be adopted. By their help he kept out the messenger until the king himself arrived. Jehoram's language indicated his despair: "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" His policy was to give up further resistance as useless, and to surrender to the Syrian power, but Elisha predicted that by the morrow the rigour of the siege should be terminated, and that provisions should be freely sold in the town. An attendant on the king mockingly rejoined that this could only come true "if the Lord would make windows in heaven," and to him it was foretold that he should witness what he regarded as impossible, but should be excluded from sharing in that abundance of which others would partake.

In the meantime the Syrians heard sounds as of chariots and horses, which they took to indicate the coming of Hittites and Egyptians as auxiliaries hired to give help to the Israelites.

Stricken with panic, they fled in haste, leaving behind them their tents and all their possessions. The deserted state of the camp was ascertained by four lepers, who had gone out from Samaria to the Syrian lines, confident that no worse fate could befall them there than the death which faced them amongst their famishing countrymen. When they brought back tidings of the flight of the Syrians, Jehoram was at first disposed to regard it as a ruse designed to draw his forces out of Samaria, and so to leave the way open for the Syrians to enter; but further inquiries confirmed the truth of the information brought by the lepers, and the Israelites, released from their siege, spoiled the Syrian camps. Thus Samaria was replenished with provisions, which were sold on the terms specified in Elisha's prediction. The lord who waited on the king when the prediction was delivered was appointed to the charge of the gate by which the famishing multitudes went forth from the city. The excited throng trampled him to death, and so the prophet's further prediction was fulfilled that he should see the promised relief, though he should not share in its benefits.

Elisha's Fulfilment of Commissions given to Elijah.—It will be remembered that when Elijah was at Horeb, a fugitive from the malice of Jezebel, he was charged with three commissions, only one of which (the call of Elisha) he personally carried out (see Lesson X.). The other two were left to his successor:—

(a) *Anointing of Hazael to be King of Syria.*—Perhaps with a view to the discharge of the duty assigned to him, Elisha went from Samaria to Damascus, the capital of Syria. The Syrian king, Benhadad, who had previous knowledge of Elisha's powers, took advantage of his presence to inquire of him whether he would recover of a sickness from which he was then suffering. The messenger sent to make the inquiry was Hazael, who would appear to have held a high position in the court. Elisha scornfully replied to Hazael's question, "Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover"; he knew that, whatever his answer might be, Hazael would be too subtle a courtier to deliver any message of evil; yet, he added, "the Lord hath shewed me that *he shall surely die.*" In saying this he looked upon Hazael with a fixity of gaze which read the secret of his heart, and, telling Hazael that he was destined by God to be the king of Syria, he shed tears at the thought of the woes which he would in time to come bring upon Israel. Hazael had replied to the prophet in language of humility and self-depreciation—"What is thy servant, *which is but a dog*, that he should do this great thing?" (2 Kings viii. 13, R.V.). He returned to his master, and having given him a false message

foretelling his recovery, on the following day he suffocated him as he lay on his sick-bed, and so succeeded to the throne. Thus God's purpose declared by His prophet was fulfilled, though the execution of it was brought about by the wicked and treacherous action of a bad man.

(b) *Anointing of Jehu to be King of Israel.*—Jehu was an officer of rank in Jehoram's army, stationed with his forces at Ramoth-gilead, which had been taken by the Israelites from Hazael, King of Syria. Jehoram was at the time in Jezreel, having retired thither to be healed of wounds which he had received in battle. Elisha sent to Ramoth-gilead one of the "sons of the prophets" with instructions to anoint Jehu as king. This was done, and Jehu received the commission, which he faithfully carried out, to execute judgment upon the wicked house of Ahab.

Death of Elisha.—Elisha lived on to the reign of Joash, the grandson of Jehu, but we have no record of the doings of his later years. On his death-bed he was visited by King Joash, who uttered over him the same lamentation which Elisha himself had uttered on the loss of his master Elijah—"O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." The dying prophet concluded his prophetic career by a symbolic act predictive of the victory of his country over the Syrians. He bade King Joash take into his hands bow and arrows; then laying his hands upon the king's hands as a token of consecration to a task assigned him by God, he directed him to shoot "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria." From the window of the chamber which looked eastward the king discharged the arrows into the ground. *Thrice* he shot his arrows, as if that number expressed the utmost number of victories that he could hope for. The prophet was indignant that he had not shown more strenuousness in his action; for now he should smite Syria but thrice, whereas had he claimed more, more might have been granted him.

Elisha died, and after his death the land was invaded by bands of Moabite invaders. As a company of Israelites were carrying out a man to his burial, they were disturbed by one of these bands of raiders, and, in their haste, cast the dead body into the grave of Elisha. The corpse, coming into contact with the body of the prophet, revived, and the dead man stood on his feet. As it has been said, "Elisha died, and was buried, like all other men, but even in death and in the grave he is avouched to be the prophet and servant of God."

Elisha a Type of Christ.—"It is not merely because he healed a leper, raised a dead man, or increased the loaves, that Elisha

resembled Christ, but rather because of that loving, gentle temper and kindness of disposition—characteristic of him above all the saints of the Old Testament—ever ready to soothe, to heal, and to conciliate, which attracted to him women and simple people, and made him the universal friend and ‘father,’ not only consulted by kings and generals, but resorted to by widows and poor prophets in their little troubles and perplexities”* (Sir George Grove in Smith’s “Dictionary of the Bible”).

Questions on Lessons XIII.-XVII.

1. “Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?” Narrate the circumstances under which these words were addressed to our Lord. What was His reply? Give an account of the incident in the life of Elijah to which reference was made.

2. “The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.” Explain these words by a narrative of the circumstances under which they were spoken.

3. Contrast the characters of Elisha and Elijah as disclosed in the Old Testament narrative. Show how these Old Testament saints were counterparts—the one of our Blessed Lord, the other of His forerunner.

* In addition to the miracles wrought by Elisha exhibiting this kindness to others, which have been treated of, with more or less fulness, in the preceding lessons, the following may also be noted:—

(a) He made wholesome the poisonous pottage prepared for the “sons of the prophets” (2 Kings iv. 38-41).

(b) He fed a hundred men with twenty loaves and fresh ears of corn, which had been brought to him as an offering (*ib.* iv. 42-44).

(c) He caused an axe-head to swim upon the water that it might be restored to the man from whom it had been borrowed by “the sons of the prophets” (*ib.* vi. 1-7).

(d) He predicted seven years of famine, and counselled his friend the Shunammite woman to seek sustenance for herself and her household in the land of the Philistines. [On her return from exile her possessions were restored to her on the representation of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha] (*ib.* viii. 1-6).

4. Give the story of the cleansing of Naaman, and point out the spiritual and moral lessons which may be deduced from the narrative.

5. Write notes on the following :—

- (a) *They that be with us are more than they that be with them.*
- (b) *Behold thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.*
- (c) *Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?*