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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1872.

ELISHA AND ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, May 26th, 1872.

Gebazi's Sin.—2 Kings v. 20-27.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Tim. vi. 10.

SCRIPTURE SELECTION.—Acts v. 1-11. Psalm i.

SUMMARY.—Covetousness produced lies and won both gold and ruin.

ANALYSIS.—I. Gain Wickedly Sought. vs. 20-22. II. Gain Wickedly Won. vs. 23, 24. III. Gain Changed to Ruin. vs. 25-27.

EXPOSITION.—Introductory.—Our last lesson ended pleasantly. Naaman's pride, rage, folly, and leprosy were displaced by humility, calmness, wisdom, and health. We may well believe that his heart no less than his flesh became new. God's mercies were not shut up to one nation, and the Old Testament nowhere teaches that they were. Naaman returned to Elisha, confessed Jehovah, and urged the prophet to take of his treasures. Elisha refused, for Naaman, and through him others, must know that God's mercy is not bought, and that the prophet does not work miracles for gain. Naaman then asks for two mule loads of the soil of Palestine, the land which, till now, he so despised, that he may make of it an altar to offer thereon sacrifices to the God of Israel. Then a whole and a happy man, he starts with his treasures of earth and of raiment, silver and gold for his own home, the prophet's benediction "go in peace" pleasantly sounding in his ears and in his heart.

Verse 20.—We have met Gehazi before. ch. iv. 12, 13, 25-31. We saw nothing in him to blame, unless it might be his forwardness in thrusting the bereaved mother from the prophet (ch. iv. 27), and even then he was moved by zeal for his master's honor. This verse begins the story of his shame and ruin. And mark the full statement of his position. "Gehazi the servant of Elisha the man of God." This seems needless after the frequent mention of him before, but it may be to show that even such an intimate constant connection with the most holy and favored of God's servants is no safeguard against sin. Even from such a connection he breaks into wickedness, and pays the penalty. Nothing external can of itself keep us, as Gehazi and Judas Iscariot prove. The beginning of his sin was a very plausible, indeed reasonable, thought. "My master hath spared Naaman this Syrian." Why spare him? He was healed, and it is only right that he should pay for it. He is immensely rich, and can well afford to pay for it. He is besides a Syrian, not a Jew, a hated Syrian, leader of the army that conquered Israel, the great power in that nation whose lawless subjects invade our lands and steal our sons and daughters for foreign service. Nay, this Syrian has of these sons and daughters among his own servants. What, spare a Syrian, and this Syrian? Let him go? Elisha has made a mistake,—has for once done a foolish thing. What wonder he thought so. Perhaps if we had been in his place we should have thought the same. The one fault of his thought was that it did not recognize God's wisdom as the guide of Elisha, because personal greed was blinding his mind. On the evil thought follows the evil resolve. Such is the order. He takes an oath. "As the Lord liveth," doubtless half persuading himself that he acted piously. Never do a thing unless you are sure it is right. I will run and take somewhat, he says—*some*, not much.

Verse 21.—There was little time to reflect; action must be prompt. Naaman was on the move,—the opportunity was brief. Prompt to do right,—what praise. Prompt to do evil,—how sad. "And Gehazi followed." "Naaman lighted down from his chariot," an act of great respect, of grateful honor, not to this Gehazi, but to his master, whom the Syrian supposed him to represent. Thus was his very coming a lie. It said, I represent the prophet, which, going unbidden, he did not. What a change for the better in the Syrian, for the worse in the servant. "Is it well." A respectful and friendly greeting. Compare ch. iv. 26.

Verse 22.—"All is well." So it was with everything but his own greedy lying

heart and acts. "My master hath sent me." Had he not told this lie he would have been sent back with a rebuke. Now another lie, for some reason must be shown for the pretended changes in the master's purpose. "Two sons of the prophets have come in," i. e., since you left, and they are in want, and their school or community is in want. This was a very plausible reason. Gehazi was shrewd. Dr. Hackett says that "Mount Ephraim designates not a single mount, but the hill-country generally of central Palestine." If so, here Bethel, Gilgal, and Samaria itself would be included. And now the wretched Gehazi follows out his plan, and asks only for a fraction of the treasure,—none of the gold, only one talent of silver, and changes of raiment.

Verse 23.—See again the magnanimity of the Syrian, standing up in marked contrast with the low thief's conduct. "Be content," i. e., make no objection. Hear to me, "take" not one talent only, that is too little, "take two talents." Gratitude moves him. How his falsehood deepens and extends. Naaman still honors the prophet in the person of the dishonorable servant. He sends back two of his own servants to carry the treasure before the lying Gehazi, as though he were some great honorable man, whom kings and mighty generals should respect. Short-lived greatness.

Verse 24.—Further deceit must be practiced. It will never do for these servants to go quite to Elisha's house. So they are dismissed at "the tower," or rather at the hill, for such is the meaning of the word, which rose at the city's limit between the prophet's house and the road over which the three came, and thus concealed them from his view. Well planned, thou faithless servant! Now thou has succeeded. Now thou art safe. The secret is thine own. The precious treasure is thine, carefully stowed away in the house,—hidden.

Verse 25.—Deceit still,—the lie prolonged. "He went in and stood before his master," with innocent expression, with quiet air. Said Elisha, "Whence, Gehazi?" This must have startled him. Does the prophet suspect? Why this unusual query? With further falsehood, in feigned surprise, he says, "Thy servant went no whither."

Verse 26.—In vain. God's Spirit has revealed to the prophet all. In vision the whole was seen by Elisha,—the particulars of the transaction. These are named that Gehazi may know that his sin has found him out. Gehazi is speechless. How like the final judgment when every secret sin, not of word and deed only, but of thought and feeling no less, shall be known to be "naked and opened" to the Judge. "Is it a time to receive money and garments," which he had brought back, "and oliveyards," etc., which he intended to buy with the treasure? The sin, bad enough under any circumstances, is aggravated by the condition of Israel; the judgments of God impending, and humiliation and prayer being specially needed.

Verse 27.—The horrible end—the stroke of judgment,—swift and terrible. "Naaman's leprosy shall cleave to thee and to thy seed forever." Not often does judgment come to the wicked so soon, but though late it is sure. God knows how to smite down at once the hopes of the guilty, and the guilty themselves. And Gehazi went out a snow-white leper. A revelation to us of the character of God,—a persuasion, by the terrors of the Lord, to flee from the wrath to come. Jas. i. 15.

QUESTIONS.—Give the story of the last lesson? vs. 8-14. What did Naaman do after he was cleansed? vs. 15. What did he urge Elisha to take? Did Elisha receive it? vs. 16. How much treasure had Naaman brought? vs. 5. Why did the prophet refuse to take any?

Who was Gehazi? vs. 20. What have we learned of him already? ch. iv. 12, 13, 25-31. Has he appeared to be a bad man? Was he probably with his master when he refused a gift? What did he resolve to do? vs. 20. What is the tenth commandment? Ex. xx. 17. What did he do next? vs. 21. Why the haste? How did Naaman receive Gehazi? Why such respect to a servant? What was his next lie? vs. 22. What his next one? vs. 22. Why did he say that the two prophets had come? For whom did he say the treasure was asked? Was that a lie? What did Naaman say? vs. 23. Does this show his gratitude to Elisha? Did he at length yield? vs. 23. How was the treasure carried? When were Naaman's servants dismissed? vs. 24. What did Gehazi then do? Was he still acting falsely?

What did Elisha ask Gehazi? What did he answer? What was the prophet's rebuke? What were Gehazi's feelings? vs. 27. Does it pay to sin? Can a man escape judgment if he has sinned? How? Rom. v. 1.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 42, 43.

SUNDAY, JUNE 2.—Elisha's Defenders. 2 Kings 6: 8-18.

Youths' Department.

THE LITTLE FISHES.

Two little fishes were swimming one day in a cool pleasant river, a few miles away. Said Scaly to Finny, "Oh! there's a nice fly! I wish I could catch him! I'll just go and try."

"Stop! Stop!" replied Finny, "there's danger, I fear;

I see a long line, and a man watching there. Don't venture, dear Scaly; be guided by me, or else you'll be caught as sure as can be."

But Scaly was heedless; the fly looked so nice. That soon he forgot Finny's kindly advice. He snatched at the fly, when as quickly as thought,

Came a jerk! and oh, dear! little scaly was caught!

Now wasn't he foolish? And yet how I wish little children were never like that little fish. But when sin entices how often we see that they yield to temptation as quickly as he.

But they who thus foolishly choose what is wrong

Are sure to repent of their choice before long. For like little Scaly, they find, though too late,

That a sharp hook is hid in the nice looking bait.

—Apples of Gold.

DON'T BEGIN.

Come now, boys, let us settle one or two things as absolute certainties when you start in life:

He who never drinks never will be drunk. That's so,—isn't it? He who sometimes drinks, may be.

He who never goes into a gambling-saloon never will gamble, and he who gambles never loses; but

He who goes to observe may gamble, and he who gambles will surely lose.

In all these things it is not best not to begin? Beware of innocent beginnings in wrong ways, and remember the old text:

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."—*Earth and Home.*

WHEN TO BEGIN.

"That you may find success," said the Rev. Charles Brooks, in an address, "let me tell you how to proceed,—*To-night begin your great plan of life.* You have but one life to live, and it is most important that you do not make a mistake. *To-night begin carefully.* Fix your eye on the fortieth year of your age, and then say to yourself: At the age of forty I will be a temperate man, I will be an industrious man, a benevolent man, a well-read man, a religious man, and a useful man. I will be such a one. *I resolve, and I will stand to it.* My young friends, pray to God that this resolution may stand like the oak which cannot be wind-shaken."

WAS IT CHANCE?

The writer had been from home to supply a vacant pulpit in a neighboring State. On his return he was obliged to wait several hours at a depot for the cars. The hour of noon came, and he stepped into a public house at hand for refreshment. Noticing that intoxicating liquors were openly sold at the bar, he turned away, preferring to go hungry, to patronizing such a hotel. He found a vacant car on a side track, where he could be alone, and enjoy needed repose on cushions already adjusted by another hand.

The wished-for train at length came, and by the middle of the afternoon he arrived at the beautiful town of N., where he had purposed to pass the night with a friend. He had been in her hospitable dwelling but a short time before she said, "You haven't had anything to eat since breakfast. At noon I set by a piece of steak, saying that it would do for some friend that should come in the afternoon train, who had been without his dinner." Although unexpected I was fortunately that friend. The dinner was soon in readiness; and never did I partake of a meal that seemed to come so directly from the hand of my Heavenly Father.

Having been absent from my family several weeks, I was quite desirous to reach home the next day. But this could not be done unless I could providentially be helped over eight miles of the way. I therefore made this a special matter of petition in my morning prayer. Reaching G. in due season, I at once made inquiry of an acquaintance whether he knew of any person going to S. F. soon, with whom I could get a ride. He directed me to Mr. L., of that place, who had just passed us on the walk. On inquiring of him, he said that he was going there himself,—

that he was all ready to start; but that before doing so, he thought that he would look round a little, to see if he could not find some one to ride with him for company. In less than five minutes we were in his carriage on our way to S. F., where we arrived in season for me to take the conveyance to my own home, which I reached in good time, thankful for the favors of a merciful Providence.

LITTLE TEMPTATIONS.

John Newton says, "Satan seldom comes to a Christian with great temptations, or with a temptation to commit a great sin. You bring a green log and a candle together, and they are very safe neighbors; but bring a few shavings and set them alight, and then bring a few small sticks and let them take fire, and the log be in the midst of them, and you will soon get rid of your log. And so it is with little sins. You will be startled with the idea of committing a great sin, and so the devil brings you a little temptation and leaves you to indulge yourself. 'There is no great harm in this,' no great peril in that; and so by these little chips we are first easily lighted up, and at last the green log is burned. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

THE FIRST PSALM.

When, with our feelings duly spiritualized, we commence to open the book of Psalms, we find within its pages such a profundity of wisdom, such a knowledge of human nature, such a trust and confidence in the Supreme Being, such a firm reliance on His mercy, that we can readily account for the circumstance that although the book was written for Jews it has been incorporated into every church of nearly every denomination. We seek in vain throughout the annals of sacred or profane writ to find a compendium of religious, moral and social study equal to that which inspired the pen of the sweet singer of Israel and caused the master-mind to pour forth his very soul for the good of posterity.—*Jewish Messenger.*

CAN'T RUB IT OUT.

"Don't write there," said a father to his son, who was writing with a diamond on the window.

"Why not?"

"Because you can't rub it out."

Did it ever occur to you, my child, that you are daily writing that which you can't rub out?

You made a cruel speech to your mother the other day. It wrote itself on her loving heart, and gave her great pain. It is there now, and hurts her every time she thinks of it. You can't rub it out.

You whispered a wicked thought one day in the ear of your playmate. It wrote itself on his mind, and led him to do a wicked act. It is there now; you can't rub it out.

TEARS OF REPENTANCE.

When the children of Israel wept at Bochim, they did well. But their repentance did not reach to the practical end of driving out the heathen according to the commandment. Hence they had to endure the "thorns" in their sides in after years, all the same as if they had not had their Bochim. Tears are good in their way, but they wash away no sins. Repentance is not mere external sorrow for sin, but is a turning away from it, with "full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience."

Said a little girl who had just been reading the newspaper account of an explosion, "Ma, dont you think that people who work in powder-mills ought to be good?" There was a great deal of human nature in that question. The world like the girl, thinks that all who are especially exposed ought to be prepared for a sudden death. We are encompassed ever by unseen dangers. We are never certain of to-morrow, and should be prepared for sudden death, whatever our business, age or place.

THE OAK.

BY MARIAN DOUGLASS.

The oak tree boughs once touched the grass; But every year they grew A little farther from the ground, And nearer to the blue.

So live that you each year may be, While time glides swiftly by, A little farther from the earth, And nearer to the sky.

IN THE ROMAN CATACOMBS.

On Saturday last I paid my first visit to the Catacombs. I had long had a desire to see at least one of these great cities of the dead. What I had heard of the Catacomb of Saint Ponziam made me especially anxious to begin with it. At a late hour on Friday evening, I went in company with the Rev. James Wall, the English Baptist missionary, who has been for several years in Italy, to make arrangements with the custodian for a visit on Saturday morning. We found that we could not secure his attendance until eleven o'clock.

Punctual to the hour I was at the house of Mr. Wall. Father Hyacinthe, who is now in Rome, had expressed to Mrs. Wall his desire to see this catacomb, and was one of the party, by Mr. Wall's invitation. Our route led us through a number of the narrow, crooked streets that are so common in Rome. As we proceeded we passed the remains of the old theatre of Marcellus. It now forms a part of walls of a narrow, dirty street. The arches that remain have been in part walled up, and now furnish shops of different kinds for one of the meaner portions of the city. Soon after we reached the Ghetto, the district to which the Papes for a long time confined the residences of the Jews. It lies on the banks of the Tiber, which we here crossed by the double bridge that leads over the ancient Insula Tiberis. The island is now built up with houses. Thence our route lay south-west toward the Porta Portese. After riding about half a mile from this gate, our conductor stopped our carriage at the entrance of what seemed to be a large fruit and vegetable garden. We alighted at the gate and walked through the grounds, gradually ascending by a zigzag pathway the Janiculum hill. The day was clear and warm, and though the ascent was somewhat wearisome, we were well repaid by the view from the summit, where we found a small square platform with a heavy stone balustrade and stone benches.

Down below in the valley flowed the Tiber; we could trace its course nearly up to the Island at which we had crossed. Half a mile below this point we could see the remains of the Old Pons Sublicius, which Horatius Cocles has made so well known. Off to our left, beyond the river, rises the Aventine Hill, and beyond it the Palatine, with the remains of the Circus Maximus lying between. Just in front of us was the Monte Testaccio with the pyramidal tomb of Caius Cestius seen over its northern slope. To the south of this Monte Testaccio was a part of the wall of Old Rome, extending down to the river; off to the south-east was the Lateran; and beyond, the Alban mountains. Far off in front we could see the Sabine and the Volscian mountains, with snow-clad peaks or ridges rising in the back ground. The visitor to Rome should not fail to look from this point at the city with its immediate surroundings, and the loftier and grander mountains that form the eastern boundary of the picture.

But our main object of interest was the catacomb. We entered by a flight of steps which led down to a small doorway. The guide had provided a quantity of small wax tapers, and gave each of us a coil long enough for our underground excursion. The hill has apparently been very extensively honey-combed by those who prepared resting places for the dead. Our route was along a narrow passage, about four feet wide and not more than six feet high. On each side were long rows of recesses for the reception of the bodies of the dead. In general there were two on each side, one about a foot from the floor of this avenue, and one higher up. The rock had been left between, like a great stone shelf. In these recesses were heaps of dust, with generally a few bones visible; the heaps were long,—their shape suggesting that they were what had been left of the living form as it decayed and gradually turned to dust. Some of the recesses were quite short, showing that children of very tender years were taken from their early Roman parents, even as from parents of the present day; and that their loved remains were tenderly cared for then as they are cared for in these later years.

I do not know how far we went, now ascending and now descending, but at length we came to a flight of steps with a painting at the top. We descended and found ourselves at the place which we especially desired to see,—the ancient baptistery. On descending the steps we came to a landing place, probably eight feet long, with the pool directly in front, sunk below the level of the landing. The platform was only as

wide as the... The b... feet wide an... ing place fou... was beautifu... taper down... very shallow... long rod wh... of the large... I found that... The surface... inches below... supplied by... of it was to... the left han... which seem... administrat... the water v... baptistery i... resenting th... John the B... immerse hi... keeping the... hart, proba... date. Perh... by the word... panteth aft... my soul aft... of the font... or as Mr. V... cinthe and... see it leads... The bap... centre of wh... most of wh... The route... intervals of... which we... haps, this... be carefully... evidence in... early Chris... This bap... back as the... easily resist... signed for... Lord and... thought the... for the pur... little water... suggest its... to defend... frank avow... change tha... A few days... St. John... St. John o... stone reser... into wa... the centre... baptistery... nary bath... opened the... Constantine... was baptiz... the action... so." "B... was my n... in and be... said, "So... changed? ... Constanti... Shrugging... hands he... be feared... ties have... compelled... to make t... amias to... tized in R... of the Pop... Nicomedi... (i. e. her... It was... we emer... cheerful... would no... Catacomb... one day... of what... felt a dee... would so... ordinance... the belie... resurrecti... once mor... the Bap... do their... consumm... —Nation... Some o... the most... known... man, for... brother... deen, we... responsi... pit than... torial cha... James M...