

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, April 29th, 1877.—Elisha at Dothan.—2 Kings vi. 8-18.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 15-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”—2 Kings vi. 16.

DIAMOND TEXT.—“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”—Psalm xxxiv. 7.

DAILY READING.—Monday, 2 Kings vi. 1-23. Tuesday, vs. 13; Luke vi. 20-36. Wednesday, vs. 13; Matthew x. 16-31. Thursday, vs. 15; Exodus xiv. 10-31. Friday, vs. 16; 2 Chronicles xxxii. 1-8. Saturday, vs. 17; Matthew xxvi. 47-56. Sunday, Psalm xxxiv.

ANALYSIS.—I. Syrian invasion. Vs. 8. II. The invasion disclosed. Vs. 9, 10. III. Supposed Syrian treachery. Vs. 11, 12. IV. Elisha compassed about. Vs. 13, 14. V. Elisha's servant alarmed. Vs. 15, 16. VI. His eyes opened. Vs. 17. VII. The Syrians blinded. Vs. 18.

QUESTIONS.—Where was Dothan? In a valley or on a hill? In what new aspect does Elisha now appear? Of what prophets is he in this a forerunner?

Vs. 8. With what miracle is this lesson introduced? What king of Israel was too lenient with Syria? How does Syria now act? Why is mercy to the guilty cruelty oftentimes to the innocent? Who is the king of Syria? Who now the king of Israel?

Vs. 9. By whom are the military acts of Jehoram now guided?

Vs. 10. How is Elisha's secret intelligence proved to be true?

Vs. 11. Why is the king of Syria sore troubled?

Vs. 12. Is any traitor to be found in his army? How is this mysterious information that is conveyed to the king explained?

Vs. 13. Where was Elisha to be found?

Vs. 14. What effort is made to capture him there? Why was the city encompassed at night?

Vs. 15. Why was Elisha's servant up so early? What does he see? To whom does he rush? What does he say?

Vs. 16. What is Elisha's command? Why need there be no fear?

Vs. 17. When the servant's eyes were opened, what did he see? Did Elisha pray for these hosts, or were they there? Who has the “heaviest battalions,” Elisha or Benhadad? Who the surest defence? What is the victory that overcometh the world? 1 John v. 4.

Dothan is a place first mentioned (Gen. xxxvii. 17) in connection with the history of Joseph. It next appears as the residence of Elisha. It is twelve miles north of Shechem, in the centre of the country, near the southern edge of the great plain of Esdraelon. The ancient name of Dothan still clings to this site, though no village exists or has existed there for a long period. The tell, or hill, on which the ruins are now seen shows itself twice in the brief account of Elisha, enabling us to see how the king of Syria could station his forces so as to compass the city, and how the mountain could appear to the prophet's servant “full of horses and chariots of fire.”

Elisha now appears in a new aspect, of which also he is the first representative. He is the support and champion of his countrymen in their time of need against their foreign enemies. He conveys to the king of Israel secret intelligence of all the movements of the Syrians. He is in this respect, as Stanley, says, the forerunner of Micah and Isaiah. He is the soul of the patriotic party in the invaded kingdom. This lesson is introduced by the record of a new invasion of Syria from the north upon Israel in the south. Ahab, as we remember, finished his northern work badly, and hostilities are again renewed. Where justice does not receive her dues, there troubles continue to arise. Still Elisha is wonderfully merciful in spirit and in act. See vs. 21-23. He will not allow prisoners of war to be killed.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 8.—The King of Syria warred against Israel. It is generally agreed that this king of Syria was Benhadad II, and that the king of Israel Jehoram, son of Ahab, and successor of his brother Ahaziah, who inherited the throne from Ahab, but died after a two years' reign. 1 Kings xxii. 51. The events of the lesson occurred near the

close of his reign of twelve years. iii. 1. The restoration of Naaman, it may seem, should have been a sufficient guarantee against further hostilities, but where the mutual relations of two neighboring nations are so unsatisfactory as we saw those of Syria and Israel were, it would require more than the healing of a general to ensure a lasting peace. Took counsel with his servants. His chief military officers, as appears from vs. 11, as well as from the connection. To them the secret plan of operations would necessarily be confided, as they were to execute the plan. In such and such. Different locations, designated by the king, but not by the historian. My camp. The place selected for encamping.

Verse 9.—Jehoram, though a wicked man, was Israel's king, and Elisha was only too glad to give him aid in all that pertained to the kingdom's welfare. A most signal service of this kind had he rendered at the very beginning of Jehoram's reign in the war with Moab (Ch. iii.) and had thus fairly earned the king's lasting gratitude. Piety and patriotism were equally fervent in the prophet, as they should be in all. Beware that thou pass not such a place. That is, neglect it not, but pre-occupy. The conduct of this war seems to have not been unlike that indicated in v. 2, only on a larger scale.

Verse 10.—Saved himself. His army, if not his person. Not once nor twice. More than once or twice, that is, several times.

Verse 11.—Sore troubled. Agitated as with violent emotion. Will ye not show me, etc. He felt sure that one of his own men, must be a traitor because the enemy had every time discovered his plan.

Verse 12.—None my lord, O king. Rather, “No,” etc. A correction of the false suspicion implied in the king's question. Elisha the prophet, etc. Elisha could hardly have been forgotten by the Syrians after effecting so notable a cure upon so high an officer as Naaman, in circumstances of such national publicity.

Verse 13.—Go and spy where he is, etc. Seeming not to suspect that Elisha might quite as likely know this project as the others, and foil him in this as in those.

Verse 14.—He sent thither horses and chariots and a great host. Fighting chariots, were low vehicles with two wheels, usually drawn by two horses. Syria was right in estimating the power of Elisha in behalf of Israel, but not in the method of overcoming it.

Verse 15.—Was risen early, etc. The enemy had taken position “in the night,” (vs. 14) before day-break. Alas, my master, how shall we do. In perfect despair.

Verse 16.—Fear not, etc. Elisha had been answered, and so he can give the same sure answer to the frightened servant. They that be with us are more than they that be with them. These words state most beautifully a truth which holds of every man who stands for the right in the fear of God.

Verse 17.—Elisha prayed. Intercession, showing the value of godly friends. Open his eyes that he may see. Their safety was already perfect, their protection ample. The Lord (Jehovah) opened, etc. Speedy and explicit answer to “the prayer of faith.” This was a prophetic prayer, that is, a prayer for a specific event which was revealed to the prophet as sure to follow. And he saw. Not with the eyes of sense, for these were already open and clear, but with the eye of spiritual vision. The mountain [or hill on which Dothan was situated] was full of horses and chariots of fire. Fire here, as usual, the symbol of divine heavenly nature. Horses and chariots were the symbol of power, and here of military power to overmatch and baffle the Syrian host. The fulness of the mountain indicates the great multitude, and hence abundance of the security furnished. Round about Elisha. Between him and the enemy, for his defence as were the Syrians around him for his capture. Comp. Ps. xxxiv. 7. Of course no one will take it as teaching that, angels actually ride about through the air in chariots of fire drawn by fire horses. Compare the ascent of Elijah ii. 9-11.

Verse 18.—When they came down. The Syrian hosts, a part of which at least, would thus seem to have been on an elevation still higher than Dothan. Elisha prayed. Again a prophetic prayer.

Smite this people with blindness. The Syrian army. And he smote them, etc. This was the wound inflicted by the celestial weapon. The blow was sudden, universal.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, May 6th, 1877.—The Famine in Samaria.—2 Kings vii. 12-20.

Select Serial.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XI. AFRIGHT AND DESOLATION.

The next morning Mrs. Barish was awakened from her slumbers, which were later on Sundays than other days, by a piercing shriek from little Hugh.

She jumped from her bed, and not waiting for a wrap of any kind, she rushed out on the landing in her night-dress to see whether the house was on fire, which she fully believed was the case, although she could smell no smoke. There, in the dim eight o'clock light, she encountered the boy crying wildly, with his face as white as his shirt.

“Shut up your noise! What on earth's the matter with ye, screetin' like that?” she demanded at the top of her shrill voice.

“Mother! mother!” cried Hugh, gasping between the two words. “Mother is—is—” The words died on his lips, while everything seemed to swim round and round with him. He clutched at the door-post but missed it, and fell heavily back into the little bed-room.

“Laws-a-mercy on us!” cried Mrs. Barish wildly. “Who'd be pestered with lodgers, I wonder! What ever's the matter with that brat and his mother, and only me in the house!”

While thus talking aloud she had made her way up to the boy, and seeing that he had fainted, she went straight to the ewer in Dora's garret, broke the ice in it, and dabbled some of the water on Hugh's face. It brought him round directly, and he sat up trying to remember where he was, and what had happened.

Mrs. Barish was shivering from head to foot, and after glancing at the figure of Dora lying fully-dressed on the outside of the bed, she thought that she had fainted too, and so broke out into bawling on her own account. “Bless poor me! I shall catch my death o' cold if I tries to bring another round in this condition, and that water as icy cold as ice! I shall have a shake, I shall, trapesing about in my be'gown for a parcel o' strangers as won't give nothin' for my pains.” Here, look! I must go and put on my clothes before I can touch your mother; but she won't hurt. How long has she been fainted?”

At the word “fainted,” little Hugh looked up with brightening eyes. “Oh, I thought she was dead!” he exclaimed, heaving a great sign of relief. “I don't know how long she's fainted,” he added. “I woke up just now, and saw her lying there at the foot of the bed, and I called her ever so, and couldn't make her hear, and then I touched her, and she's as cold as ice, and I thought she was dead, so I cried out for you. Please do something for her ma'am.” And his look and tone implored even more than his words.

“Yes, when I've got my things on,” answered Mrs. Barish, turning more chill than ever, as the fear arose within her that the woman was really dead. But to smother the fear and to reassure herself, she added, “Of course she's as cold as ice lying there like that in such bitter weather, with clothes only fit for summer. And nobody knows how long she's been in that faint. ‘Wever, I'll be back in a minute or two.’ So saying, she hurried off to get dressed.

It seemed to Hughie a very long time before she returned. He had dressed himself meanwhile, taking furtive glances at his mother's still form, yet not venturing to call her or touch her again. When he had got on his few clothes, he sat down on the edge of a chair gazing at her with great concern, and longing with the utmost anxiety and impatience for Mrs. Barish's return.

At length she came up the few steep stairs with slow and cautious footfall, and said, “Now for a cold-douse like you had, my boy! That'll bring her round if anything will.” She took up the ewer, and approaching the body she put out her hand to turn the face a little round.

It was heavy as lead, and indeed cold as ice, and with a look of horror and affright she cried out, “Why, she is dead, stone dead? Oh! what a naughty bad woman, to come into my house and die like that! Oh! it'll ruin me! There'll be a crowner's inquest, and nobody'll take my lodgings after! What shall I do?” Her cry rose to an excited shriek, as she hurried down the stairs, followed by Hughie crying wildly, and sobbing out, “Oh! send for a doctor, please ma'am! P'raps she isn't dead, only fainted and very cold! Tell me where I can find a doctor, oh do!”

“What's the good of a doctor when she's dead, you goose!” said Mrs. Barish, angrily. “Though I s'pose there must be a stiffeate of her death!”

Oh! but is she really dead? said Hughie, with streaming eyes. “Didn't you say you thought she'd fainted? She fainted last night when we were out, and p'raps she has again now. Do let us go up and see once more.”

Although the child had for a long time familiarized himself with the idea of losing his mother, yet now that the fear had become a reality, he could not bring himself to face it but with the bitterest sorrow, and the wildest regret, and also with apprehension on his own behalf. This was miserably increased by Mrs. Barish's next words. “No,” she said, wringing her hands, “it's no use goin' up to see. I've seen corpses afore, and she's a corpse sure enough. Oh dear! dear me! to think I've got a dead body in the house! But I'll have it moved off to the work-us straight away, that's what I will; and you'll go with it. ‘Your mother ought to ha' got you a place, that's what she ought,—the careless, dreamy thing that she was!’ But now there's nothin' but the work-us for ye to look to!”

Hughie had never heard much about the workhouse, but he had a dim idea that it was a place something like a prison, where poor people were kept under iron rule. He shrank with dismay from the thought of going there, amongst strangers who would be hard and harsh to him, so unlike his loving, gentle mother. And he secretly resolved that he would not go, unless he was carried off by main force.

He sat quietly sobbing, while Mrs. Barish moved about lighting the fire, and clearing up the hearth, all the while muttering aloud about the horror of having a dead body upstairs, and the shamefulness of Dora in daring to die in her house in that deceitful manner, without ever telling her that she was ill, and expected to die. “But I mustn't upset myself like this, else I shall be ill, too,” she said, as she put her little kettle on the fire with an angry jerk. “I must just calm myself, and try to keep calm, and get a bit o' breakfast down me, afore I start off beating about for strangers as haven't got a bit o' claim on me. A pretty trouble this'll be to me, young man, d'ye hear? I only wish I'd been worthy to know yesterday as your mother was goin' to die off like this! I'd ha' got her carted off pretty quick out o' my house, and saved myself the worry and trouble I shall have, afore ever I can get this precious business settled!”

Hughie made no reply, but sat quietly sobbing in a corner of the room, out of her way, and shivering with cold. By-and-by her kettle boiled, and she made herself some tea, and set one cup and saucer, and bread and butter, on the table. When it was ready, she sat down by the fire, drew the little table towards her, and began her breakfast, now and then muttering something, heaving deep sighs, swaying herself to and fro, and making other signs of distress, which all added to the little desolate boy's misery.

When she had finished, she put some water in the tea-pot, and poured out a cup of straw-coloured tea into the cup which she had just used, and pushed it across the table, with a piece of bread and butter which she had left. “There, you can take that,” she said. “Your mother paid for what'll keep you to-day, and you shall have it. I was al'ays a honest woman.”

Hughie quietly refused to take it, saying, with a quivering mouth, that he did not want anything. His heart was too full to allow him to eat.

“Very well, then, leave it,” she replied, crossly. “It'll be a good thing for you if ye don't live to want it afore you're much older. If folks turn up their

noses at good food, they're dead certain to come to want, sooner or later!”

Hughie made no answer; and when Mrs. Barish had cleared her table, she went on, “Now I must run off jest as I am, and get somebody to come to that woman. I must go and get advice, too: I've never been in such a pickle as this afore, and however I'm to act, I don't know. Come, get your cap while I put on my bonnet. You can run about where you like till I come back: you may look in at one o'clock, and I'll give ye a bit o' dinner. Oh, dear me! it seems like a dream that I've got into such trouble as this!”

CHAP. XII.—A SAD FAREWELL.

Hughie did not know how the time sped by; but after walking about until he was sick and faint with cold and want, and thinking sad thoughts, he slowly took his way to where his mother was.

Mrs. Barish was at home, and another elderly woman with her, and they were just solacing themselves with glasses of hot gin-and-water. “Yes,” Mrs. Barish was saying, as the boy timidly entered; “you must stay with me till I've got through this bother. I couldn't bide in the house by myself with that dead body here—no, not for no money! Ah! here's her boy. Well, she added, turning and nodding at him as she spoke, “your mother'll very soon be out of everybody's way now. The work-us is goin' to take her in charge and dispose of her, and then you'll get took off the streets, and kep' in your place, as you ought to be.”

Hughie listened with his eyes wide open, and stood as still as a statue for a minute.

“Don't stand starin' like that, as if you was gone clean off your head,” said Mrs. Barish. “It's a good thing for you and I'm sure you needn't fret; for, to my thinkin', your mother wasn't a fit and proper person to bring a boy up. It's me that has most cause to complain, havin' my house and myself upset like this by them that is nothin' to me.” She looked at the woman opposite to her, and gave her a decisive nod, as much as to say, “There! that's a bit of my mind!” Then turning to Hughie again, she said, “Well, I've saved ye a bit o' my good dinner: perhaps ye won't refuse that!”

Hughie stepped forward and sat down to the table, for now he felt that it was necessary to eat something; and he thought he could do so without effort. So he sat down; and in a slow and absent manner ate all that was on the plate. He was thinking earnestly all the time, trying to decide what was best to do. To leave his mother where she was, was dreadful indeed, but the terror he had of being taken to the workhouse with her, and then of having to see her carried away from him for ever, leaving him there amongst those terrible strangers, nerved him, at last, to make the resolution to run away and leave her; for what could he do for her if he stayed?

So, when he had finished his dinner, he asked very timidly whether he might go upstairs and see his mother.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Barish, “if you can go by yourself. But I aint goin' to harrow up my feelin's by seein' that dead body any more, I can tell ye. I've done my dooty to her so far, and no more I aint goin' to do.”

“Yes, I'll go by myself,” said the boy. And he went alone upstairs, slowly and sadly, thinking that the last time he walked up them his mother was holding his hand tenderly in hers, which would nevermore clasp it lovingly again.

He felt a strange sense of awe as he walked into the silent room, and stood beside his silent mother. She had been laid properly on the bed with her head slightly raised on the pillow, but dressed just as she was when he last wished her good-night. Her face looked awfully white in contrast with her black dress, and as her left white hand was next him as he stood there, Hughie noticed that her wedding-ring, which she had so jealously kept and worn, was now removed from her finger. He merely noticed it, but did not wonder or trouble about it: he was too much absorbed by the overwhelming thought that she would never speak to him, and kiss him, and fold her arms round him in loving embraces any more.

Although he knew it was so useless he cried, “Mother! mother!” audibly, but quietly, and put his small unwashed hand on her very white one, which for the first time did not respond to his