

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, March 25th, 1877.—Review.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“But God is judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” Psalm lxxv. 7.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Micah i. Tuesday, Micah ii. Wednesday, Micah iii. Thursday, Micah iv. Friday, v. Saturday, Micah vi. Sunday, Micah vii.

QUESTIONS.—What was the first form of government under which the Jews as a nation lived? What form did they afterwards seek? How did these two differ from each other? How was the monarchical subordinate to the theocratic? Through what period did the theocratic continue? What three kings reigned during this undivided monarchy? After the death of whom did the undivided monarchy break up? Who had then come to the throne of Judah? To what place did he go to be inaugurated? Why? For what reason did the ten tribes rebel against him? With what success? What was the controlling tribe of Israel? What was the great sin of Jeroboam? What were his reasons for committing it? Is expediency ever to be a guide to a Christian's life? How did Ahab sin even to be more wicked than Jeroboam? What was Baal-worship? What was the worship of Ashtoreth? What was one of the penalties of the Mosaic law in the event of national apostasy from God? Who denounced this penalty upon Ahab? By what means did Ahab search for Elijah during the drought? By what great test did Elijah show the impotence of all the priests of Baal? What is the difference between Elijah's character at Mount Carmel and at Mount Horeb? By what injustice to a private citizen does Ahab draw on his doom? Where was the city of Samaria? The city of Jezreel? From what mountain and past what towns did Elijah travel to the scene of his ascension? What man was his companion? Will you describe the scene of Elijah's ascension? What is proof that Elijah's spirit was conscious after its removal from earth? What is proof that departed spirits know and commune with each other? Will you describe Elijah's personality as differing from that of Elisha? In what increasingly sinful light have we seen the kings and the kingdom of Israel? In what have we seen the mercy of God wonderfully displayed? Has Israel as yet had one good king.

Israel's form of government before it was consolidated into a national government was patriarchal, which is a government according to families by the heads of families. Some degree of this government was evidently kept up throughout the Egyptian bondage.

The tribes were consolidated into a nation proper at and after the events at Sinai. The law there given was the national code. Of that law God was sole Author. Moses was the medium of its communication as God gave the law, so also he continued to communicate by revelation with the people in administering this law, and in general their government. The judges were not kings, but merely special agents raised up and put forward by Jehovah in emergencies, to direct and lead the people under God's supervision.

Afterward the nation became a kingdom. The people wished a man to be king, not having sufficient faith in the unseen God to recognize him as a present and active Sovereign. Still in this choice and change they did not either in purpose or in fact renounce utterly the authority and sovereignty of Jehovah. Instead, they formally and respectfully applied to Samuel as God's prophet to act as a prophet in effecting the change under and according to the divine direction. They lacked faith, and sinned in choosing an arrangement other than that given them, but yet their sin was not that of utter abandonment of God.

“The undivided monarchy” continued through the successive reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, a period of one hundred and twenty years, unless as is probable in the “forty years” of Saul we are to include the undivided judgeship of Samuel which would of course reduce the period by several years. Under David the kingdom became what it remained under Solomon, an empire, that is, extended its dominion over other surrounding nations, making them subject and tributary. Its dominion extended from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates.

The break and division of sovereignty came after Solomon's death, on the succession of his son Rehoboam, who refused to relax the severities and ex-

travagances of his father's rule. The break occurred at Sichern, or Shechem, whither he had gone to receive recognition as king, especially by the disaffected tribes, of which Ephraim was the most influential. Shechem was the natural capital of Ephraim, and Jeroboam was the leading spirit in Ephraim, and had been most prominent, no doubt, in shaping the course of events against Rehoboam.

This sin of revolt on Jeroboam's part was, however, eclipsed by his greater sin of publicly and persistently corrupting God's worship in defiance of the express commands of the original divine law of the land, and for purely political ends. His choice of Bethel and Dan instead of Jerusalem; of the calves instead of God's ark, with its attending cherubim; of his own instead of the prescribed festivals, and of a general instead of the consecrated Levitical priesthood, was gross rebellion, and was all to strengthen his power against Rehoboam.

Ahab belonged to the third dynasty of the new kingdom, and his sin differed from and over-topped Jeroboam's, because while Jeroboam stopped with a change and corruption of the worship of Jehovah, he tried to stamp out all worship of Jehovah, and introduce instead Baal's worship. He would substitute Baal for Jehovah as the God of Israel.

The penalty for such as Ahab's sin according to the Levitical law, which was still in a manner owned as the national law of both kingdoms, was death, and Jehovah took the infliction of this into his own hands. He gave space for repentance and reformation, however, sending Elijah to announce and denounce the impending penalty upon himself and his house or dynasty.

In nothing does Ahab's sin more impressively and painfully manifest itself than in his persecution of Elijah, who stood forth as specially, if not solely, Jehovah's representative.

The contest at Carmel between Elijah and the four hundred, successful most splendidly and overwhelmingly, filled Elijah with hope which was soon exchanged for despair.

Samaria continued to be the capital of the kingdom of Israel after Ahab had built his palace at Jezreel. The latter city, on the eastern border of the plain of Esdraelon and at the western foot of Mount Gilboa, was twenty-five miles north of Samaria, a little east of north. Naboth was clearly one of God's hidden ones, and heroic in his faith in God as being more than the king.

Elijah, according to the account in 2 Kings ii, started with Elisha on his last journey from Gilgal, which was a town on the mountains or high lands of Ephraim, went by Bethel and Jericho, and in through the Jordan bed at the same place and in the same way that the Israelites first crossed it into Palestine. They proceeded still further eastward until separated by a storm, in which clouds with a fiery splendor, in appearance like horses and chariots, separated the two friends. Elisha saw it, and this was the designated sign that God would clothe him with all needed power to fill the office of head prophet in Israel not less successfully than Elijah had done. The falling mantle was a further evidence, and Elisha returned in new power, retracing his way quite across Palestine from the extreme east beyond the Jordan, to the extreme west at Carmel.

The reappearance of Elijah with Moses on the mount of transfiguration, is a special evidence that his removal was not his annihilation or the end of his conscious life.

Elijah is unquestionably one of the greatest characters in Old Testament history. His courage when in the way of duty no danger, no human threats, could daunt. His warnings and rebukes were delivered with a boldness and daring unequalled even in sacred history.

Of Elisha, “we gather that his dress the ordinary garment of an Israelite, that his hair was worn trimmed behind, . . . and that he used a walking-staff, of the kind ordinarily carried by grave or aged persons.” He was a man of social and civilized life, tolerant “toward the person and religion of foreigners, for example, with Naaman or Hazael; sometimes giving vent to the feeling of holy indignation at iniquities, but usually not dealing in invectives. The record presents him rather as a worker of miracles than in his proper character of the prophet.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, April 1st, 1877.—The Oil Increased.—2 Kings vi. 1-7.

Select Serial.

From Day of Rest.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. III.—OFF TO LONDON.

Little Hugh had been his mother's only companion for such a long time that she talked to him of her troubles, her plans, and her secret feelings, as if he were a much older person. And he entered into all that she said to him with an intelligence and sympathy far beyond his years.

Children who have been trained in the school of sorrow and trouble, have far quicker sympathies and make better confidantes than grown-up people, who have had but small experience of the more bitter of life's lessons.

As Mrs. Haldane started down the road leading towards the railway station, holding her boy by the hand, she said, “See how kindly God has helped us, Hughie, just at the right time: He sent that gentleman to meet us, who had once known dear father, and he gave me this half-sovereign to help us on to London.”

“Well, it was kind,” said Hughie, heartily, “and he looked much kinder than the lady, didn't he, mother?”

“I think so, love,” she replied, smiling at his penetration; for as she had looked at the lady, who was young, fair-featured, and handsomely-dressed, she had thought how particularly disagreeable and ungracious she seemed.

“Did you listen to what the preacher said this evening, Hughie dear?” she added, “about God caring so much for us and taking an interest in all the little concerns of our life?”

“Yes, mother, I couldn't help listening, he talked so loud; and I liked lots of the things he told us.”

“Look at these pert little sparrows hopping on before us, and listen to that robin singing such a beautiful song in the tree: God cares for even these, Hughie, and sees that they get their food and shelter. Ah, I can never look at a little bird without having my faith in God strengthened: He cares so much more for us. If I didn't believe this with all my heart how afraid I should be to go to London now, to look for grandmother! how I should dread to spend any of this half-sovereign for fear we should be left destitute! But you see, dearie, how we have been helped ever since we left Edinburgh; and so I believe we shall be as long as we need it, and you, when I am called away from you.”

This was not the first time Mrs. Haldane had spoken to her boy about a leaving him: he had no need to ask her what she meant. But after gazing dreamily on before him for a minute or two, at the little birds hopping and flying on their way, he said, “I hope you'll live till I'm a man, mother, and then I'll work for you like father used to.”

“I may, Hughie: we don't know what will happen. But if I shouldn't, remember, love, what I've told you many a time before, to be good and faithful to those you may happen to live with, and grateful to those who help you. I hope you may be such a good man as dear father was, loving God, and loving all your fellow-creatures; and trying to do good in the world, in some way or other. Do you think you will remember in years to come all I have taught you, Hughie?”

“Yes, mother. I shall never forget you,” he replied, clinging more tightly to her hand, as if he realized how terrible it would be to let it go for ever.

He walked along silently after that, with a sad light in his large eyes. But by-and-by when he found himself rattling along in a train to London, the cloud of apprehension that was distressing him lifted somewhat, and he chatted with the liveliest interest of things he noticed as they sped along in the soft evening light.

“Have you ever been to London before, mother?” he asked, speaking close to her that she might hear above the din of the train.

“Yes, my dear boy; father and I went there for a week before we went to Edinburgh.”

“It's a grand place, mother, isn't it? I'm so glad we're going. Some of the boys in Edinburgh used to say the

streets are paved with gold in London!”

While he uttered the words he looked up in her face with an incredulous smile. She smiled back at him and shook her head. “No, no, Hughie,” she said, “they are paved with the coldest, hardest stone for some people. We must look up for the gold and brightness—not under our feet.”

He rather wondered what these words meant, and thought of them many a time afterwards.

Mrs. Haldane sat thinking of her past and present, contrasting her former journey to London with this one. Then she was a happy young wife going to London to spend a week in sight-seeing with her loving husband; now she was a poor, broken-down widow, going with a slender hope of finding her mother, and with only very vague notions of how she was to get daily bread and shelter for herself and her boy.

Yet there was more hope in her heart than her circumstances warranted. She knew much of poverty, decent respectable poverty, and of the struggles of the poor to get work and bread; but of the deep depths of poverty and degradation in which thousands are irretrievably sunk in London and other large towns, she knew next to nothing.

When they arrived at the Victoria Station, Mrs. Haldane enquired of officials the way to Spitalfields, but was curtly responded to. Everybody was too busy to direct her to such an out-of-the-way locality; and one man in a very off-hand way told her to take a cab.

She then stepped out to the cabs, and looking from one to another for the kindest face, she at last accosted a youngish, respectable-looking cabman, and asked what he would charge to take her to Spitalfields.

“What part do you want to go to?” he asked.

“I don't know. I merely want to be taken to the neighbourhood, that I may make enquiries for a friend. But I can't afford much.”

“Well, it's rather an expensive drive in a cab for you,” the man answered kindly. “But if you'll take notice of what I tell you, you can take the 'busses, and get there cheap.”

He then gave her minute instructions about the way to go, where to change, and the colour of the omnibuses she was to take.

She thanked him very heartily, feeling grateful for having met with that bit of real disinterested kindness.

CHAP. IV.—IN QUEST OF LODGING.

It was getting late when at length they were set down in Spitalfields, and both mother and child were thoroughly tired, and somewhat bewildered.

Of the first policeman they met, Mrs. Haldane gently asked direction to a cheap lodging.

“Yes, there's Jackson's place within a stone's throw, if you ain't over-particular about your fellow-lodgers,” he replied. “It's cheap, anyhow, and what's cheap ain't too nice about these parts. Look 'ee; follow your nose till you come to the first turning on the right, and anybody'll show you which is Jackson's up there.”

She walked slowly on as directed, Hughie dragging at her hand in a manner that taxed her small strength sorely. She took the first turning, and in a few moments arrived at an open door revealing a large, low-ceiled room, brilliantly lighted by a huge fire in a wide grate, before which three or four persons were doing bits of cooking, in the way of herring, bacon, cheese, potatoes, etc., while several other men and women lounged or stood about the room, smoking, chaffing, laughing, quarrelling, as the case might be.

The fire looked very inviting, for both mother and child felt the chilliness of the night in their thin clothing; the seats also looked inviting to the utterly tired wayfarers, but the people—the people! Mrs. Haldane stood gazing at them in mute dismay for several seconds. Had she come to this? Must she go with her gentle-spirited, susceptible boy, and herd amongst those half-human creatures? A sobbing sound involuntarily escaped her, and tears sprang to her eyes. Poverty she could bear, white-washed walls, bare floors, scanty fire, dry bread, in quietness and respectability; but this she could not bring herself to: this was poverty in its extremest bitterness, to have to make herself one with that blatant, wholly demoralized crew.

A big fellow, with his hands in his pockets, came up, and hustled her roughly to get in. “Don't block up the doorway, missis,” he said, “there's other folks wants a night's lodgings as well as you. Step for'ards, missis; we're all jolly good fellows, and that nobody can't deny.”

She shrank back into the street with a feeling almost of horror. “This won't do, dear Hughie. I'm so sorry for your sake: you are so tired, love,” she said, in pitying tones.

He made no response, not even his usual “Never mind, mother,” with which he tried to cheer her when she was sad with pity for him. His feet were now so sore, and his head so heavy and aching for want of rest, that he couldn't summon courage enough to make any response. His pale lips quivered, and he would have liked to burst into tears, only he knew that would too greatly aggravate his mother's distress, so he restrained himself, and stealthily brushed away with the sleeve of his little old jacket the one or two tears that would not keep back.

“Take my arm, dearie, instead of my hand, and lean heavily on me: I'll help you along,” said his mother, tenderly. “You'll see we'll soon find a place now, where you can have a good night's rest.”

She would ask direction of no other fellow-creature. She looked up: the stars were shining overhead, and while she gazed, happier tears filled eyes than had but just now trembled there. “God's stars,” she murmured to herself, “and God above them,—nay! here, with me, with us, in our loneliness and sorrow; for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”

Then she breathed an earnest cry for His direction to a dwelling-place for the night, and walked on calmer in spirit and expectant.

They presently came to a little provision shop: the shutters were closed, but the door was wide open, and within everything seemed in excellent order, many of the things being tidily covered up for the night; and behind the counter stood a clean-looking, sharp-faced, thin woman, whom Mrs. Haldane upon entering accosted.

“Can you direct me to a clean, respectable lodging, if you please?” asked she, emphasizing the two adjectives.

The woman looked at her with a hard, cold stare, and replied, “I've got a room to let, as you'd see in the wind, if my shutters was down. But I don't take any but respectable people. Who are you?”

In days gone by Mrs. Haldane would have indignantly resented this sort of talk. Now she was very poor, and remembering her weary child hanging on her arm, she answered meekly, “I'm a respectable widow from Edinburgh, and I'm seeking my mother who lives somewhere in these parts, and I'm very anxious to get a clean, decent lodging for myself and my little boy.”

“I don't believe a word you say,” replied the little woman, sharply. “I never do believe tales of this sort; they're always made up. But you look decent, so I don't mind letting you have my room if you can pay the rent.”

“What is it?” asked Dora, anxiously. “Three shillings a week, paid in advance. I've been cheated once, but I ain't goin' to be again.”

Hughie heaved a great sigh of relief as he saw his mother take money from her pocket, and lay three shillings down on the counter.

The woman picked them up and locked them in her till, then came round to shut and lock the shop-door. Having done so she said, without looking at her lodger, “You can follow me. Have you a box anywhere?”

“No, this small bundle is all I have,” replied the widow turning aside her shawl and revealing a little package which was fastened round her waist. “But I hope to get sewing here, and then I shall be able to buy the few little things we need. I am quick at sewing, and can do it well.”

“Humph!” uttered the landlady, as she kept her waiting at the foot of the stairs, while she lighted a candle in the kitchen. “I can find you a job or two. Poor people ought to be willing to work.”

She then led the way up three flights of narrow stairs to a little room at the top of the house. There was no fireplace in it, and it had no window but a sky-light; but it was thoroughly clean,