

The Sunday-School.

THIRD QUARTER,
LESSON XI.—Sept. 11.

ELIJAH TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN.

2 Kings 2: 1-11.

THE LESSON.—The first chapter of Second Kings, exhibiting the beginning of God's judgment upon the house of Ahab and relating Elijah's last public act. The translation of Elijah.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*He was not; for God took him.*—Gen. 5: 24.

LEARN BY HEART.—Vs. 9-11 I Cor. 15: 53-57; Matt. 25: 21.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.* The account in 2 Chron. 21: 12, of the letter from Elijah to Jehoram, king of Judah, would indicate that Elijah lived into his reign, which began B.C. 889 (common chronology), or B.C. 851 (revised chronology). But 2 Kings 3: 11, indicates that Elijah died while Jehoshaphat Jehoram's father, was still living. Some consider that the letter was written when Jehoram was co-regent with his father (B.C. 893 or 855); some that Elijah wrote it prophetically, to be delivered after his death; some that Elisha was held to be a prophet before Elijah passed away.

Place.—Starting from Gilgal, in Ephraim, Elijah journeyed southeastward, through Bethel and Jericho, to the east of the Jordan, perhaps up Mount Nebo.

Rulers.—Jehoram (Joram), son of Ahab, king of Israel; in Judah, Jehoram, either alone or co-regent with his father Jehoshaphat; Ben-hadad II was king of Syria; Shalmaneser II, of Assyria. The Black Obelisk records deeds performed at about this time by Shalmaneser II.

Place in the History.—Close of the career of the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, and opening of Elisha's career as his successor.

We come now to the final scenes in the life of the greatest Old Testament prophet. Five pictures are shown us, each exhibiting Elijah in some notable characteristic.

SCENE I. THE LAST REBUKE OF SIN.

—2 Kings 1: 1-18. Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who reigned little more than a year before he fell through the lattice of a window and was injured. He sent to inquire at the oracle of Baalzebub whether he would recover. Elijah intercepted the king's messengers, rebuked them for inquiring of a heathen idol and bade them tell Ahaziah that he should not recover. Ahaziah sent twice a captain with a band of fifty to capture Elijah. Each time the captain and his men were struck down by fire from heaven. The third captain saved himself by a humble entreaty, and Elijah went to the stricken king and repeated his doom. "So he died, according to the word of the Lord.

SCENE II. THE LAST INSTRUCTION OF DISCIPLES.

—Vs. 1-6. *When the Lord would take up Elijah,* God knows when our work is done. *Into heaven.* Elijah was viewed as "continuing in heaven a life, which no death had ever interrupted." *By a whirlwind.* See on v. 11. *That Elijah went with Elisha.* He was Elijah's servant, but also his scholar and friend. Elijah's main work seems to have been the education of the people, and especially the "sons of the proph-

ets," in the principles of true religion. *From Gilgal.* Not the Gilgal near Jericho, but Gilgal in the hill country of Ephraim. Here probably was a school of the prophets. *And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel.* Another school of the prophets was there. *As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth.* Confirming the statement by the two supreme truths of all knowledge, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. *I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. The Sons of the prophets.* These were young men attending the theological seminaries of the time, fostered and perhaps founded by Samuel. These ancient colleges under the superintendence of a recognized prophet, who was called the *father*, while the students were styled his sons. The subject of study was the law of Moses. Attention was given to music and sacred poetry, while the young men were trained in various handicrafts. *Said unto him, knowest thou.* How Elijah's coming departure was known to them we are not told. *Take away thy master from thy head today.* "The teacher sat on an elevated seat, so that his feet were level with the heads of his pupils." *Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.* And Elisha's sorrow was too deep. *They came to Jericho.* The important city in the Jordan valley, where also was a school of the prophets. *The Lord hath sent me to Jordan.* Not a town, but into the open country—to the Jordan.

SCENE III. THE LAST MIRACLE.—Vs. 7, 8.

And fifty men . . . went, and stood to view afar off. The abrupt heights behind the town commanded an extensive view of the river, the nearest bend of which was five miles away. *Stood by Jordan.* We can imagine with what eager longing Elijah looked across, toward the hills of his native Gilead. *And Elijah took his mantle.* Of sheepskin, the outward sign of the prophet's office. *And wrapped it together.* Rolled it up, so that it was not unlike Moses' rod. *Smote the waters.* Strongly, as one smites an enemy. *They were divided.* As the Red Sea by Moses, and the Jordan by Joshua.

SCENE IV. THE LAST COMMUNION WITH HIS FRIEND.—Vs. 9, 10.

Together they climb the steep ascent—the old prophet and the young. *Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away.* There were three sources of this offer: Elijah's love for Elisha, his desire to strengthen Elisha for the burden he was about to assume, and his longing for the good of his nation. *Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.* Elisha did not ask to become an Elijah, but to succeed him. It was not a request of pride, or it would not have been granted, but a request for service. *Thou hast asked a hard thing.* This was a hard thing because (1) spiritual gifts are hardest to impart; (2) they are the most valuable of gifts; (3) they are not to be won or retained without fidelity; (4) God alone can give them. *If thou see me when I am taken from thee.* If he prove his fitness for prophetic gifts by remaining with his master to the end, his request will not be denied.

How the Promise was Fulfilled.—Elisha did see the ascension of his great

teacher, and he did receive the eldest son's portion of his power. The parallel between the two lives is striking, but Elijah was the pioneer, and the man who breaks a path is greater than the man who follows along the same way. Elijah aroused, Elisha instructed; Elijah was the lightning that showed the precipice, Elisha was the bridge over the chasm.

SCENE V. THE LAST OF EARTH AND THE FIRST OF HEAVEN.—V. 11. *They still went on and talked.* Perhaps they talked of the work Elisha was to do, and Elijah gave his last instructions. *There appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire.* Compare the celestial convoy around Elisha in later times (2 Kings 6: 17), and the legions of angels that Christ could summon (Matt. 26: 53). *And parted them both asunder.* Surrounding Elijah as with a flaming host. *And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.* The Bible records only two similar events, the translation of Enoch, and the ascension of Christ.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

The characteristics of the great prophet:

1. His *mysteriousness.* Elijah towers up like a mountain above all the other prophets. This was shown in the sudden appearances and disappearances of his life.

2. He was a man of tremendous *passions.* He was a Mount Sinai of a man, with a heart like a thunderstorm. His life shows a mighty hatred of evil, trust in God, confidence in himself, love for his nation, power over men, a vast energy and powerful impulses.

3. But Elijah's passions were *subject to him.* Elijah was a man of immensely stronger passions than poor Ahab ever was; only Elijah's powerful passions all swept him to heaven, whereas all Ahab's contemptible passions shouldered and shoveled and sucked him down to hell.

4. It was through his *prayers* that Elijah gained such command over himself, others, and the forces of God. He "prayed fervently."

5. Elijah had his *time of weakness,* and thereby his example comes the nearer to us. His despondency in the desert is evidence that he was tempted as we and won his victories over himself against all the tendencies to fear and faithlessness that ordinary men yield to.

6. But Elijah *conquered* all his weakness, through the power of communion with God, and we see him at the last stronger and more glorious than ever.

THE DEBATABLE AGE.

Why is a boy too old to go to Sunday school at the same time that he is too young to be a Christian? Why do laws have to be made to keep him from going to work in shop and factory before he is fourteen, while at the same time he is too young to do any work for God in the world? Boys will do well to think over these questions and get rid of some of the confessed folly in their own minds on these points.

We can scarcely pick up a paper nowadays without seeing something about the doings of boys. Boys receive medals for life-saving, or win prizes in the high school, or march in parades—the world has a place for every lad. So, too, has the Church. Every bit of pluck, of sense, of ability, of nobility, a boy has can find a use in God's service. There is no debatable age in Christ's plan for a boy. His whole life is claim-

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ed by the Master, and not to recognize that claim is the worst mistake a lad can make.

CONSCIENCE.

The death of Charles IX of France was a terrible one. He had authorized the massacre of the Huguenots on the tearful night of St. Bartholomew, and was haunted by its horror during his dying moments. "I know not how it is," he said to his surgeon, Ambrose Pare, "but for the last few days I feel as in a fever. My mind and body are both disturbed. Every moment, whether I am asleep or awake, visions of murdered corpses, covered with blood, and hideous to the sight, haunt me. Oh, I wish I had spared the innocent and the imbecile." He died two years after the massacre, and to the last moment the horrors of the day of St. Bartholomew were present, without ceasing, to his mind.—*Smiles on "Duty."*

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