

The Sunday-School.

FOURTH QUARTER, LESSON IV.—Oct. 23.

ELISHA AND NAAMAN.

2 Kings 5: 1-14.

THE LESSON includes the whole of chapter 5.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.*—Jer. 17: 14.

LEARN BY HEART.—Matt. 18: 3; Psa. 51: 7-10; Isa. 1: 18; 2 Cor. 5: 17.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.* About the eighth year of Jehoram of Israel, B. C. 847. The fourteenth year of Shalmaneser of Assyria (B. C. 889, Ussher).

*Place.*—1. Damascus, the capital of Syria. Renowned for "Damascus blades" and "Damask silks."

2. Samaria, the capital of Israel, one hundred and ten miles to the southwest in an air line.

3. The nearest fords of the Jordan about twenty-five miles from Samaria.

*The Black Obelisk*, discovered by Mr. Layard at Nineveh, and placed in the British Museum, and the bronze gates of one of Shalmaneser's palaces, discovered in 1878, and also sent to the British Museum, both contain records of wars of Assyria against Syria under Ben-hadad, and give a stirring picture of the times.

NAAMAN AFFLICTED WITH A DEADLY DISEASE.—V. 1. *Now Naaman commander-in-chief, King of Syria. Ben-hadad II., whose capital was at Damascus. A great man with his master.* His most talented statesman, his best general and military organizer. *Amighty man in valour.* Of personal strength, courage, and skill. *But he was a leper.* It is not easy to decide just what form of leprosy afflicted Naaman. It is a loathsome, defiling disease in its later stages. In the early stages there are often few symptoms and little discomfort. The progress is slow. There are cases on record of persons who lived as lepers forty years. It is, therefore, easy to understand how Naaman might retain his office, though a leper.

*Note 1.* This man could do great things in spite of great disadvantages. Many of the greatest successes have been wrought by persons who seemed to have insuperable difficulties in their way.

2. No life is perfectly happy.

3. There is a "but" in every life. Great, "but" he was a leper. Good, "but" with some weakness. Happy, "but" with some thorn in the flesh. There is another kind of "but"—a leper, "but" Elisha is there to heal; a burden, "but" God's grace is sufficient; sin, "but" Christ has come to save.

A LITTLE GIRL SHOWS HIM WHERE HE CAN BE CLEANSED.—Vs. 2-4. *The Syrians had gone out by companies. Roving bands of marauders. Brought away captive . . . a little maid.* Little girls are still the prizes of Kurdish and Bedaway forays. *My lord (Naaman) were with the prophet that is in Samaria.* This young girl must have often heard of the miracles of healing performed by Elisha.

*Note* how much a child can do, like the boy with the five loaves and two fishes in Christ's time; like the young Joseph and Daniel. They cannot argue, but they can invite.

*And one* (probably Naaman . . . told his Lord the king.

SEEKING DELIVERANCE IN EARNEST, BUT FROM THE WRONG SOURCE.—Vs. 5-7. *And the king of Syria said Go to, go. Start immediately. I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. Probably Jehoram, the son of Ahab. He thought this the easiest way to reach Elisha. And took with him. To come before any one without a gift when a favor was to be asked would have been inexcusable rudeness. Ten talents of silver.* There was no coined money, but only ingots or bars of gold and silver. A talent of the common standard weighed 96½ lbs. avoirdupois, and was worth \$1,940 in silver. *Six thousand pieces* (shekels weight) of gold. A shekel of the common standard weighed about 253 grains and was worth \$9.69, so that the present consisted of \$19,400 in silver and \$58,140 in gold, or \$77,540 in all. *Ten changes of raiment.* The word means costly robes, suitable for festive occasions. *That thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.* Through the prophet at his capital. *The king . . . rent his clothes,* as an expression of grief and fear. Jehoram lived in perpetual terror of his powerful neighbor. Nothing was said in the letter about the Man of God, and it never occurred to him to seek his help. *He seeketh a quarrel against me.* A pretext for invading the country.

THE WAY OF HUMILITY AND FAITH Vs. 8-13. *When Elisha . . . had heard.* He probably had his home in Samaria. *Let him come now to me,* etc. However sinful the king had been, and however powerless to help Naaman, yet true religion was not dead; and God would graciously show his power through his prophet. *With his chariot.* He came with a gorgeous cortege and pomp. *And stood at the door of the little cottage,* waiting, in his chariot, for the prophet to come forth and humbly ask the great man what he desired. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him . . . Go and wash in Jordan seven times. The Jordan was 25 miles away. The prophet treated the great general with none of the deference he expected. What was the object of all this? Evidently for its moral effect—upon Naaman, upon the Syrians, and also upon the Israelites.

1: It is evident that Naaman had no conception of the true God, or of the position and power of his prophets. Elisha showed him that he was the Ambassador of the King of kings.

2. Elisha would efface himself, and fix the leper's thoughts on the healing as the gift of God.

3. This method of cure would help to implant faith in God in his heart.

4. It would be a test of his sincere and humble obedience. Without yielding the heart and will to God there is no salvation.

5. It would lead him away from all forms and superstitions.

6. And yet it would give him some-

thing to do, which would be a proof of his obedience.

7. It was so simple and easy, that there was no excuse for refusal.

*God's Way of Salvation* from sin, through Christ, is based on these same principles. *But Naaman was wroth.* He probably had had little faith in the humble prophet. Elisha had not been discourteous, but only treated Naaman like a common man. *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus?* "The Abana is no doubt the modern Barada. It was called by the Greeks "the golden flowing." It is the clearest water possible. *Pharpar.* A less important river near Damascus. *Better than all the waters of Israel.* To the eye the Jordan can bear no comparison with the rivers of Damascus. *May I not wash in them, and be clean?* But there was no divine word behind that washing. He went away in a rage. Letting his anger overcome even his desire to be cleansed *And his servants (officers) came near,* seeking him to reason. *Had bid thee do some great thing.* Some daring exploit. *How much rather then,* etc. It removed all excuses. Moreover he could easily try the experiment.

THE COMPLETE DELIVERANCE.—V. 14. *Went he down.* His stormy passion subsided. He obeyed the prophet and the prophet's word came true. *Like unto the flesh of a little child.* In striking contrast to its former foul and diseased condition. *And he was clean.* His whole nature was free from its taint.

*Note 1.* Naaman returned to Samaria to give thanks to the prophet, and express his faith in God. Naaman wished to give his present to Elisha, but the prophet refused all reward.

2. The cure seems to have produced in Naaman the effects the prophet had desired, and he became a worshipper of Jehovah.

3. The narrative goes on to show how Gehazi, covetous at heart, almost undid the moral influence of his master, by going after Naaman, and by misrepresentations, taking a present from him. Like Achan, he coveted the gold and the raiment.

HEART OF THE LESSON.

1. Sin, in the heart and life, is well represented by the leprosy.

2. The great need of each heart, and of mankind, is cleansing from this deadly evil.

3. Those that realize its evil will be in earnest to find some way of escape.

4. The only way is by a change of heart and life, by the power of Jesus Christ, through a child-like obedience and trust.

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