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STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Notes.)

Lesson XI. March 15. 2 Kings 5: 15-27.

GEHAZI PUNISHED.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Be sure your sin will find you out." Num. 32: 23.

EXPLANATORY.

I. NAAMAN'S RETURN. 15. "And he returned to the man of God," probably in Samaria. The journey must have been about 30 miles. As this was not in the direction of his home, he lengthened his journey at least three days for the sake of expressing his gratitude.

FIRST, *He returned with a restored and healthful body*, as we saw in our last lesson.

SECOND, *He returned with a new born faith in God.* "And came (probably into Elisha's house), and stood before him," for the first time seeing the prophet, through whom he had been cured. Standing implies respectful honor to the prophet. "Behold, now I know." From what God had done for him. His own experience was an irrefutable argument. "That there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Naaman seems absolutely to renounce all belief in any other God but Jehovah. He does not mean that Jehovah is confined to Israel, for he himself would worship him in Syria. But the God then worshipped in Israel, and rejected elsewhere, was the only true God of all the earth. The others were not gods.

THIRD, *Naaman returned with a grateful heart.* "I pray thee, take a blessing (Rev. Ver. present) of thy servant." Because with a present there generally is given good wishes and benediction, the Hebrews frequently used blessing, as here, for a gift. Thus (Gen. 33: 11) Jacob calls the present which he had prepared for Esau by this name. "Take, I pray thee, my *blessing*." It was customary to give presents under such circumstances. Moreover, by this present Naaman would express his gratitude for the favor he had received.

EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE (1) are natural to a grateful heart. It desires to show both by words and by deeds the gratitude that is felt. Not to express it argues a meagreness of gratitude. (2) Expressing gratitude tends to increase and deepen the feeling. (3) This tends to make us do for others the good deeds which have awakened our gratitude. And (4) all this tends to ennoble the character and enlarge the soul.

16. "But he said," calling attention to his God, and showing that it was for religious reasons that he refused, "I will receive none." Kitto says that to decline a present was usually regarded as an incivility, if not an affront; but in this case Naaman himself was guilty of the incivility when he omitted to make the present before he proffered his request. But it was omitted by the prophet's sending his message to Naaman before he had time to proffer the present, and then his rage prevented him from doing it. These circumstances took away all incivility from the prophet's refusal, while they made Naaman more anxious that Elisha should accept his present.

Why did Elisha refuse? It would not have been wrong in itself to accept the present, for later on, it is implied that Elisha accepted one at Damascus (2 Kings 8: 7-10). But now every thing must bend to making a true religious impression upon Naaman and his company, that they might be missionaries of the true religion among the Syrians. True religion is God's free gift. It is Spiritual. No money can buy its blessings. No return can be made for them except faith, love, and obedience.

FOURTH, *Naaman returned with newre ligious life.*

17. "Shall there not then." Rev. Ver., *If not, yet I pray thee let there be given.* "Two mules' burden of earth." Lange says, that he wished to erect an altar of this earth, which should be, in the midst of a heathen country, a sign and monument of the God of Israel, and a memorial of the prophet of that God. His request was, therefore, the result of a strong and joyful faith rather than of a heathen delusion. "Nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." He would be an open rejecter of idolatry and a professed worshipper of Jehovah. He returned a happy convert to Jehovah, who, from his high official place could send forth an undoubted testimony to the throne, the court, and the people, of the power and goodness of the one *living and true God.*

18. "In this thing . . . pardon thy servant." Here came a question of apparent inconsistency with his profession and a question of conscience. Lange well says that this did not show signs that his faith was still wavering, undecided, and weak. It rather shows that he had a tender conscience, which desired to avoid an appearance of denying Jehovah, and which was forced to speak out its scruples and have them quieted. Such scruples would not have occurred to one who was wavering between service of God and service of the gods. "When my master goeth into the house (or temple) of Rimmon," the national god of the Syrians, signifying either most high, or pomegranate which from its many seeds was the symbol of fruitfulness, the generative power of nature. "And I bow myself in the house of Rimmon." He would have to appear to worship the idol, although in his heart he did not worship him.

19. "And he said unto him, Go in peace." The usual Oriental benediction. Did Elisha mean to approve of Naaman's course? Ought not Naaman to have avoided even the appearance of evil, at the cost of the loss of his position and wealth, and even life?

NOTE (1) that Naaman's course is no model for a young Christian convert. We cannot justify our conduct in our circumstances, by his conduct in his circumstances. He was only a heathen convert in the dim light of the past. (2) Two practical lessons follow from this subject: (1) The first is not to judge others by ourselves; (2) the second is not to excuse ourselves by others. (3) It is our duty to take up boldly the cross of Christ, and ever to confess Him before men.

II. GEHAZI'S VILLANY. "So he departed from him a little way." A length of ground, but it could not have been very far, or Gehazi could not have overtaken the cavalcade. There was no doubt some delay in getting off, so that Gehazi had time to think over his plans. This phrase belongs to the next verse. He had gone a little way when Gehazi bethought himself and ran after him.

20. "Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God." Living with such a man, in such a home, amid religious teachings, and the marvellous works of God, Gehazi became a villain. He might, perhaps, have been the successor of Elisha; he might surely have been a great power for good, but he failed. Judas became a traitor amid the very teaching of Jesus. It is possible to live in a Christian family, and not be a Christian. It is possible to print the Bible, and not believe it, to use profane language in the act of printing the Lord's prayer. A man may even preach the gospel and be a devil. Circumstances do not make us good, nor can they prevent us from being good.

FIRST, COVETOUSNESS. "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman." Like Achan, who could not bear to see so much wealth wasted at Jericho, when he might so easily gain possession of it, Gehazi hated to see such riches leave his master's house, for a mere religious scruple, a sentiment. Doubtless he had often been pinched to obtain the things he wanted for himself and master. The love of money is a root of all evil. Here covetousness was the root from which grew many sins and calamities.

SECOND, PROFANITY. "But, as the Lord liveth." This was taking the name of the Lord in vain, on a trivial subject, in a trivial manner. It was entirely different when Elisha used the same words (ver. 16).

THIRD, LYING. 21. "And when Naaman saw him (Rev. Ver. *one*) running after him." On an Eastern road the travellers were not numerous, and any one in hot pursuit would at once be noticed, and it would be felt that he was anxious that the travellers in front should halt. "He lighted down from the chariot to meet him." As Gehazi approached, Naaman would recognize him; for Gehazi may have been the messenger first sent to bid the Syrian go and wash in Jordan, and he had clearly been by his master's side during the subsequent interview. Anxious therefore to show his gratitude, the superior lights down from his chariot. This was an act of much condescension, and is an index of Naaman's feeling. To alight from a vehicle to offer salutations, was to acknowledge the person saluted as a superior or equal. "Is all well?" Literally, Is there peace? He feared that some evil must have befallen Elisha.

22. 'All is well." Nothing is the matter with the prophet. "My master hath sent me." Gehazi's facility in lying, his skill in making up a plausible story, argue that lying was no new accomplishment of his, but one in which skill had been gained by practice. Wickedness often cultivates skill in details, while it always fails in the larger issues and real values of life. "There be come to me from mount (Rev. Ver., *the hill country of*) Ephraim." The Gilgal mentioned in the previous chapter (4: 38) seems to have been near the hill country of Ephraim. There, we know, there was a college of prophets, and in the neighborhood may have been others. From all these centres the members would come to Elisha for counsel. Gehazi uses one of the probably common incidents of the prophet's life to form the foundation for his deceit. The communities of prophets would naturally be poor, and few things were more likely than that they should reach Samaria in need both of money and clothing. The story was full of plausibility. "A talent of silver." $1,600 to $1,800. A large sum to ask for such a purpose, and all he dared to ask. Gehazi had to balance between his own avarice on the one hand, and the fear of raising suspicion on the other.

23. "Take two talents. And he urged him." Naaman was more than glad to do something for Elisha, and gave all that would be received. "And laid them upon two of his servants." Both from courtesy, and because the weight would be too much for Gehazi to carry so far alone, the two talents weighing over 205 pounds avoirdupois.

24. "When he came to the tower." (Rev. Ver., hill; Hebrew, Ophel.) The question arises: What hill is meant? And it appears best to understand it of some eminence near the house of Elisha. All Samaria was hilly in character (see 1 Kings 16: 24). "He took them from their hand." We may conjecture that the hill, which must have lain between Elisha's house and the place where Gehazi overtook Naaman, interrupted the view in this direction, and that Gehazi dismissed Naaman's servants at this point lest they should be seen from his master's residence.

FOURTH, CHEATING. Lying is usually for the purpose of cheating. Gehazi obtained this wealth on false pretences. It was not his by any right whatever.

FIFTH, HYPOCRISY. 25. "But he went in, and stood before his Master," as if nothing had been done. He took his usual place, with placid face and folded hands. He was a hypocrite, that is, one who wears a mask, who acts one character while he is another. One may smile and smile, and be a villain. "And he said, Thy servant went no whither." Another lie. Lying naturally follows wrong doing.

SIXTH, TREASON TO RELIGION AND COUNTRY. 26. "Went not mine heart with thee." The prophet means to say, Was I not with thee in spirit—did I not see the whole transaction, as if I had been present at it? He uses the verb went, because Gehazi has just denied his going. "Is it a time to receive money, etc.?" Elisha, in all he had done for Naaman had sought to teach him the nature of the true God, and to lead him to worship Him. God's blessings were free; they could not be purchased.

NOTE THE SOCIALITY OF SIN. Sins go in clusters. They are clannish. One attracts or begets another. A sin seldom or never lives alone. Men swear, to hide a lie. They lie, to hide a theft. They steal, because they covet.

III. GEHAZI'S PUNISHMENT. 27. "The leprosy therefore of Naaman," whose money he had taken, "shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever." Leprosy is hereditary. A man cannot sin and not curse his children as well as himself. He had in his body the outward sign of the leprosy of his soul. "And he went out from his presence." See Gehazi as he goes out of Elisha's presence, and regard him as a specimen of those who having been judged on the last day will—depart! Men should consider the price they really pay for their success. "A leper as white as snow." Both here and elsewhere in this phrase, the words as white are inserted to explain the comparison. (Compare Num. 12: 10). As the incrustation of leprosy is sometimes rather rose-colored than white, it seems likely that the point of the comparison is not the whiteness only, but that likeness which it bears to a light, downlike covering, as if the limbs had been sprinkled over in the manner, though not always with the color of snow.

Was this punishment severe? Punishment is the Cain mark God puts upon sin. A light punishment would have been unfitting for such sins and evils as Gehazi had done. Nothing less would have produced the right effect upon his age, or upon other ages. Neither would any less affliction have had sufficient influence upon Gehazi himself. It was intended that the leprosy of the body should drive out the leprosy of the soul. Whether it succeeded or not, it was intended for Gehazi's good, as well as for a warning to others. How sad it was to fall from the assistant of a prophet, the promoter of the moral and spiritual welfare of a nation, to be philtered in all history through all ages as a WARNING.

A Chinese View of Us.

"Your superior skill in the mathematical and mechanical arts we are ready to acknowledge," a learned Chinese once said to me, "but you must concede to us the palm of philosophy and letters." This estimate is the prevailing one among educated Chinese as they compare our civilization with their own. It may be modified, and doubtless will be, by further acquaintance; but it shows that they are not imposed on by the glitter of wealth or the noise of machinery. The material progress on which we vaunt ourselves weighs light in their scales when poised against moral principles and æsthetic culture. A letter of Mr. Yungwig, the well-known scholar and diplomat, has fallen into my hands, of which the following is an extract. Certain zealous Americans had the doubtful taste to invite his assistance in a "convention for promoting the general adoption of republican government." He replies: "In view of what the general government has done for the past twenty years in the way of enacting obnoxious laws against the Chinese, and without any provocation flinging insult after insult in the very teeth of the Chinese government, I cannot for the life of me see how republicanism is to become universal, or how the torch of American liberty is to enlighten the Eastern races when they are shut out from its light." I feel confident that this would meet with similar confirmation on other points if we had access to the unpublished reports of the Chinese mission of inquiry.—*W. A. P. Martin, in the February Forum.*

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Then there are certain minute plants, some of them quite microscopic, which grow in wayside pools, and which move continually in whorls or spirals, without any moving influence in the water. In a myriad forms of this minute life, the erudition of the profoundest men of science is required to determine whether they are animal or vegetable in their nature. And then who knows whether the scientists are quite right? The moral of the whole matter is that life in the two forms is identical. But what have you said when you have said that? Does the fact of the identity prove that there is spirit in matter, or that animal, human intelligence is merely a phase of matter? You pay the money of your education and take your choice of the two horns of the dilemma.—*Transcript.*

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