

The Sunday School

BIBLE LESSON.

Abridged from Peloubet's Notes.

Third Quarter, 1904.

JULY TO SEPTEMBER.

Lesson III.—July 17.—Asa's Good Reign.
—11 Chronicles 14: 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee.—11 Chron. 14: 11.

EXPLANATORY.

I. REHOBAM AND ABIJAH: TWO KINGS THAT TRUSTED IDOLS.—2 Chron. 11, 12, 13, with the parallel passage, 1 Kings 14: 21 to 15: 24. Rehoboam's reign of 22 years over Israel covered Rehoboam's reign of 17 years over Judah, the three years of his son Abijah, and the beginning of Asa's reign.

Abijah, who trusted God in an emergency, Abijah ("Jah is my father"—called "Abijam" in Kings) is a name given to a son both by Rehoboam and Jeroboam, in an apparent rivalry of piety. Second Chronicles 13 records a great battle between Abijah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, in which Abijah roundly rebuked the king of Israel for his desertion of Jehovah. Though outnumbered and outflanked, Abijah was granted a great victory.

II. ASA TRUSTS GOD AND DESTROYS IDOLS.—Vs. 1-5. Abijah's reign lasted only three years. He was buried in Jerusalem, leaving the kingdom of Judah to his son Asa (whose name, perhaps, means "healer.") He ruled for 41 years, contemporary with seven kings of Israel.

2. AND ASA DID THAT WHICH WAS GOOD. We do not know how the seed of righteousness was planted in Asa's heart, but he nurtured it in the face of great obstacles, and so proved the power of his character.

3. FOR HE TOOK AWAY THE ALTARS OF THE STRANGE GODS. "The gods of foreign origin." AND THE HIGH PLACES. Altars and shrines of heathen worship, on hills or rising ground. The Hebrews found these "high places" when they conquered Canaan, and used them for the worship of Jehovah. This practice tended to degrade the true religion to the level of heathenism, so that the Hebrews were commanded to worship only at Jerusalem (Lev. 26: 30; Deut. 12: 17-14). The statement in 1 Kings 15: 14 that the high places were not taken away may indicate that in spite of Asa's reform the worship of Jehovah on some of the high places continued.

AND BRAKE DOWN THE IMAGES. R. V., "pillars," margin "obelisks." "This 'pillar' was a monolith standing by an altar as a symbol of the god worshipped at the altar."

AND CUT DOWN THE GROVES. R. V., "the Asherim." An Asherah was probably a wooden pole, which was planted beside an altar as a symbol of a deity. It appears to have been a survival of tree-worship, as the "pillar" was a survival of stone worship. The Asherah of itself did not represent any particular deity, but it could be carved to bear the symbol of any special god or goddess, e.g., of Astarte. "Nature-worship in practice became throughout the Semitic world a system of immorality legalized and fostered under the name of devotion to the goddess of lust. The favorite symbol of this goddess, tantamount to an 'idol,' was a tree, and her worship was chiefly carried on in groves, or other places where the rich luxuriance of the vegetable world suggested the attributes of Astarte, the Semitic Venus."

4. AND COMMANDED JUDAH. He not only did right himself, but he taught and trained his people to do right. TO DO THE LAW AND THE COMMANDMENTS. "The decalogue and the ceremonial law."

5. HE TOOK AWAY, etc. Not only from Jerusalem, but from all the cities of Judah. THE IMAGES. R. V., "sun-images." Pillars for sun-worship. "Such images were representations of Baal, the old sun-god, the male counterpart of Astarte." AND THE KINGDOM WAS QUIET. At peace for ten years (vs. 1.)

III. ASA TRUSTS GOD IN PROSPERITY.—Vs. 6, 7. The rewards of virtue are not all reserved for the next life, but they begin gloriously in this. Asa's uprightness brought him prosperity.

6. HE BUILT FENCED (FORTIFIED) CITIES. Doubtless restoring Rehoboam's fortifications (2 Chron. 11: 5-11), which Shishak had destroyed.

7. WHILE THE LAND IS YET BEFORE US. While our movements are unimpeded by an enemy. "Apparently Asa had rebelled against Egypt and expected an invasion."

IV. ASA TRUSTS GOD IN ADVERSITY.—Vs. 8-15. Asa was prepared for adversity because he did not forget God in his prosperity.

8. ASA HAD AN ARMY consisting of 580,000 men of valor—not a standing army, but a trained militia, summoned from their ordinary occupations when war broke out. Judah's troops were ordinarily heavy-armed (like the Greek hoplites) and bore TARGETS, large oval or rectangular shields covering the whole body. Benjamin's troops went

light-armed (like the Greek peltasts) and carried bows, and small round SHIELDS or bucklers.

9. ZERAH THE ETHIOPIAN, or Cushite, a descendent of Cush, son of Ham. The tendency of recent discoveries is to identify Zerah with Osorkon II., who may have been of Ethiopian descent; or perhaps Zerah was his general. A THOUSAND THOUSAND. A million, "the largest collected army of which we hear in Scripture; but Darius Cordomannus brought into the field at Arbela a force of 1,040,000. Xerxes crossed into Greece with above a million; and Artaxerxes Mnemon collected 1,260,000 men to meet the attack of the younger Cyrus. CAME UNTO MARSHAN. A city just on the borders of the hill country, 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Here Micah was born. The army came from Egypt by the northern route, along the coast, near the land of the Philistines.

10. THEN ASA WENT OUT AGAINST HIM. R. V., "to meet him." IN THE VALLEY. Rather a sloping, hilly moorland, which separated the Philistine plain from the Judean highlands. ZEPHATHAN is (counting from the north) the fourth of the five valleys that break through this borderland, giving the only access to Judah.

11. ASA CRIED UNTO THE LORD. Even if all his army was present, he was outnumbered two to one, and greatly needed Jehovah's aid. IT IS NOTHING WITH THEE TO HELP. If a man should help an ant rolling its food along, it would make no difference to the man whether the ant's burden was large or small; so even our greatest difficulties are trifles to God. THE R. V., however translates it, "there is none beside thee to help." LET NOT MAN PREVAIL AGAINST THEE. For Asa, by his ten years of faithful obedience, had identified himself with God's cause.

12. SO THE LORD SMOTE THE ETHIOPIANS BEFORE ASA. "The natural outcome of such prayer and trust." "The sole occasion in sacred history in which an Israelite army met and defeated one of the great world powers in open battle."

The pursuit extended far into Philistine territory, to Gerar below Gaza. The invading army was routed beyond recovery, the Philistine cities, that had probably aided the enemy, were punished, and with an immense amount of booty Asa returned triumphantly to Jerusalem.

Lessons from Asa's trust. 1. It was the natural outgrowth of a God-fearing life.

2. It was based upon a humble consciousness of his own weakness and God's power and love.

3. Yet Asa did not fail to do what he could, and then trusted God for the rest.

4. And so God gave Asa the most notable victory ever won by Hebrew arms. In the same way, if we trust God and obey him he will enable us to come off "more than conquerors" in any battle against evil.

LORD CHARLES BERESFORD.

Like many other boys who have risen to eminence, Lord Charles Beresford was the despair of both his parents and teachers. On his thirteenth birthday the choice of a calling was put before young Beresford by his father asking him whether he would enter the army or navy or take up orders. "Well," he concluded, "what is it to be?"

"The navy," was Beresford's immediate reply.

"And why the Navy boy?" pursued the father.

"I'd like to be an admiral, like Nelson," "Pshaw! Like Nelson! Why Nelson?"

"Because I want to."

"But even if you were in the navy, why do you think you will ever become an admiral?"

"—Because I mean to," was the curt and emphatic reply.

HOW TO KEEP FROM WHIPPING OXEN.

A good way of overcoming an evil habit is by engaging actively in something better. Doing right with all our energies is, for the time being at least, a sure antidote to a temptation to do wrong. An old farmer was inclined to whip his oxen impulsively as he went along the country road. This habit troubled him as well as his oxen. He found that his best way to overcome it was by deliberately singing "Old Hundred;" then he didn't want to break in on a sacred tune by lashing his oxen. A jig tune might not have helped him, but a psalm tune did. There was a lesson for some of us, as well as relief to the oxen, in that farmer's experience.

LIBERTY AND LAW.

"The only laws with which he cannot take liberties are the inner ones. And this is true because, as Jesus taught, the kingdom of God is within us, not without us. What is less than God we can control, because he has given us charge of it. But God himself and his kingdom, which he has written in the nature and heart of man himself, must be and will be obeyed. Singularly economics by the increased estimate under Christian inspiration and guidance which it has put upon man has supplied the newest form of the argument for the existence of God. Man is an economic animal, but one that reasons thinks, has memory, can suffer through time and mingle in the present many intangible and mighty forces which cannot be reduced to statistics. Thus the spiritual valuations in man's life have acquired great economic importance. It is of greater importance that a man shall feel that justice is being done than that he shall have a full dinner pail. The full pail with conscious injustice prevailing will never, as it has never, still the anger and cupidity of man.—A. A. Berle.

THE MISSES AT SCHOOL.

There was once a school
Where the mistress, Miss Rule,
Taught a number of misses that vexed her;
Miss Chief was the lass
At the head of the class,
And young Miss Demeanor was next her,
Poor little Miss Hap
Spilled the ink in her lap,
And Miss Fortune fell under the table;
Miss Conduct they all
Did a Miss Creant call,
And Miss State declared this was a fable.
Miss May lost her book,
And Miss Lead undertook
To show her the place where to find it;
But upon the wrong nail
Had Miss Place hung her veil,
And Miss Deed hid the book safe behind it.
They went on very well,
As I have heard to tell,
Till Miss Take brought in Miss Understanding;
Miss Conjecture then guessed
Evil things of the rest,
And Miss Counsel advised their disbanding.
The Advance.

CLEVER ANTS.

Dr. Flagg tells an interesting story of some ants he had observed: "A pie was placed on a shelf in a cupboard, with a wide ring of molasses encircling the plate. The ants discovered it, and wanting pie for breakfast, they set out to get in. They first marched about the ring, leaving an ant here and there at places which were seen to be less wide than the rest of the ring. Then they carefully selected the narrowest place; and, going to an old nail hole in the wall, they formed an endless stream of porters, each bringing a grain of plaster. They built a causeway through the molasses of these bits of lime, and in three hours from the time of discovery, they were eating the pie.—Ex.

A MEAN MAN.

"That Charley Pinchback is a mean man." "What has he done?" "You know he's engaged to Tilda Rickrack. Well, he found a ring some here at a bargain, and gave it to her. It was too small for her finger. What do you suppose he did?" "What?" "Advised her to diet until she could get it on."—Ex.

"I am deeply interested in discovering the Lost Tribes of Israel," said Mr. Musty, as he came in and sat down by the busy editor for an hour's discussion of the subject.

"So?" replied the man of resources. "Why don't you advertise for them? The business office is on the first floor. Here, Dan, show the gentleman to the advertising department."

EFFORT AT RECONCILIATION.

A London paper tells an excellent story in connection with the sentries in front of Buckingham Palace. It appears that their custom of meeting face to face for a moment, and then separating without a word, having cut each other dead, is a continual source of discomfort to sympathetic Americans. One morning a visitor from the United States found it too much for him. "Come boys," he said, soothingly, "make it up." Whether the sentries responded to the touching appeal is not recorded.



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