



LESSON III.—JULY 17.

Asa's Good Reign.

II. Chronicles xiv., 1-12.

Golden Text.

'Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee.' II. Chronicles xiv., 11.

Home Readings.

Monday, July 11.—II. Chron. xiv., 1-15.
 Tuesday, July 12.—I. Kings xv., 1-10.
 Wednesday, July 13.—I. Kings xv., 25-34.
 Thursday, July 14.—II. Chron. xv., 1-9.
 Friday, July 15.—II. Chron. xv., 10-19.
 Saturday, July 16.—II. Chron. xvi., 1-14.
 Sunday, July 17.—I. Kings xv., 16-24.

1. So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years.
2. And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God:
3. For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves:
4. And commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandments.
5. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him.
6. And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the Lord had given him rest.
7. Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered.
8. And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and four-score thousand: all these were mighty men of valor.
9. And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah.
10. Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.
11. And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee.
12. So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled.

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

INTRODUCTION.

Last week we learned of the idolatry of the Northern kingdom, Israel, under Jeroboam. This week we turn to the history of Judah, the Southern kingdom.

Rehoboam reigned seventeen years, years full of trouble, as the record says, 'And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, all their days.' I. Kings xiv., 30. Moreover, Shishak, King of Egypt, attacked Judah and, in spite of the defenses Rehoboam built, he lost a number of cities, and Jerusalem was saved only by the surrender of the treasures of the temple and the king's palace. The shields of gold which Solomon had made, were taken, and were replaced with bronze shields. See II. Chronicles xii., 5-12. This trouble came upon Rehoboam for the idolatry and the

wickedness of himself and his people. He is classed with the kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord. He was succeeded by his son, Abijah, called Abijam in I. Kings, who reigned but three years, and 'walked in all the sins of his father.'

Asa, the son of Abijah, was the third king of Judah. He seems to have been about twenty years old, according to Rawlinson, when he came to the throne, and he 'did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.' He reigned forty-one years, during which seven kings ruled in Israel. Asa's reign began in Judah as Jeroboam's was closing in Israel.

This lesson is taken from II. Chronicles, though the last one was from I. Kings. I. and II. Kings originally formed one book, as did I. and II. Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Kings and Chronicles cover the period during which the people were ruled by kings, both before and after the division. Chronicles, however, is the fuller history, and contains genealogies of Israel.

THE LESSON STUDY.

Verse 1. 'So Abijah slept with his fathers.' After continuing the evil way of his father for three years, Abijah died, and was buried in Jerusalem. He was succeeded by his son, Asa, and 'the land was quiet for ten years.' After the troubles and disasters of the two preceding reigns God granted a rest to the country with the coming of a new king. The Lord punished the Jews for their sins, but he did not allow the punishment to continue until they were utterly destroyed as a people.

2-5. 'And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.' A great change is now coming about for Israel. Since Solomon turned to idols (I. Kings xi., 4), Jerusalem had not known a righteous king. But Asa does right in God's sight, 'for he took away the altars of the strange gods,' and proceeded to abolish completely the worship of idols in Judah.

Having put away the outward means of sinning, Asa turned to the people themselves, 'and commanded Judah to seek the Lord.' A revival of the true religion was now started in Judah, and the people were returning to God. If you intend to be at peace with your Lord, the idols and the altars you have set up in your own heart must be given up. Matthew xvi., 24-26.

Asa's good character is a source of encouragement to persons who have not had the great help of Christian parents and a Christian home. Here was a man whose ancestors for three generations had done evil and worshipped idols, and had sunk the kingdom into idolatry and great wickedness, yet he rises, by the help of God, above all this and lifts his nation with him back to the worship of God.

6-8. 'So they built and prospered.' Having looked after the spiritual needs of his people Asa now turned to their temporal interests, a very good order of procedure. 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'

As we have noted, the king of Egypt had attacked Judah in the time of Rehoboam and had taken several cities, so that the land was naturally in urgent need of better defences. Asa urged the building of fortified cities during this time of peace—'while the land is yet before us.' It had been conjectured that he had thrown off the oppressive relations with the king of Egypt, and was consequently expecting an invasion.

Notice that Asa, in verse 7, attributes the peace and prosperity during this early part of his reign to the fact that they had sought the Lord. It was right also to take the usual precautions for defending his kingdom, even while looking to God for protection. We are to trust God and do the best we can in temporal affairs.

Not only were the walls and towers of the cities put into good condition but Asa had an army drawn from his two tribes, and numbering five hundred and eighty thousand men. The soldiers of Judah were more heavily armed than those of Benjamin.

9-12. 'Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude.' Asa and his people came to a day, after their years of peace, when they had need of all these preparations.

'And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots.' Zerah is not yet identified for a certainty in secular his-

tory, but he must have been a ruler of considerable power to have an army of a million men, 'the largest collected army of which we hear in Scripture,' says one commentator.

Here was Asa outnumbered about two to one. What was he to do? He follows the same rule that he followed in setting his kingdom aright—remembered God first. Notice his faith in God's power. 'Lord,' he cried, 'it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power.' This son of idolatrous and evil ancestors had come to possess true faith and reliance on God.

He had done his best to prepare his people for their own defense, but he confesses that God can save them regardless of the power they possess, and he relies on him. What was the result? Judah was overwhelmingly victorious.

If we follow out Asa's history, we discover that he was not always as faithful to God as at first, and the brighter part of his reign came at the beginning, still he is reckoned as one of the good kings.

The lesson for July 24 is 'Jehoshaphat's Reform.' II. Chronicles xix., 1-11.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, July 17.—Topic—The world's gain through universal peace. Psalm xlvii., 9-11; Isa. ii., 2-4.

Junior C. E. Topic.

GIVING.

Monday, July 11.—Beginning a long journey. Gen. xxviii., 1-5.

Tuesday, July 12.—A vision and a promise Gen. xxviii., 10-17.

Wednesday, July 13.—A cheerful giver. II. Cor. ix., 6, 7.

Thursday, July 14.—Willing givers. Ex. xxv., 2.

Friday, July 15.—Generous giving. Prov. xi., 25.

Saturday, July 16.—Blessedness of giving. Acts xx., 35.

Sunday, July 18.—Topic—A lesson in giving. Gen. xxviii., 12-22; I. Cor. xvi., 2.

Aim every shot at the centre. Select a few good points and enlarge on them. In this way they will most likely be remembered. And three good points well developed are worth more than three times as many just suggested and then left only to be forgotten.

The Teacher's Duty.

Any worker in a live Sunday-school or in a dead-and-alive one, ought to do his best to secure an improvement in his charge; but the poorer the condition of the school the greater the need, and hence the possible value of his work. It is a shame for a Sunday-school worker to close a school, to suspend a teachers' meeting, or to give up a class on the ground of its sickness. The writer once visited a poverty-stricken home, where he saw an emaciated little child lying in evident neglect on an uncleanly bed. Asking the mother if a physician had seen that child, he learned that nothing was done for the little one. 'And why not?' he inquired. 'Ah! it's a sickly one. It's not worth the raising,' was the cold-blooded response. That mother did not propose to waste her strength upon a dead-and-alive little one. And she was of much the same spirit as a Sunday-school worker who abandons his charge because of its sickness.—'Living Epistle.'

How many who pass through our colleges learn only to use big words to express little thoughts.—Bishop Spalding.

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