

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON I.

Jan. 6, 1878. } REHOBOAM, FIRST KING OF JUDAH. { 2 Chron. xli. 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"When he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him." Verse 12.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. 1 Chron. xxix. 10-30.....Solomon succeeds David.
T. 1 Kings xi. 4-13.....The division foretold.
W. 2 Chron. ix. 22-31.....End of Solomon's reign.
Th. 2 Chron. x. 1-19.....The division accomplished.
F. 2 Chron. xi. 1-17.....Rehoboam's early reign.
S. 2 Chron. xii. 1-16.....End of Rehoboam's reign.
S. James iv. 1-10.....Grace to the humble.

HELPS TO STUDY.

We return now to the Old Testament history. There are two PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS to be answered.

1. *Who wrote and what is the purpose of the Book from which the lessons for the ensuing quarter are taken?*

In the Hebrew canon the Chronicles form a single book, entitled, "Book of the Events of the Times." It begins with Adam, and ends abruptly in the middle of Cyrus' decree of restoration. The continuation of the narrative is found in the Book of Ezra, which begins by repeating 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23, and filling up the fragment of the decree of Cyrus. A closer examination leads to the conclusion that Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, were originally one work, displaying throughout the peculiarities and language of a single editor, who was most probably Ezra.

The great object of Ezra and his contemporaries was to re-infuse something of national life and spirit into the heart of the people, and to make them feel that they were still the inheritors of God's covenantal mercies. The threads of the old national life broken by the captivity have again to be gathered up. The people require to be reminded of their entire history, to be shown that their prosperity depended upon their faithfulness to Jehovah, and that their sins were the cause of their overthrow and humiliation. It is with these aims that the past history of the Kingdom of David is re-written in the Books of Chronicles, with frequent allusions to recent events and constant reiteration of their great religious teachings.

2. *What is the connection of our present series with the last series of Old Testament lessons?* We begin now at the same point as we did last year, the division of the Kingdom. Read over the notes on the first lessons of 1877. We traced the Kingdom of Israel to its end. We are now about to follow out the parallel progress of the Kingdom of Judah.

Upon the death of Solomon, Rehoboam his son was made king, (2 Chron. ix. 31.) He refused to redress the grievances of the people. Consequently ten tribes revolted and made Jeroboam their king. (2 Chron. x. 16-19; 1 Kings xii. 19, 20.) Rehoboam raised an army of 180,000 men to subdue the rebels, but was compelled by Divine constraint to relinquish his intention.

Our lesson brings before us, first, his

1. TRANSGRESSION AND ITS PUNISHMENT: Verses 1-5.

1. *The king's sin.*—Verse 1. After he was recalled from his intended expedition against Israel he proceeded to establish the kingdom, by fortifying his capital, which he surrounded with a chain of fortresses, garrisoned cities in which he placed princes of his house, 2 Chron. xi. 5-12; and by welcoming the faithful priests and worshippers of Jehovah who were driven from the kingdom of Israel by Jeroboam, 2 Chron. xi. 13-17.

Thus he strengthened himself, but not in God, Ps. lii. 7; Prov. xvi. 2. It was an ungodly, and therefore a false prosperity, Ps. lxxiii. 12; lxxxi. 12.

He forsook the law of the Lord, Jer. ii. 13; 1 Kings ix. 9. The prosperity of fools is their destruction. There are peculiar dangers in the possession of great wealth or power. Dan. iv. 30; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16.

All Israel with him, Ps. xiv. 3; cvi. 21; Hos. xiii. 9. *What waste of opportunities is here.* Rehoboam was of mature age (forty-one years); he inherited the temple, the treasures, the experience of David and Solomon; he had the best material of all Israel in a small compact territory. But he utterly fails to improve his blessings. Let us beware. No one can excuse an unfaithful stewardship upon the plea of lack of opportunity.

Dependence upon self leads to forsaking God. No man can sin alone. The sinner drags down others with him. The more prominent his position, the more dire will be the effects of his bad example.

2. *The suffering which followed the sin,* Verses 2-5. In the fifth year. The king's apostasy began in the fourth year. Retribution quickly follows. Even in this is seen God's mercy, in sending the discipline before the sinners had become hardened in guilt.

Shishak, king of Egypt, (note 1) came up.—An ancient enemy becomes again God's rod for the chastisement of his people. God often uses the pride and ambition of one man to punish the sin and folly of another.

Because they had transgressed.—Sin was the bad policy which wrought ruin.

Without number.—A vast array of roving hordes. (Note 2.) Judges vi. 5; 2 Chron. xiv. 12; xvi. 8; Nahum iii. 9; Jer. xli. 9-10.

Then came Shemaiah.—Once before he had appeared to prevent bloodshed. 2 Chron. xi. 2-4. Now he comes interpreting the meaning of their calamities. Prophets were not sent to gratify idle curiosity, but to set forth God's will. Forsaken me. They that leave God's law (verse 1) leave God himself. I have left you. The worst of all calamities. Jud. x. 13; 2 Chron. xv. 2.

When God forsakes a man or a nation, what avails strength or policy?

Punishment follows sin as surely, though not always so closely as our shadow follows us.

God makes use of various instruments, and is as directly the Worker in ordinary methods as in miracles.

II. PENITENCE AND PROSPERITY: Verses 6-12. Humbled themselves. "Even kings and princes must either bend or break before God, either be humbled or be ruined." Trouble is not in vain when it brings men to humility. Hos. v. 15. God brings men and nations low that they may look upward. "From the top of a tower one looks on the earth; but, from the bottom of a well, one sees the stars." So these men in their humility began to understand God's character; for they said, The Lord is righteous. Lam. i. 18. They learnt also submission to God's righteous dealings. The Lord saw their sorrow as quickly as He saw their sin. Luke xv. 20. "I will not destroy." "Those who acknowledge God righteous will find Him gracious."

My wrath shall not be poured out.—Their lives were spared, and the city was not destroyed. He in whose hand is the heart of kings, so turned Shishak from his purpose, that he was content with the spoils of the temple and the palace without molesting the city.

Nevertheless, repentance restores to favour; but God often still permits the consequences of the sin to overtake the sinner, not in anger but in mercy. What would have been punishment to the ungodly, becomes discipline to the penitent. They shall be his servants. Every one has a master. If not God, it is the evil one. That they may know my service, that is, know by sad experience, the difference between the easy yoke which God put upon them and the hard service of their enemies. It is well when the bitterness of sin makes men realize the sweetness of God's service.

Shishak took away the treasures, the vast wealth accumulated by David and Solomon. He took all. 2 Kings xxv. 13-15. What a humiliation. The shields of gold. There were 500 of them, 200 larger ones, worth probably about \$3000 each, and 300 smaller ones. 1 Kings ix. 16; x. 16-17.

Shields of brass.—Thus the king tried to hide his shame. Oh, the folly of pretence! Foolish hearts seek to keep up the shadow of greatness when its reality is gone. Verse 11 means that the shields were only taken out of the place where they were kept, when they were borne by the body-guard, as the king went in state to the house of the Lord.

In Judah things went well.—Literally, "there were good things." The good things of grace. There was more real prosperity in the humiliation of the kingdom than there had been in its power.

Penitence averts God's anger.

He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Rehoboam's reign presents four periods, which are alternately bad and good.

First, we see the vain youth contemptuously refusing Israel's petition, threatening them with a heavier yoke and sorer chastisement, and, when the standard of revolt is set up, first ignominiously fleeing to the capital, and then preparing a vast army to crush the insurgent tribes. Here Rehoboam is the vain, cowardly, and tyrannical despot.

Second, we see how open he was to influence, whether good or bad. Jehovah's prophet warns him not to fight with Israel, and at once he refrains, and then wisely sets about fortifying the cities of Judah, and so guarding against an attack on the part of Jeroboam. And God rewards him by bringing back to his allegiance the priests and Levites of the northern tribes, and all "such as set their hearts to seek the Lord," thus strengthening the kingdom in the best possible way, by supplying it with a godly population. Here Rehoboam is the obedient and favored successor of David and Solomon.

Third, we see Rehoboam spoiled by prosperity. When he "had established the kingdom and strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord." Then comes in the parallel account in 1 Kings xiv., detailing the apostasy of the people; and then the ravages of Shishak, the first invasion by a foreign power for nearly a century. Here Rehoboam is the backsliding idolater, bringing calamity on the people.

Fourth, we see the king and the princes, at the word of the same prophet they obeyed before, "humbled themselves before God," and, in consequence, God mercifully granting deliverance; and then, apparently, an improved condition of things for the rest of the reign (see verse 12). Here Rehoboam appears as the returning prodigal.

In which of these four periods was Rehoboam like us? If the first or the third, repent! If the second or the fourth, be humble, thankful, steadfast!

Why have changing periods of the kind at all? How much happier to be whole-hearted in God's service.

But we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves. Therefore let us "prepare our hearts to seek the Lord," whose grace is all-sufficient.

FOR THE LITTLE ONES.

I wonder how many of these boys ever climbed to high places? And do you ever fall? Would you rather fall from a high place, or from a low place? Being proud is something like being in a high place; not just the kind of high places about which we have been talking.

When Rehoboam was first made king, he obeyed God's law. He was not proud, so we will say he was in a low place, that is, he was humble, and God blessed him and made him a great king. More and more people, because they did not wish to worship golden calves, came to live in his country, and Rehoboam built many cities. When Rehoboam became so great he grew proud; so proud that when he had been King four years, he thought only about pleasing himself, and stopped worshipping God and trying to please him; then God punished Rehoboam. How many of you would like to know how God punished Rehoboam? Do you believe he let King Jeroboam and his soldiers take him? Yes. No, but God let another king named Shishak bring so many soldiers and people from a far country that King Rehoboam became frightened. Shall I read you from the

Bible, what word God sent to Rehoboam by his prophets? 2 Chron. xii. 5. "Ye have forsaken me; therefore have I also left you in the hands of Shishak;" he had forsaken God, and God had forsaken him. Rehoboam was afraid to fight Shishak without God for his helper, and he began to feel sorry for his proud ways, and cried to God to forgive him. The Bible tells us that when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him.

This is our Golden Text for to-day. God said to Rehoboam, "I will not let Shishak kill you, but you must be his servant and obey him, so that you will remember to obey me. Do you think Rehoboam was proud any longer? How was he then? Could he serve God better as a King or as a Servant? Can a proud heart or a humble heart serve God best? Let the Golden Text be repeated by the class in concert.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. Shishak.—The Sheshonk I. of the monuments, first sovereign of the Bulastic, or twenty-second dynasty of Egypt. The monuments confirm the chronology of the Bible. He was the old friend and supposed father-in-law of Jeroboam. Early in the present century, during the exploration of Egyptian ruins which commenced with Napoleon's occupation of the country, the monumental record of the identical invasion of Palestine by Shishak was discovered, sculptured upon the walls of the great temple of Karnak. It was a list of the countries, cities, and tribes conquered or ruled by him, or tributary to him.

2. Lubim.—Libyans, a nation on the African coast west of Egypt, and on the northern confines of the great desert. They seem to have been first reduced by the Egyptians, about B.C. 1250. Sukkim.—"Tent-dwellers," an Arab tribe dwelling in the deserts south of Palestine. Others believe them to be the Troglodytes, or "cave-dwellers," inhabiting the caverns of a mountain range on the coast of the Red Sea. Ethiopians.—"Dark-complexioned." They occupied the country south of Egypt, extending over modern Nubia, Senaar, and Northern Abyssinia. They were a dark-complexioned, stalwart race, "men of stature," and fine-looking. Fenced cities.—The walled cities which Rehoboam had fortified as a line of defence on his southern border. Chron. xi. 5-12.

THE ALTERED MOTTO.

Oh! the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be,
When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered:—
"All of self, and none of Thee."

Yet He found me; I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray: "Forgive them Father!"
And my wistful heart said faintly:—
"Some of self and some of Thee."

Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and ah! so patient!
Brought me lower, while I whispered:
"Less of self, and more of Thee."

Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, thy love at last hath conquered;
Grant me now my soul's desire:—
"None of self and all of Thee."

—Th. Monod.

WHEN I come to this blessed Word, which is God's Book, I am safe; and if I have to stand alone, I would stand alone. I love that word spoken by the great Reformer, when he was told that the world was against him—"Then," replied he, "I am against the world."—Rev. W. H. Krause.

Births, Marriages and Deaths.

NOT EXCEEDING FOUR LINES 25 CENTS.

MARRIED.

On December 19th, in Bolton village, at the residence of James Munzie, Esq., uncle of the bride, by Rev. P. Nicol, Mr. H. A. Bonnar, M.C.P. and S.O., of Chesley, County of Bruce, to Miss Maggie, daughter of Alexander Munzie, Esq., of Albion.

MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY.

TORONTO.—Knox Church, Toronto, on 3rd January.
LINDSAY.—At Woodville, on 26th of February.
BARRIE.—At Barrie, 1st Tuesday of February.
STRATFORD.—In Knox Church, Stratford, on 29th January, at 10 a.m.
WHITBY.—In St. Andrew's Church, Whitby, on 3rd Tuesday of December, at 11 a.m.
SAUGEEN.—At Mount Forest, on the third Tuesday of December, at 2 o'clock p.m.
OWEN SOUND.—In Division Street Church, Owen Sound, on Tuesday, 18th Dec., at 10 a.m.
KINGSTON.—In St. Andrew's Hall, Kingston, on Tuesday, 8th Jan., 1878, at 3 p.m.
PARIS.—At Tilsonburg, on Tuesday 18th Dec., at 7.30 p.m.
LONDON.—In first Presbyterian Church, London, on Tuesday 18th Dec., at 2 p.m.
OTTAWA.—In St. Andrew's Church, Ottawa, on Tuesday, 5th February, at 3 p.m.
CHATHAM.—In Wellington Church, Chatham, on 18th December, at 11 a.m.
PETERBOROUGH.—In the Mill Street Church, Port Hope, on the third Tuesday of January, at 1.30 p.m.