

Solomon. There was no difficulty about the succession; by divine command the throne belonged to David. Rehoboam had no rival in his family, as had been the case at his father's accession. Solomon's reign has been, not inaptly called, "the golden age" of Israel. Endowed with the divine gift of wisdom, he set himself to cultivate the arts or peace. Education, agriculture, and trade were encouraged; the temple was built and the royal palace was erected; vast commerce inaugurated, so that his fleet brought to his kingdom cargoes of merchandise and treasures from every known land. But Solomon, in old age, became little better than a heathen. He broke three special commands given (Deut. 17:16-17): "He shall not multiply horses to himself; neither shall he multiply wives to himself; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." But we are told (1 Kings 4:26). "Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots and twelve thousand horsemen." "And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines." "And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones" (2 Chron. 1:15).

A corrupt king makes a corrupt court, and a corrupt court makes a corrupt people. Indulgence in sin is fatal to either the individual or the nation. Rehoboam, in temper and disposition, was the true product of such perversion of the truth. Son of an apostate father and a heathen mother, he had a strong, hereditary bias toward wrong, and was heir to an accumulation of evils, the result of his father's godless extravagance. On his accession Rehoboam met the heads of the nation at the fine old city of Shechem, between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, then the metropolis of the tribe of Ephraim. David was made king at Hebron, and Solomon was crowned at Jerusalem. The change was ominous. It showed that the northern tribes were determined to stand for their rights. There was a bitter rivalry between Judah and Ephraim of long standing.

After the death of Saul there had been a separation under different kings (2 Sam. 2:4-10). After seven years the revolted tribes went over to David (2 Sam. 5:1-3). When King David removed his court from Shechem, transferring the tabernacle and centre of divine worship from Shiloh to Jerusalem, the Ephraimites and other northern tribes considered themselves slighted. Absalom, knowing this, used the circumstance to seduce them from allegiance to his father. Now the deflection breaks out anew. Jeroboam, a distinguished officer, and at one time a personal friend of Solomon, was called from Egypt, to which he had been banished for treason. By force of his own character he soon became the leader of the movement, demanding certain reforms. He had been informed by a prophet that he was to rule over five-sixths of the kingdom (1 Kings 11:29-37). Crafty and unscrupulous, he either forgot God or ignored Him. He seems never to have consulted Him in any matter. He had forgotten the lesson Jacob had learned at Peniel—"the strength of man is in God."

A crisis, political and religious, was at hand, requiring a wise head and a kind heart; unfortunately, that was what Rehoboam did not possess. When Jeroboam addressed him—"Thy father made our yoke grievous; now, therefore, make thou the grievous service of thy father lighter, and we will serve thee." This was Rehoboam's opportunity. He had a chance for continuous power and popularity, but he procrastinated in the face of danger; irresolute, he craved time.

Every man's character is discovered by the way he meets the emergencies which arise in his life.

Rehoboam consulted with the old men which had been his father's counsellors, but rejected their wise advice and turned to the young men who had "grown up with him." They fed his vanity and pride, and he belittled himself by becoming their echo.

A religiously inclined youth enquired of his pastor, "Do you think it would be wrong for me to study the noble art of self-defence?" "Certainly not," answered the minister; "I learned it in youth myself." "Indeed, sir! Did you learn Sullivan's or the old English system?" "Neither. I learned Solomon's system." "Solomon's system?" "Yes. You will find it laid down in the first verse of the fifteenth chapter of Proverbs—'A soft answer turneth away wrath.' It is the best system of self-defence of which I have any knowledge." It would have been well for Rehoboam if he had remembered his father's proverb and practiced its spirit in defending himself and his kingdom, instead of fulfilling his prediction, "A companion of fools will be destroyed." His haughty, scornful words was like a spark to the fuel of discontent, and started it into a blaze of rebellion. "Behold how great a fire a little matter kindleth." The insulting reply to their request was never forgiven nor forgotten by the ten tribes. The covenant nation was divided, followed by a succession of events, as sad as the history of our race records. Rehoboam continued his folly to the end of his life. His character and conduct are set before us, not for an example, but for our warning.

Jeroboam earned one of the worst epithets that was ever applied to man: "Jeroboam—who made Israel to sin."

Gibbon wrote of the religions of the Roman Empire, "They were all considered by the people as equally true, by the learned as equally false, and by the rulers as equally useful." The latter was Jeroboam's conception of religion.



LESSON 2.—JULY 10, 1898.

Elijah, the Prophet.

(Lesson Text: 1 Kings 17:1-16. Memory Verses: 2-6)
(Read the whole chapter.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord."—1 Kings 17:16.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday: 1 Kings 16:25-33. Tuesday: 1 Kings 17:1-7. Wednesday: 1 Kings 17:8-16. Thursday: 1 Kings 17:17-24. Friday: 1 Kings 18:1-16. Saturday: James 5:13-20. Sunday: Psalm 37:12-24.

The Heart of the Lesson.

Elijah, the prophet of solitude and malediction, came into view as suddenly as if he had just alighted from the chariot which was to await unseen, until, having fulfilled his course, it should bear him from earth to heaven.

We know something of the youth and young manhood of Moses as foster-son of Pharaoh's daughter in the Egyptian court, and we have a glimpse of Samuel's early training under Eli in the tabernacle at Shiloh. But Elijah's early life is unknown. He was the Melchizadeck among the prophets, "without father, without mother," having neither beginning of days nor end of life, without a cradle or a grave.

If Israel never had so impious a ruler as Ahab, she never had so peerless a prophet as Elijah. He was evidently not from the lap of luxury, or the home of affluence; he was certainly from obscurity, possibly from penury; a Nazarite unshorn, with rough garments and speech.

The bending spars that carry the white wings of