

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, January 14th, 1877.—The Sin of Jeroboam.—1 Kings xii. 25-33.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 26-31.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And he shall give Israel up, because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin." 1 Kings xiv. 16.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 1 Kings xii. 25-33. Tuesday, vs. 26; Mark vii. 14-23. Wednesday, vs. 28; Exodus xx. 1-21. Thursday, vs. 30; Psalm i. Friday, vs. 32; Deuteronomy xxix. Saturday, 1 Kings xiii. Sunday, 1 John 15-29.

ANALYSIS.—I. Jeroboam a Builder. Vs. 25. II. Jeroboam a Doubter. Vs. 26, 27. III. Jeroboam an Idolater. Vs. 28-33.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 25. Where was Shechem? Where Penuel?

Vs. 26. Jeroboam feared the return of his people to the house of David; upon what were his fears grounded? What did these fears show that he lacked?

Vs. 28. What was Jeroboam's scheme to prevent the realization of his fears? What did these two calves of gold possibly resemble? Where were they placed? Why? What commandment did this idolatry violate? Ex. xx. 4.

Vs. 30. How did this thing become a sin to the people? Which is worse, the follower or the leader of wickedness? How is Jeroboam regarded in Jewish history? 2 Kings x. 29.

Vs. 31. What one place for divine worship do Jeroboam's high places set aside? What order of ministry do his priests from the lowest of the people displace? How does he show himself careless of the appointed times for true worship?

Vs. 33. Who at last overthrew Jeroboam's altars? Compare 1 Kings xiii. 1, 2, with 2 Kings xxiii. 15, 16 (s. c. 975-625). In reviewing this lesson, what should you say is its practical teaching? Can anything ever be so desirable as to justify the violation of a precept of God's word? Is the power of the Church of Christ ever advanced by worldly devices?

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.—Having returned to Jerusalem, Rehoboam proposed to attack Israel at once, to recover the portion of the kingdom that had revolted from him. But the Lord forbade the shedding of blood, and said, "Return every man to his house, for this thing is from me." The division of the kingdom is now an established fact, and the narrative without delay introduces us not to Rehoboam over the kingdom of Judah, but to Jeroboam over the kingdom of Israel. To this latter kingdom our Old Testament lessons for the present year are wholly devoted.

EXPOSITION.—Jeroboam's next step was to make good his position against threatened or possible reverse. This conduct is instructive.

Verse 25.—Built Shechem in mount Ephraim and dwelt there. Ephraim was the head and front of the revolt, and confessedly had the first and chief place among the ten tribes. Jeroboam belonged to this tribe. It was thus fit that the capital of the new kingdom should be in the territory of Ephraim and all the more as that territory was contiguous to the rival kingdom of Judah. To make it his capital was doubtless his purpose in building it. This building, however, was rather an enlargement and fortifying of a place already of considerable importance. Shechem (sometimes written Sichem, Sychem, and Sychar) was already sacred from historical associations (Gen. xii. 6; xxxiii. 18; Josh. viii. 33-35), and from its character as a city of the Levites and a city of refuge (Josh. xxi. 20, 21), and in the time of Christ was made yet more sacred as being the scene of one of his most interesting experiences and of his richest discourses. Went out from thence and built Penuel. A border defence on the important route from Damascus to Shechem, and hence needed to be well fortified to guard against hostile invasion from that quarter. It too was memorable for its history. See Gen. xxxii. 22, 30; xxxiii. 17; Judges viii. 17. Lying as it did beyond the Jordan on the extreme eastern limit of the territory of Israel, Jeroboam, it is fitly said, "went out from Shechem" to build it. Living at Shechem he could guard that against his southern foes.

Verse 26, 27.—He rightly judged that

a king's chief strength is in the loyal national spirit of his people. The danger of alienation seemed to him very great. The chief source of the danger he finds in the national religion with its holy city, its thrice holy temple, and the three yearly visits to the city for worship and festivals. The possession of Jerusalem was a greater advantage to Judah than was the prestige of the names of David and Solomon, and the glory of their family. Jeroboam should have taken Jehovah's worship and promise both together, assured that the seeming contradiction could not be more than seeming. Now shall the kingdom [i. e. of the ten tribes] return [as before the rebellion] to the house of David [i. e. in submission to the kings of the line or family of David]. The house of the Lord. The temple built by Solomon. Chs. v-viii. Turn again unto their lord. Recognize Rehoboam or his successor as "their lord." Kill me. As a usurper, even though they had willingly rebelled with him, and made him their king. In the remaining verses of this chapter we have Jeroboam's method of meeting the danger indicated in verses 6 and 27.

Verse 28.—Wherupon. He consulted with his chief advisers. He took no counsel of God. Jeroboam's commanding genius and will neither did nor would brook any opposing views. Made two calves of gold. The course decided upon in the consultation. It has been with reason held that the images were of calf-form, partly because Jeroboam in his exile in Egypt had become accustomed to this form of worship there prevalent, partly because he had the precedent of Aaron's act at Sinai, (Ex. xxxii. 4-8), and some aid partly, perhaps, because the cherubim in the temple were of this form as to their bodies. It is clear that Jeroboam, like Aaron, intended these, not as substitutes for Jehovah, but as representations of him, thus violating the second rather than the first commandment of the decalogue. Said unto them, i. e. to the people, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. He urges convenience to counteract a command. Behold thy gods, etc. Aaron's words over again. Ex. xxxiii. 4, 8. Not two different gods but the one God, each calf having the same meaning as the other and two being made because two places of worship were for convenience designated.

Verse 29.—Those two places were Bethel and Dan. The former was at the extreme north of the new kingdom. Besides Bethel was of old a sanctuary, and hence from of old sacred. (Gen. xxviii. 16-22). While Dan also had been made the seat of an established though irregular worship (Judges xviii. 14-21) and thus was already in a measure consecrated. Jeroboam herein showed sagacity.

Verse 30.—The one at Bethel was preferred by all the people, even those in the extreme north next to Dan. He cites in favor of this, Jer. xviii. 13; Amos iv. 4; v. 5; Hosea v. 8. This conduct was "a sin" as against the law of God concerning both image-worship (Ex. xx. 4) and the choice of any place or places of formal worship without the divine sanction (Deut. xii. 5-16).

Verse 31.—House of high places. The selection of elevations for worship was customary. See iii. 2; xi. 7; xiv. 23; xiii. 32; 2 Kings xvii. 29, 32; xxiii. 19, etc. Priests of the lowest of the people. Or rather from all the people without distinction, for such is the meaning of the Hebrew. God designated the tribe of Levi to furnish priests, and ministers of the sanctuary, but the Levites adhered to the temple worship at Jerusalem, and so Jeroboam selected priests of his own will without reference to God's. See 2 Chron. xi. 13-17; xiii. 9-12.

Verse 32.—A feast in the eighth month, etc. "The feast of tabernacles" as ordained of God, fell on the 15th of the seventh month. Jeroboam retained the feast, and the day of the month, but changed the month, perhaps alleging that as this was the harvest-feast the later harvest time of the north made necessary a later date for the festival by the northern kingdom.

Verse 33.—So he offered, etc. "Jeroboam the son of Nebat" laid the foundations of his government in rebellion against God, caused Israel to sin, and so hastened the day of his kingdom's ruin, and his people's dispersion in exile and

captivity. Only him who honors God will God honor.

Jeroboam had been appointed king under the divine sanction. He held his crown on the condition of obedience, and on that condition the continuance of the crown to his house was pledged to him. Nothing was wanted on his part put unreserved faith in that promise. The Lord had given him every reason to trust in the sufficiency of his protection.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, January 21st, 1877.—Omri and Ahab.—1 Kings xvi. 23-34.

Booths' Department.

MAGGIE KENNEDY.

A Christmas Story.

BY MATTIE DYER BRITTS.

A group of school-girls stood by the teacher's desk, eagerly examining a paper which one of them held in her hand.

"Let me see, Maggie," cried Julia Reed, pressing closer, "you went to Professor Stone—what did he give?"

"He gave me two dollars," said Maggie. "Here is his name. 'I've got nine dollars on my paper. How much have you got?'"

"I've got six. But I haven't seen many of the Sunday-school teachers yet."

"Here comes Miss Rhoads, I want to see her. Julia, you go to Miss Carroll's room and ask her, you'll have time before school."

"I will. I'd rather see her, for she'll be sure to help, and that stingy little Miss Rhoads, won't give you a dime! Now see if she does!"

"Oh, yes she will! Nobody has refused yet," said Maggie. And as Julia went off to Miss Carroll's room, Maggie addressed the plain, pleasant looking little body which approached the desk, and presented her petition.

Christmas was coming, and the ladies of the church, were going to put a new carpet on the pastor's study, and the Sunday-school, teachers and pupils, had a plan on foot to make him a Christmas present of a handsome walnut writing-desk, to cost twenty-five dollars. Julia and Maggie, were raising the money, and now what would Miss Rhoads give.

Miss Rhoads took the paper and glanced at the names. A blush tinted her pale cheek, but she answered very quietly.

"I am sorry, Maggie, but I cannot afford to give you anything, just now."

"Just as you choose, of course," said Maggie, as coldly, almost rudely, as she dared speak to her teacher, a scornful smile, curling her pretty red lips, as she took her paper and turned away.

Miss Rhoads' eyes, her only beauty, filled with tears, which Maggie saw, and dropping her hand lightly on the young girl's shoulder, she said, gently, "Some day, Maggie, dear, you may judge me differently." And then she rang the bell for the classes.

Maggie went to her seat, without a word more. And as she sat down, Julia, who shared the same desk, whispered, "Did she give you anything?"

"No," answered Maggie, shortly.

"Didn't I tell you so?" whispered Julia. "Miss Carroll gave me a dollar, and she gets the same salary Miss Rhoads does."

"Miss Rhoads is stingy!" said Maggie, in the same tone. "Look how she always dresses, so plain she is almost shabby! And Miss Carroll always looks beautifully, and she does wear the loveliest ties! And such pretty gloves!"

"Yes, and she is so stylish!" answered Julia. "I wonder Miss Rhoads isn't ashamed to walk down street by her side, little, plain old maid!"

"But Miss Rhoads is the best teacher," said Maggie, whose love of justice was strong.

"Well, maybe she is. But she's so shy and backward I can't bear her!" said Julia.

"Nor I—" began Maggie, but Miss Rhoads' "Attention, young ladies!" quieted her, and she rose to go to a class.

Maggie had been too well trained to be disrespectful to her teachers, but she could, and I am sorry to say she did, treat her with a coldness which made the young teacher feel herself an object of dislike, and grieved her deeply.

For Miss Rhoads had a little private reason which she never told, and Maggie never guessed at, for wishing to love Maggie, and be loved by her.

A sore throat kept Maggie out of school two or three days, the latter part of the week, so that she was absent on Friday, the day the prize essays, of which Maggie had written one, were to be given in for correction.

But Maggie was bound not to lose her chance. She copied her essay at home, and late Friday afternoon, she wrapped herself up to take it to Miss Rhoads at her home. She knew the street and number, and easily found the place. Miss Rhoads was just coming in as she reached it, after school was over, and Maggie told her errand upon the steps.

She would have turned back at once, but Miss Rhoads said she must come in and get warm first. And as the day was bitterly cold, Maggie consented willingly.

They went in through a tiny hall, and passed into a small, exceedingly plain, but exceedingly neat, parlor. No chance to get warm there, for the fire in the little grate was almost out. Miss Rhoads hesitated a moment, then opened an inner door, disappeared a moment, and came back.

"Come into my mother's room, Maggie," she said. "I very seldom take company into her room, but I can't let you carry that sore throat out again until you are nice and warm. Come in."

Maggie followed her teacher, stopping on the threshold with an involuntary "Oh!" of pleasure—this room was so great a contrast to the meagre parlor. A bright fire in the grate, a bright carpet on the floor, bright curtains at the windows, where hung a canary in a cage above two or three hanging baskets of green vines; books, pictures, pretty vases on little brackets and various little trifles, made it as cheery and inviting as possible. And upon a lounge, lay a sweet, gentle-faced old lady, sleeping as quietly as a child.

Miss Rhoads smiled at Maggie's exclamation, as she seated her in a low chair by the fire, and said:

"My mother is an invalid, Maggie, dear. She has not left this room for many months, and you see I make it as bright as I can for her."

"I did not know you took care of your mother," said Maggie, speaking softly, not to wake the sleeper.

"Yes. She has no one else," replied Miss Rhoads with a smile so sweet, that Maggie thought it made her plain face almost beautiful.

"Does she never sit up?" asked Maggie, deeply interested in spite of herself.

"Sometimes," said Miss Rhoads. "But a chair tires her, she cannot stay up long."

"If she had one of those reclining things for invalids, that you can move up and down as you like, that would be nice for her," said Maggie.

Miss Rhoads' face lit up. "Ah! that is just what I have been trying to get her for ever so long. But you know I only have my salary, Maggie, and with the rent and coal, besides our food and clothing, I haven't been able yet. And I have to hire a girl too, so that she will not be alone while I am in school."

"They cost a good bit, don't they?" asked Maggie. "The chairs, I mean."

"Yes, from twenty to thirty dollars. But I shall save it as soon as I can."

And then the young teacher laid her hand on Maggie's shoulder, and said gently, "Now, Maggie, dear, you know why I could not help you get Mr. Everett's desk. You don't blame me, now, do you?"

If Maggie was hasty, she was also frank and honest.

"I blame myself, and I am ashamed of myself, Miss Rhoads!" she said, impulsively. "I did think you were mean and stingy, and I treated you as hatefully as I dared. But if you will forgive me, I don't think I will ever judge any one so hastily again. I didn't dream you had such a burden."

Miss Rhoads bent over and kissed Maggie's red cheek. "There, it is all forgiven and forgotten," she said. "But, Maggie, dear, don't say 'I have a burden,' my dear mother can never be that."

Maggie colored as she saw her mistake, and hastily said, "Oh, I didn't mean that!"

"I know how you meant," said Miss Rhoads, with a re-assuring smile. And

as she was now quite warm, Maggie rose to go, asking permission to come again, which Miss Rhoads readily granted.

On her way home Maggie stopped in at a furniture store, and priced some invalid's chairs. Some nice ones were shown her for twenty-five dollars, and thanking the clerk for his politeness, she went on her way, her mind full of some plan by which she could get one of these chairs for a Christmas present to Miss Rhoads.

"Oh! if I were only rich enough!" she said. "I don't like to ask Papa for so much money, and I don't believe he would give it to me, unless I told what I wanted to do with it, and that must be a secret. I wouldn't want any other Christmas present, if he would give me that. It would make Miss Rhoads so happy. I love her now, and I want to do something to atone for the way I treated her. They say, 'where there's a will there's a way.' I know my will is good enough, now where's the way?"

But though it was her constant desire, she had not found the way on Monday, and Tuesday was Christmas.

It so happened that Maggie's Uncle Joe, her mother's brother, just returned from California, was now making a visit at Maggie's home. Uncle Joe was a bachelor, with more money than he knew how to spend, and Maggie was his pet.

Monday afternoon Uncle Joe said to her "Well, chick, what do you want for Christmas present, to-morrow?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Maggie.

"Say what you want, and it is yours, even to the half of my kingdom," said Uncle Joe, pulling her long braids.

"How will a nice little gold watch do?"

"I should like a watch very much," said Maggie. "But—Uncle Joe—there is something I want more."

"Well, what is it? A pair of diamond earrings?"

"No, mamma would not let me wear diamonds. Don't you know they are not for little girls?"

"I supposed they were for any one who could afford to buy them. I stand corrected, ma'am. Please to tell me what you do want then."

"Twenty-five dollars, Uncle Joe."

"Twenty-five dollars! A modest request I declare. A good watch would cost two or three times that much."

"Yes, Uncle, but if I had twenty-five dollars I wouldn't want one other thing."

"I deed! Might a fellow know what you wanted to do with it?"

"O, that's a secret. Or—yes—I don't know—you can keep a secret, can't you Uncle Joe?"

"Tutures couldn't draw it from me!"

"Well, I expect I would get a better one if you went with me to select it—I don't know much about such things. If you'll give me the money for my Christmas present, Uncle Joe, and keep my secret, I'll tell you."

"God! It's a bargain. Tell me, and I'll give it to you."

So Maggie nestled up to Uncle Joe and told her little story.

"What did you say your teacher's name as?" asked Uncle Joe, in an odd tone.

"Miss Hatty Rhoads."

"Do you know where she came from?"

"Somewhere in Massachusetts, Braintree, believe."

Maggie hardly noted the start and flash of the eye which Uncle Joe gave at her information, she was delighted at having secured so valuable an ally.

"Well, go bundle up, and we'll go and get that chair straightway," said Uncle Joe. And Maggie ran to obey him promptly as possible.

"Now," said Uncle Joe, as they entered the store, where Maggie had called on Friday evening, "make your choice, and I'll foot the bill."

An excellent and convenient chair, covered with crimson rep, was selected, paid for, and ordered to its destination at once.

"Now," said Uncle Joe, as they left the store, "you must call on your teacher and tell her it is coming, and I'll go with you."

"No, I'd rather let it be a surprise," said Maggie.

"It will be a surprise anyhow," said Uncle Joe, "and if you don't go and tell her, she may think it is some mistake and be worried over it. Better go."

But—hesitated Maggie, "Uncle Joe, don't know how she would like my giving a stranger. They don't see me company."

"Never mind, we'll try it this time," said Uncle Joe. "I have a fancy to see this little body who is so faithful to her old mother. You may as well let me go."

Maggie saw by Uncle Joe's manner that he was determined, and she knew it was no use to object; besides, as he had been so kind to her, she did not like to refuse to oblige him, so with much mis-