

The Sunday-School. THIRD QUARTER. LESSON I.—July 3.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED.

1 Kings 12: 12-20.

THE LESSON includes 1 Kings 12: 1-24, with the parallel passage, 2 Chron. 10: 1-19; 11: 1-4.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*—Prov. 16: 18.

LEARN BY HEART. Vs. 12-14; Prov. 15: 1; Matt. 5: 25.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.*—The division of the kingdom occurred B. C. 975, according to the common chronology found in the margin of our Bibles; B. C. 937, according to the revised chronology given in Hastings' Bible Dictionary. (See Note on the Table of Chronology).

*Place.*—Rehoboam met the leaders of the northern tribes at their chief city, Shechem, then the metropolis of the tribe of Ephraim. It was situated between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, about 27 miles north of Jerusalem. Here Abraham encamped when he first came to Canaan, and Jacob when he returned from Padan-aram. Here Joseph was buried, and here the law was proclaimed in the time of Joshua, and the covenant renewed near the close of his life. Shechem was a city of refuge.

*Persons.*—Rehoboam, only recorded son of Solomon, at this time either 21 or 41 years old. Jeroboam, son of Nebat and Zeruah, leader of the northern tribes. Rezin I. was king of Damascus, and Shishak the Pharaoh of Egypt.

*Place in the History.*—The divided kingdom; the beginning of two lines of development and experiment instead of one.

*The Book of Kings.*—See the Introduction.

THE KING THAT SOLOMON LEFT: A GREAT OPPORTUNITY.—A year ago we traced the history of the Israelites through the warlike reign of David and the peaceful rule of Solomon. At his death, Solomon left his son Rehoboam a magnificent empire, great in three ways.

1. *In Size.*—The Israelites numbered about 6,000,000. The twelve tribes occupied a country having only about 13,000 square miles. But Solomon also ruled over a large extent of neighboring territory, so that his entire kingdom covered about 60,000 square miles.

2. *In Wealth.*—Solomon's yearly revenues were more than \$20,000,000. He erected magnificent palaces and public buildings. No other nation was as wealthy, and commerce flourished.

3. *In Possibilities.*—The foreign tribes over which Solomon ruled were never bound firmly to his kingdom. Wealth was in the hands of a few, while the common people were ground under heavy taxation. The national virtue had been corrupted by the heathen immoralities and worship which Solomon both permitted and introduced, and by the monarch's own example of sensual living. And yet if Rehoboam had chosen he might have consolidated his empire, relieved oppression, exalted the multitude by education, religion, and justice, and established a nation much greater than Solomon's.

REHOBAM: THE YOUNG MAN THAT

HAD THE OPPORTUNITY.—Three factors determined Rehoboam's action.

1. *His Mother.*—She was Naamah, a princess of the heathen Ammonites, and an idolater. For her sake, Solomon built opposite the temple, a sanctuary for her god Molech. Much of what we are we owe to our mothers. But a bad mother tends to make a bad son, and so it was with Rehoboam.

2. *His Father.*—Rehoboam was brought up in the harem, and his father was probably too busy with his kingdom to pay much attention to him. Solomon's personal example of weakness and sensuality must have neutralized all his precepts.

3. *Himself.*—Rehoboam was weak and conceited. Yet the first three years of Rehoboam's reign show considerable ability, and the young man could have risen above the defects of his character.

JEROBOAM: ANOTHER YOUNG MAN WITH AN OPPORTUNITY.—1 Kings 11: 26-40. The great opponent of Rehoboam.

1. *His Character.*—It was quite the opposite of Rehoboam's. He was so industrious and capable that the king made him head overseer for Ephraim and Manasseh.

2. *The People's Discontent.*—This had several causes. The northern tribes were jealous of the prominence given to Judah and Jerusalem. Solomon had taxed the people heavily, and the northern tribes, being farthest from the capital, reaped least benefit from the taxation.

3. *The Call of God,* through the prophet Ahijah, who met the young man, tore his own garment into twelve pieces, and gave Jeroboam ten in token that he was to reign over ten tribes. Inspired by this prophecy, Jeroboam raised a revolt, but he was unsuccessful.

4. *The Call of the People.*—Immediately after Solomon's death the northern tribes convened at Shechem, bent upon obtaining relief from their burdens. They had sent to Egypt after Jeroboam, and he was at hand.

THE TWO WAYS PRESENTED TO REHOBAM.—1 Kings 12: 1-11. Rehoboam obtained from the people a delay of three days, that he might consult with the leaders.

*The Right Way, Urged by the Old Men.*—The cynical, overbearing advice grant the people's requests. Their words pointed out the wise and safe way for the young king.

*The Wrong Way, Urged by the Young Men.*—The cynical, overbearing advice they gave shows that these youths belonged to the gilded youth, the aristocratic idlers.

REHOBAM'S FOOLISH CHOICE.—Vs. 12-15. *So Jeroboam and all the people came . . . as the king had appointed.* R. V. as the king bade. *And the king answered the people roughly.* Rehoboam felt that he could readily put down insurrection. *My father also chastised you with whips.* Imposed heavy burdens of taxation. *But I will chastise you with scorpions.* I will increase your civic burdens. *Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people.* This sums up the entire narrative. *For the cause was from the Lord* like the hardening of Pharaoh's heart or the Jews' crucifixion of Christ. *That he might perform his saying.* The reference is to Ahijah's prophecy to Jeroboam that he should rule over ten tribes.

A *Difficult Point* is raised by the questions, How could this unhappy division of the kingdom be said to be "from the Lord," and, How was Rehoboam to blame, if God was the author of the event?

1. *Undoubtedly God desired that his people should remain united.*—His plan for them from the days of Abraham was that they should become a strong and populous nation. The kingdom under David and Solomon seemed on the point of fulfilling this design. Thus extended, if the nation had remained true to God, it would have been a far mightier power for advancing the true religion.

2. *But God never forces plans on a nation or an individual.* We are not mere puppets in God's hands. God has given us free will which he allows us to use even in opposition to him.

3. *But God's love follows the erring still.* Our Father makes even the wrath of man to praise him. If men will not choose the best, God brings them the second best.

4. *So the disruption of the kingdom was made in God's providence to work out good for the nation*—not the highest good possible for them if they had obeyed God, but the highest good possible for them when disobedient.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM AND THE RESULT.—Vs. 16-20. As soon as the leaders from the north saw that Rehoboam had no intention of remedying abuses they gave the signal for the revolt. *All Israel saw that the king hearkened not . . . What portion have we in David? What have we to do with David's son, Rehoboam, or David's tribe, Judah? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel. Back to your homes, and prepare for war. Now see to thy own house, David.* Look after your own tribe of Judah, Rehoboam, for that is all you will have left. *The children of Israel which dwell in the cities of Judah.* The members of the northern tribes who had homes in the cities of Judah did not join their kinsmen in the revolt. Rehoboam was so blind to the real state of affairs, that he attempted to stop the revolt by sending to them Adoram, who was over the tribute. This man presided over the forced labor, and the foolish young king could not have chosen a more hated messenger. The indignant people stoned him to death. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to escape from Shechem to Jerusalem. *Upon this day. When all Israel, the northern tribes, heard that Jeroboam was come again out of Egypt. Called him unto the congregation.* The general assembly of the northern tribes. *And made him king.* The rank, the talent, and the known energy of the late exile pointed him out as the fittest man for the vacant post. *But the tribe of Judah only.* The next verse adds, "with the tribe of Benjamin," which was divided, the smaller, southern half adhering to Judah.

Returned to Jerusalem, Rehoboam assembled an army to put down the rebellion, but he was forbidden by God, speaking through the prophet Shemaiah, of whom nothing further is known (1 Kings 12: 21-24). This event completed the separation of the kingdoms, settling God's seal upon it.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

1. *The necessity for an important decision may arise at any moment. The only safe way is, to be ready for it.*
2. *One's character, already formed, is*

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3. *The only way to be ready for the great choices is to choose wisely in small affairs.* Be patient in little trials, and you will be patient under great provocation. Be faithful in little duties, and you will be faithful in great emergencies.

4. *We are never left to choose unaided.* God does not force the right choice upon us, but he clears our mind to see it, and strengthens our will to lay hold upon it and adhere to it.

There is only One Eclectic Oil. — When an article, be it medicine or anything else, becomes popular, imitations invariably spring up to derive advantages from the original, which they themselves could never cure on their own merits. Imitations of Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil have been numerous, but never successful. Those who know the genuine are not put off with a substitute, but demand the real thing.

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