

The Sunday-School.

THIRD QUARTER, LESSON II.—July 10.

JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRY.

1 Kings 12: 25-33.

THE LESSON text, relating the causes of idolatry and the people's downward course in it, together with the warning recorded in 1 Kings 13, and the retribution recorded in 1 Kings 14: 1-20. The only record of all this in Chronicles is 2 Chron. 11: 15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Keep yourselves from idols.—John 15: 21.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—Time. Jeroboam reigned 22 years.—B. C. 975-957 (common chronology), or B. C. 937-915 (revised chronology).

Place.—Jeroboam's capital, at first Shechem, was soon transferred to Tirzah, among the hills a few miles north of Shechem. Solomon's Song (6-4) uses the comparison "beautiful as Tirzah."

Persons.—Jeroboam, at the beginning of his reign of 22 years; his wife, an Egyptian princess; his son Abijah. Prophets, Ahijah, at Shiloh; an unknown Judean prophet, and the "old prophet" at Bethel.

Contemporaries.—Rezin I., king at Damascus. Shishak, the Pharaoh of Egypt. Jeroboam's reign extended through those of Rehoboam and Abijah in Judah.

Place in the History.—The introduction of idolatry as a national institution; the first step in the degeneration of the people after the division of the kingdom.

LEARN BY HEART.—Vs. 28-30; Matt. 6: 24; 1 John 2: 15-17.

God's people, sundered into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, had a double history till the exile. We followed first the story of Israel under Jeroboam.

THE TEMPTATION TO IDOLATRY.—Vs. 25-27. Jeroboam began his reign energetically and wisely. Then Jeroboam built Shechem. The city, destroyed by Abimelech had been restored. Jeroboam fortified it, adding public buildings. It was adapted for the capital because centrally located, and in the midst of his own tribe, and its age and sacred character gave it dignity. In Mount Ephraim. The mountainous ridge of Central Palestine, reaching from near Jerusalem northward about 50 miles to the plain of Esdraelon. And dwelt therein, removing afterward to Tirzah. And went out from thence. Having established his capital, he transferred his workmen. And built. Strengthened and enlarged Peniel where Jacob wrestled with the angel of God. Jeroboam fortified it for protection from Assyria on the northeast, and Judah on the south, and from the desert tribes of the east. Massive ruins, on two sharp hills, mark the probable site of Peniel.

Jeroboam's Great Opportunity. God had chosen him to rule. He had made a good beginning. But all of his advantages he threw away by scorning the one condition of permanence, that he should walk in God's ways. And Jeroboam said in his heart. He recognized the real reason for his advocacy of idolatry. If this people go up (to Jerusalem) to do sacrifice. The law commanded this journey thrice a year, for all males,—at the Passover (April),

Pentecost (June), and the Feast of Tabernacles (October). Then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord. To Rehoboam, whom Jeroboam feared they would come to regard as their legitimate king. And they shall kill me. So that the two kingdoms might be more readily united.

Was Jeroboam's Fear Well Grounded? No. He had God's promise that if he walked in God's ways, God would build him a "sure house."

PRETEXTS FOR IDOLATRY.—Vs. 28, 29. So Jeroboam proceeded to establish idolatry. Whereupon the king took counsel. With men like-minded with himself. And made two calves of gold. They were probably of considerable size, and represented a young but full-grown bull. The ox-symbol of God was most natural for an agricultural people, for whom the great animal was the breadwinner. Of gold. Not solid, but a wooden core overlaid with gold.

First Pretext.—It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. The probable meaning 'Ye have gone up long enough.' It was as if Jeroboam had said, "You have thrown off Judah's political yoke. Now throw off her religious yoke. You have been tied to her apron string long enough."

Second Pretext.—Behold thy gods . . . which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. The Israelites originally regarded these images as symbols of Jehovah. Jeroboam's argument was that the new worship was only a continuance of the old. He used almost the exact words of Aaron when he made the golden calf (Ex. 32: 4).

Third Pretext.—And he set the one in Beth-el. Beth-el, about four hours from Jerusalem, was regarded as a sacred city. It would be a convenient sanctuary for Jeroboam's southern tribes. And the other put he in Dan. The most northern part of the kingdom. Dan also was an ancient sanctuary. It was a plausible and convenient sanctuary for the northern tribes of Israel.

Jeroboam's pretexts, then, were: The alleged need of establishing an independent religion in order to complete their freedom from Judah; that the new religion would merely continue the old under a different form; that they possessed within their own boundaries sanctuaries as sacred as Jerusalem and even more ancient.

Empty Excuses for Evil.—They are easily found. The rumseller "must support his family;" the embezzler "had to save his credit by borrowing" money from his employer's safe." The politician enters evil courses for the success of his party.

DOWNWARD IN IDOLATRY.—Vs. 30-33. Jeroboam soon found that breaking one commandment led to the breaking of others. And this thing became a sin. It was a sin because it broke the commandment against graven images; it led to idolatry; the idolatry involved obscene rites; sometimes, as in Moloch-worship, it involved murder, human sacrifice; it perpetuated the division of the kingdoms, thus weakening God's people; it degraded the service of God. For the people following the lead of their sinful king, went to worship before the one (R.V. margin, "before each of them,") even unto Dan.

The First Step downward in idolatry was the actual worship of these images,

and not of God through the aid of the symbols.

The Second Step was to replace the temple with sanctuaries modeled after those of heathendom. He made an house, a sanctuary, one at each of the two cities. Of high places. The 'high place' of primitive worship was, originally merely an erection of indefinite height upon a mound or terrace. Before the building of the temple the worship of Jehovah was often carried on at these local shrines, but after the temple was built they became wholly identified with idolatry.

The Third Step downward in idolatry was to replace the consecrated tribe of Levi by a new priesthood. And made priests of the lowest of the people, and not as heretofore, from the Levites alone. Which were not of the sons of Levi, the priestly tribe. Jeroboam would gladly have retained their services, but they refused to celebrate idolatrous rites and went south to Rehoboam.

The Fourth Step downward in idolatry was the establishment of new feast days. Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month. November. The law expressly fixed the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month. On the fifteenth day of the month. The day was retained because the fifteenth was the day of the full moon. Like Solomon at the dedication of the temple, the king officiated at the inauguration of the new worship. So did he in Beth-el. The more distant Dan was inaugurated by some of the newly made priests. And he placed in Beth-el. Dan already having its priesthood—descendants of Moses. So he offered, etc. This verse recapitulates what has gone before. Which he had devised of his own heart. He left a worship where all was divinely authorized for ceremonies and services which were wholly of his own devising.

WARNINGS AGAINST IDOLATRY.—1 Kings 13: 1-34. This chapter is the story of how Jeroboam, while sacrificing upon his altar at Beth-el, was solemnly warned by a "man of God" whom Jehovah had sent out of Judah. "The altar shall be rent," he cried, "and its ashes poured out." Then, as the enraged king called on his guards to seize the prophet, and put out his own hand to lay hold on him, the hand was withered, and an earthquake rent the altar. Jeroboam entreated the man of God to restore his hand, and this was done through the prophet's prayer. The honest historian goes on to relate how the heroic man of God himself fell on his way home, being tempted to disobedience by one of the unfaithful prophets of Beth-el.

It is very striking to go through the Bible and notice how every great sinner receives from God a great warning. Pharaoh has his Moses, Ahab his Elijah, David his Nathan, Belshazzar his Daniel, Herod his John the Baptist, Pilate his wife's dream. God leaves no sinner the excuse that he has not been warned.

But apparently the witness which the man of God bore, and the death which he died, were in vain. Jeroboam "returned not from his evil way."

IDOLATRY PUNISHED.—1 Kings 14: 1-20. The disasters and ruin that all idolatry causes came soon upon Jeroboam and his kingdom.

1. His son Abijah fell sick and died. Ahijah prophesied the utter downfall of Jeroboam's house if the king persisted in his sins; but his words had no effect.

2. Jeroboam won for himself an evil repute in history.

3. Jeroboam's kingly line was short, ending with his son.

Ayer's

What are your friends saying about you? That your gray hair makes you look old? And yet, you are not forty! Postpone this looking old.

Hair Vigor

Use Ayer's Hair Vigor and restore to your gray hair all the deep, dark, rich color of early life. Then be satisfied.

"Ayer's Hair Vigor restored the natural color to my gray hair, and I am greatly pleased. It is all you claim for it."
Mrs. E. J. YANDERMAN, Mechanicsville, N. Y.

25¢ a bottle. All druggists. J. C. AYER CO., Lowell, Mass.

Dark Hair

4. When the Levites, the most God-fearing inhabitants of the northern kingdom left it and greatly strengthened the kingdom of Rehoboam, both in material resources and in character, while Jeroboam's kingdom was correspondingly reduced.

5. Irreligion, and idolatry, and immorality prevailed in the northern kingdom, and sowed the seed for the harvest of ruin.

6. The final result was the destruction of the nation one hundred years before the captivity of Judah. See 2 Kings 17: 61-23. All this was foretold long before, and Jeroboam might have studied it if he would. See Lev. 26: 1-45; Deut. 8: 1-20; 28: 15-48.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

The Golden Text of this lesson might well be, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." All that Christians mean by mammon, worldliness, is essentially the same as the sin of idolatry into which Jeroboam fell.

Like Jeroboam, we find it very easy to discover plausible pretexts for worldliness. "We must have money." "We want to get along in the world." "Other folks do it." We promise ourselves that our mammon-worship shall not interfere with our Jehovah worship. But it always does interfere.

Like Jeroboam, we have ample warnings. Jeroboam has become a warning to us. The Bible is full of such warnings. The Christian church is a standing protest against worldliness. We can see around us the lives absorbed in the world going down to an unhappy and often tragic end.

Finally, this modern idolatry is punished much as was Jeroboam's. It always brings spiritual death. It weakens lives and nations. It breaks up families. It means woe here and hereafter.

Relieve those Inflamed Eyes!

Pond's Extract

Reddened one-half with pure soft water, applied frequently with dropper or eye cup, the congestion will be removed and the pain and inflammation instantly relieved.

CAUTION!—Avoid dangerous, irritating Witch Hazel preparations represented to be "the same as" Pond's Extract which easily cures and generally contains "wood alcohol," a deadly poison.