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Lesson I. January 4. 1 Kings 12: 1-17.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."—Prov. 16: 18.

EXPLANATORY.

(Condensed from Pelouhet's Notes.)

I. THE NEW KING, REHOBOAM.—Ver. 1. After Solomon's death his natural successor was his son Rehoboam. Doubtless Solomon had other children; but none appear in history except Rehoboam and two daughters, whose marriage is mentioned in 1 Kings 4: 11, 15. His age is given in 1 Kings 14: 21 as 41 at the time of his coronation; but most commentators argue (1) that this is a probable error of an early copyist for 21, an error easily made, since the two numbers in the Hebrew alphabet-numerals are so nearly alike. His mother was Naamah, an Ammonitess (1 Kings 14: 31). She was an idolater. It was for her principally that Solomon built the High Place to Moloch, on Olivet, opposite the temple; and here "she no doubt introduced her son to the bloody and probably licentious rites of the Ammonite religion." Why mention his mother? Because she determined his destiny; because her evil influence overpowered all the wisdom of Solomon in its effect on her son. Rehoboam's ruin was his mother's monument. "It has been said that 'every great man is the son of his mother.'" Both his father and mother were to blame for his character. One naturally feels that Solomon in his earnest warnings and entreaties to young men, in the Proverbs, so often repeating, "My son," had his own son in mind. "And it may well be," says Rawlinson, "that the keen reproofs and reproaches addressed to the foolish son' are barbed by a personal sentiment of regret and disapproval." On the other hand, Rehoboam himself was chiefly to blame. Every element of his surroundings might have been a means to better things,—steps of a stairway that reached to heaven.

II. THE KINGDOM HE INHERITED. (1) *Extent.* The extent of territory occupied by the twelve tribes at the death of Solomon is calculated by Kiepert at 12,810 English square miles. It was about the size of the kingdom of Holland, or of Massachusetts and Connecticut together, or two-thirds as large as Ancient Greece. But there were many tributary nations occupying a wider extent than this.

Population. The population, estimated from the reported number of men fit for soldiers, must have been not far from 6,000,000, more than twice the population of the United States at the time of the Revolutionary War, equal to the population of England 150 years ago, and of the United States in 1805. 1,000,000 greater than the population of Canada at present. Wealth and luxury were very great, so that "silver and gold at Jerusalem were as plenteous as stones" (2 Chron. 1: 15). Commerce was widely extended to all parts of the known world.

OUR OPPORTUNITIES. God has made each child king over a larger realm than the son of Solomon inherited. The kingdom of life, with its future, its usefulness, its powers and possibilities, is given to every one; and with God's help and a right heart, there is no limit to the good that may come from it.

III. HIS CORONATION DAY. THE PLACE. 1. *And Rehoboam went to Shechem,* "the place between the shoulder blades," between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, in Ephraim. "It is one of the most striking and beautiful spots in Palestine, and the more so as its perennial supply of water clothes it with perpetual verdure."

THE OBJECT. *To make him king.* (1) The assembly was not for the purpose of revolt, but (2) doubtless with the intention of exacting certain conditions from the new king before they accepted him. (3) The kingdom was not an absolute monarchy, and the northern tribes had a somewhat distinct existence from Judah.

THEIR GRIEVANCES. 2. *And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat.* Jeroboam was a young Ephraimite of the town of Zereda, who had shown so much energy and ability that Solomon had made him chief of the forced labor from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. The prophet Abijah had foretold that he should be Solomon's successor over ten tribes; and it is very probable that, in view of the dissatisfaction of the people, he made some attempt to take possession before Solomon's death, so that, his plot being discovered, he had to escape to Egypt, where Shishak was the Pharoah. *Who was yet in Egypt heard of it.* Of the proposed assembly at Shechem. *And Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt.* That had been his home; and according to the Septuagint, he had married the sister of the queen.

3. *That they sent and called him.* From Egypt, as soon as they had planned this meeting at Shechem. There was time for this after the death of Solomon, before the assembly.

4. *Thy father made our yoke grievous.* In all times and countries the heavy yoke which was laid upon beasts of burden has been used as the type of complete servitude. The point of grievance with the people was excessive taxation. The luxury and cost of Solomon's court—*i. e.*, his family establishment, his harem, and his political relationships—had become simply enormous.

ANOTHER GRIEVANCE clearly was the chafing of the Ephraimites under the supremacy of Judah. They were a proud, independent race, breathing the air of freedom more naturally than the people of Judah.

THE QUESTION TO BE DECIDED.—*Make thou . . . his heavy yoke . . . lighter, and we will serve thee.* This was a right and proper request. The great works were finished, the temple completed; and there was no longer the same need of lavish expense. Without doubt, they overlooked the many blessings, the great wealth, the peace from surrounding enemies which Solomon's reign had brought them. It is usual for people to complain the most when they have the most. But they had a right to seek the reform of whatever was wrong. This is still the right and duty of all, for it is the only road to civic perfection.

TURNING POINTS IN LIFE. This was the turning point in the life of King Rehoboam. On his decision hung his destiny as king and the welfare of the nation. So, too, there come to all of us places where the way of life parts before us, and eternal destinies depend on the choice we make, whether we choose God or the world, Christ or self; to do right and be true in the hour of temptation, or to walk in the brilliant and attractive way of sin that leads to death.

IV. THE ADVICE GIVEN BY THE ELDERLY COUNSELLORS. They were the men of wisdom and ability whom the wise Solomon had chosen for his advisers (see Prov. 11: 14; 15: 22). They were of ripe age, no doubt; and they were old in the sense of having had long experience in the government and all the affairs of the kingdom. *That stood before Solomon.* They were in immediate attendance on the king. All his officers had to *stand* in the king's presence.

7. *If thou will be a servant unto this people this day,* etc. That is to say, "if thou wilt *for once* submit to be led by the people." The advice was not that the king should permanently resign the office of ruler, but that he should *for once* be ruled by his people. He was simply to reign as a true king for the good of his people, and not for his own pleasure or glory. He was to be like the sun, shedding blessings on all, not a focus on which all rays centre. All true kings serve the people. *This day . . . forever.* Thus acts, in themselves brief, entail lasting consequences; and opportunities allowed to slip by unimproved may be lost forever.

The wisest are those who use the wisdom and experience of others, to go to God, and to Jesus, and their treasure-house of wisdom, the Bible, for they know all things, the end of every way, the fruit of every seed, the river that flows from every fountain. Then the wise go next to the men who have the best experience of life, who have made the most of it. And last they take warning from those who have experienced the evil of wrong-doing, who, deceived by the fragrance of the blossoms, are eating the bitter and deadly fruit; who, deceived by the sparkle of the cup, are now drinking the dregs at the bottom.

V. THE ADVICE GIVEN BY THE YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED. 8. *But he forsook the counsel of the old men.* Because the advice did not suit him. It was contrary to his pride and to his selfish, despotic feelings. "What he desired apparently was not wise guidance, but to be confirmed in his own opinions." *And consulted with the young men.* The very change argues weakness. Green wood is ever shrinking. *That were grown up with him.* Those who, by the fact of their having led the same kind of life as himself, were doubtless quite as inexperienced in state affairs. They and he thought only of themselves, their own pleasures and honors, and not of their duties nor of the rights of others. Selfishness made them blind, and inexperience made them rash. *Which stood before him.* Whom he had chosen as his counsellors. The surest mark of a fool is that he chooses other fools for advisers.

9. *That we may answer.* It is noteworthy that Rehoboam includes the young counsellors with himself, and says "we" when he speaks to them; but he employs the singular number "I" in verse 6, when addressing the older men. This shows with whom he identified himself.

10. *Thus shalt thou speak . . . thus shall thou say.* This iteration is expressive of determination and resentment. We may read between the lines, "I would make short work with them, and teach them a lesson they will not forget." *My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins.* This should be rendered, not as it is in the Authorized Version, "My little finger shall be," but, as in the Revised Version, "is thicker than my father's loins." This is not a threat of still heavier impositions, but a boast of his superior strength and firmness. It is correctly paraphrased by the Jewish Targum, "My weakness is stronger than my father's might."

11. *I will add to your yoke.* Make it as much heavier as the body was than the little finger. The answer was wholly contrary to the true idea of a ruler; the language of a tyrant, not of a true king. *My father hath chastised you with whips.* It is probable that the expression is not entirely figurative. It is quite possible that the levies of Amorites, Hittites (chap. 9: 20, 21), etc., had been kept at their tolls by the lash. *But I will chastise you with scorpions.* (The very word that stings). He would lash them with scorpions, which should infix their venomous stings with every blow. They were called scorpions by the Romans, as we use the phrase "cat-o'-nine-tails," and were used for criminals alone. Of course, Rehoboam's counsellors used the word figuratively, to express the heavier burdens and harsher treatment he would inflict upon the people.

IV. THE KING'S DECISION. 13, 14. *And the king answered the people roughly.* He was harsh and cruel in what he said, and rough and insolent in the manner of saying it. *Forsook the old men's counsel, . . . spake to them after the counsel of the young men.* He made a fatal omission in seeking advice. There is no mention of his praying to God, like his father, for wisdom, nor of going to the temple for guidance, nor seeking the help of God's prophets.

15. *For the cause was from the Lord.* Rev. Ver., "It was a thing brought about of the Lord's"; literally, *a turn of affairs from the Lord.*

This disruption of the kingdom, the worst thing for Israel had they been true subjects of Jehovah, became the best thing for those who had become tainted with idolatry, proud, self-willed, and luxurious, thus threatening the very existence of true religion and godliness. This is infinitely better and more comforting than the belief that chance or evil men or demons control the events that enfold us.

V. THE HARVEST OF HIS FOLLY. 16. *When all Israel saw that the king hearkened not.* Josephus says, "They were struck by his words as by an iron rod, and grieved as though the words of the king had been actually put into execution." *The people answered* (Hebrew, *brought back word to*; probably after some consultations amongst themselves), *saying, What portion have we in David?* The name is put for his house or family. We have nothing more to do with this royal family, and renounce our allegiance. *To your tents, O Israel.* That is, Disperse to your homes. This cry—the *Marseillaise* of Israel—probably had its origin at a time when the people dwelt in tents; viz., in the march through the desert (see Josh. 22: 4; Num. 1: 52; 9: 18; 16: 26).

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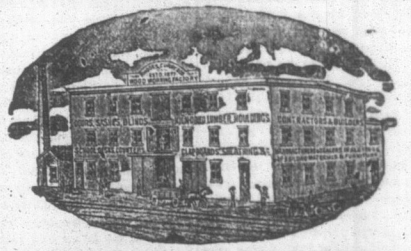

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