

The Sunday-School.

THIRD QUARTER,
LESSON III.—July 17.

ASA'S GOOD REIGN.

2 Chronicles 14: 1-12.

THE LESSON.—Study the entire chapter. Read the history of Judah, from Rehoboam to Asa, 1 Kings 14: 21 to 15: 24. 2 Chron. 11: 1 to 13: 22. Read also the conclusion of Asa's life, 2 Chron. 15: 16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee.* 2 Chron. 14: 11.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.* Abijah came to the throne, according to the common chronology, in B. C. 957; Asa, B. C. 955, ruling till B. C. 914—41 years. The revised chronology gives these dates 920, 917 and 875. The battle with Zerah was probably in Asa's fourteenth year (2 Chron. 15: 10).

Place.—Asa reigned in Jerusalem. The great victory over Zerah, the invader, was at Maresah, 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

The Book of Chronicles. See the Introduction.

LEARN BY HEART.—Vs. 2-5; Psa. 27: 3; Josh. 1: 7.

REHOBAM AND ABIJAH: TWO KINGS THAT TRUSTED IDOLS.—2 Chron. 11, 12, 13, with the parallel passage, 1 Kings 14: 21 to 15: 24. Jeroboam's reign of 22 years over Israel covered Rehoboam's reign of 17 years over Judah, the three years of his son Abijah, and the beginning of Asa's reign. We return, therefore, to the southern kingdom, to bring up its history.

Rehoboam's Great Sin.—With even less excuse than Jeroboam and Israel had, Rehoboam and Judah fell into idolatry. At first Rehoboam took vigorous measures for the defense of the southern kingdom. He strongly fortified 15 cities. Then he sank into a life of which the only record is the great number of his wives and concubines. And his people fell with him. Idolatrous shrines and images were set up, sodomites were introduced, together with the licentious worship of Ashtoreth.

Rehoboam's Punishment came after 4 years of this course. Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Judah. Jerusalem was saved only by the surrender of the wealth stored up by David. Rehoboam was virtually reduced to the position of a vassal of Egypt.

The Record in Egypt.—At Karnak, Shishak built a memorial of his successful campaign that remains to this day. On the southern wall of the court of the great temple of Amun, Shishak enumerates 133 places, towns and fortresses that he captured.

Abijah, who Trusted God in an Emergency.—Second Chronicles 13 records a great battle between Abijah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, in which Abijah rebuked the king of Israel for his desertion of Jehovah. Abijah was granted a great victory.

Notwithstanding this, we read (1 Kings 15: 3-5) that he copied the idolatries of Rehoboam his father. But his kingdom was preserved by the salt of the good men, the Levites who had come down from Israel.

ASA TRUSTS GOD AND DESTROYS IDOLS.—Vs. 1-5. Abijah's reign lasted only three years. He was buried in Jerusa-

lem, leaving the kingdom of Judah to his son Asa. He ruled for 41 years, contemporary with seven kings of Israel. *And Asa did that which was good.* He came to the throne probably at about the age of 20. *For he took away the altars of the strange gods.* The gods of foreign origin. *And the high places.* Altars and shrines of heathen worship. *And brake down the images . . . And commanded Judah.* Did right himself, and taught and trained his people to do right. *To do the law and the commandment.* The decalogue and the ceremonial law. *He took away, etc.* Not only from Jerusalem, but from all the cities of Judah. *The images.* Representations of Baal, the old sun-god. *And the kingdom was quiet.* At peace for ten years.

Our Idols to be Destroyed.—The world is full of man-made idols. We do not call them gods, but we worship them none the less.—Luck, Accident, Fortune, Fashion, Popularity, Self-indulgence.

The way to get rid of these idols is Asa's way—boldly drive them out; and then fill the heart so full of good thoughts that they cannot get back again.

ASA TRUSTS GOD IN PROSPERITY.—Vs. 6, 7. The rewards of virtue are not all reserved for the next life. Asa's uprightness brought him prosperity. *He built fenced (fortified) cities.* Doubtless restoring Rehoboam's fortifications, which Shishak had destroyed. *Walls and towers.* A solid masonry wall of cut stone, with towers at intervals. In the walls were watchmen. *While the land is yet before us.* While our movements are unimpeded by an enemy.

Godliness in Prosperity.—Asa gave God the glory; his prosperity came because he sought the Lord. He did not make the mistake of Nebuchadnezzar, who cried, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?"

Asa's prudence in building the forts is no evidence that he did not fully trust God. We are to "trust God and keep our powder dry."

ASA TRUSTS GOD IN ADVERSITY.—Vs. 8-15. Asa was prepared for adversity because he did not forget God in his prosperity. *Asa had an army* consisting of 580,000 men of valor, a trained militia, summoned from their ordinary occupations when war broke out. They bore targets, large shields covering the body. Benjamin's troops went light-armed and carried bows, and small round shields or bucklers. Zerah the Ethiopian, a descendant of Cush, came unto Maresah. A city on the borders of the hill country, 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. *Then Asa went out against him.* To meet him. *In the valley.* Which separated the Philistine plain from the Judean highlands. Zephath is (counting from the north) the fourth of the five valleys that break through this borderland. *Asa cried unto the Lord.* Even if all his army was present, he was outnumbered two to one. *It is nothing with thee to help.* The R. V. translates it, "There is none beside thee to help." Let not man prevail against thee. Asa, by his ten years of obedience, had identified himself with God's cause. *So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa.* The victory was so decisive that Egypt did not send an army into Palestine for three centuries. With

immense booty Asa returned triumphantly to Jerusalem.

Lessons from Asa's Trust.—1. It was the outgrowth of a God-fearing life.

2. It was based upon a humble consciousness of his own weakness and God's power and love.

3. Yet Asa did not fail to do what he could, and trusted God for the rest.

4. And so God gave Asa the most notable victory ever won by Hebrew arms. If we trust God and obey him, he will enable us to come off "more than conquerors" in any battle against evil.

ASA FAILS TO TRUST GOD.—2 Chron. 15: 16. Asa's life was like a day of sunshine, ending in clouds. After his great victory he again drove out the idols, though imperfectly, and sealed the new allegiance to Jehovah with a great covenant festival at Jerusalem. This prosperity and religious zeal drew to Judah a great number from the northern kingdom, and probably this defection roused Baasha, king of Israel, to make war upon Judah.

Asa forgot how God had delivered him from Zerah, and instead of seeking Jehovah's help, he bribed Ben-hadad, king of Syria, to draw off Baasha's forces by attacking Israel in the rear. In this he was successful, but Hanani the prophet rebuked him, telling him that if he had trusted God Israel and Syria would have been delivered into his hand.

Asa imprisoned Hanani, but the seer's prophecy of trouble was fulfilled. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign he was seized with gout, from which he suffered for two years before his death.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

Notwithstanding his final failure, Asa was a great and good king.

1. His patriotism was sincere and ardent.

2. His courage. True patriotism, sometimes calls on a man to stand alone, as Asa did, against the majority, and even against his own kindred.

3. His humility. However bold before men, Asa was humble before God.

4. His prudence. Though weak, Asa mustered what strength he had, gathered his army and fortified his cities. So the modern patriot, while trusting God, is to employ all the means God has given for the betterment of the world—his voice, the public press, the ballot, the political party.

5. His trust. Asa dared all odds, realizing "One, with God, is a majority."

And while he thus dared, he conquered. 6. His failures also have their lesson for us. No goodness we can attain in this life can save us from the necessity of constant watchfulness. The world is always urging: "Trust in me! Trust money. Trust station. Trust fame. Trust the devices of a temporal expediency." Asa fell because he did not always remember how false are such voices.

TO READ THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR.

The following schedule for reading the Bible in one year has been recently furnished:

January.—Read Genesis and Exodus.

February.—To the tenth of Deuteronomy.

March.—To the end of First Samuel.

April.—To the end of Second Kings.

May.—To the end of Nehemiah.

June.—To the one hundredth Psalm.

July.—To the end of Isaiah.

August.—To the end of the Old Testament.

October.—To the end of Luke.

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November.—To the end of Corinthians.

December.—To the end of the New Testament.

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