

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

– *I KINGS 12:20* – *JULY 3.* –

Golden Text: – "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." – Prov. 16:18.

THE International Sunday School lesson course changes again to the Old Testament. Six months ago we concluded a study of Israel's experiences down to Solomon's time: today we consider the conditions which followed the death of the wise king. And, by the way, while crediting King Solomon with great wisdom, we should not ignore the fact that his life in many respects was a contradiction of his wise utterances. Under the Lord's blessing his rule brought great prosperity to the nation of Israel. Peace ruled within its borders during his lifetime, and those borders were extended so that they included adjoining nations.

The fact that discontent was rife throughout a considerable portion of Solomon's kingdom, so that it was all ready to break out in open rebellion at his death, does not necessarily prove that his subjects were badly governed – oppressed. We find today that many of the best governed and most prosperous peoples are discontented, while many of the badly governed and less prosperous are contented. Thus in our own nation the blessings and privileges of liberty are not appreciated by all. There is perhaps more complaining under the wisest and best governments in the world today than under the more despotic ones. It may have been the same in respect to Israel. Indeed it would appear to have been the same in some degree, because we find that Israel never prospered to the same extent subsequently. After their rebellion against what they considered tyranny and oppression, they seemed to be less prosperous than under that which they considered to be oppression.

Solomon's son who succeeded him in the kingdom was Rehoboam. The twelve tribes, while uniting under David and subsequently supporting Solomon, nevertheless preserved tribal liberties and called a council of all the tribes except the one to which the royal family belonged (Judah – Benjamin being a small tribe attached to Judah). This gathering of the ten tribes was in the capital city of the principal one, Ephraim, in the city of Shechem. The representatives of the ten tribes made no secret of the fact that they wished assurances from the new king that there would be an abatement of the royal demands in the nature of levies of men for public labor, of taxes, liberties, etc., and that their loyalty to him as their king was more or less in the balance. The king was invited to attend this meeting.

WHAT BETTER COULD BE EXPECTED?

The king was really a better man in some respects than might have been expected when we call to mind that his mother was a heathen woman, and that to please her Solomon had erected a sanctuary to Moloch on Mount Olivet. With such a mother and a royal father whose time was necessarily largely occupied in other ways, it would have been a wonder if Rehoboam had been more godly than he was. The older councillors advised that he yield to the demands of the tribes as gracefully as possible, but the young men expressed the thought that to yield a little would mean a pressure to yield more and would show weakness. They advised that he speak out boldly and bully his subjects into loyalty. He followed their advice and sent as his reply, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions (whips with metal lumps on the strands)." The answer was a foolish one and precipitated the separation of the ten tribes from the two. That separation lasted for centuries: the only healing of it that ever took place was that, after the captivity in Babylon, so many as desired of all the tribes gathered back again into Canaan and were henceforth one little nation.

We are to view the affairs of nations and the affairs of individuals as separate and distinct, though the individuals make up the nations. Things may be working advantageously to the individuals, but disadvantageously as respects the nations, or vice versa. The Lord's people are to learn to trust him in the guidance of the great affairs of [R3384 : page 187] life – that he is overruling in the affairs of nations in the interests of his loyal servants. This was so in respect to Israel's affairs. The split in that nation must have seemed to many of the people a woful disaster, reducing them as a nation from a high place as one of the principal nations of earth to a much lower level. To some it may seem even to intimate a failure of the divine purposes – that God never wished the nation to be divided, but wished the Jewish people to become great, mighty, powerful, so that he might accomplish through them the promise that in the seed of Abraham all the families of the earth should be blessed. But those who took such a view erred. God wished the nation to be divided – he wished to humble them, to weaken them. This is distinctly stated in the lesson, as we read the cause was from the Lord, that he might establish his word [R3385 : page 187] through the prophet Ahijah. Some time before the Lord had sent a message through this prophet to Jereboam to the effect that the latter should become king of the ten tribes, and now the answer of Rehoboam paved the way to the accomplishment of that prophecy.

PROPER VIEWS OF ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCES.

As in the lessons of the next six months we shall study the history of Israel, let us view it from this standpoint. Let us not think of the matter as being wholly the result of unwisdom on the part of kings and rulers, but as being a matter entirely overruled by the Lord with a special object in view.

The object in view – indeed the entire object of the Jewish dispensation – was the purifying of Abraham's descendants, so that the Lord might find in that people the most holy, the most devoted,

the most obedient, to the intent that when the time should come for the presentation of Messiah, the nation should be represented by its very best people under the most favorable conditions. This was attained. In the time of our Lord, notwithstanding the fact that many of that nation who heard him were called hypocrites and many others were professedly publicans and sinners, nevertheless the moral and religious conditions of the nation were never better. This is evidenced, we think, by the fact that, in addition to the disciples and the five hundred brethren who received our Lord during his ministry, there were several thousand ready to receive him on the day of Pentecost, and more thousands subsequently. It is doubtful if as many thousands of "Israelites indeed, in whom there was no guile," could have been found in any other period of Israel's history. The finding of them at that time was by no means accidental, but was the result of divine providences in their national experience.

The Lord sifted the nation time after time to take out of it the classes possessing less faith and to bring more closely together those possessing more faith, until the best results were eventually found, as we have shown. The experiences narrated in our lesson were the beginnings of a sifting process. The nation of Israel was more or less honeycombed with idolatry, though still the religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was their national faith. The Temple at Jerusalem was the center of this faith, and the tribe of Judah – through which the Lord had foretold Messiah should come, and in which, therefore, the kingly authority was vested – became on this account the most religious of all the tribes, because thus closely identified with this hope and its fulfilment, and because in their king Messiah's kingdom was typified, as in their sacrifices his sufferings were typified. Both the sufferings and the royal glories, therefore, were more vividly and specially impressed upon the people of Judah than upon those of the ten tribes, whose territory was more or less remote from the capital city, the Temple, etc. – especially in a time when there was no rapid means of communication.

During the period of the union of the tribes under David and Solomon, some of the most devoted people of all the tribes had removed to Jerusalem, partly through their religious convictions and for the privilege of prayer in the Temple, and for more frequent association in the religious festivities. With the political rupture came the tendency to cast off all faith in the promises made to the fathers to the effect that a deliverer should rise out of Zion and that this great king should be of the tribe of Judah. Patriotism on the part of the ten tribes would naturally tend to alienate them from these religious promises. They must have remembered that the Lord had said that his law-giver would not depart from Judah until Shiloh should come – until the Messiah. In harmony with this we shall find, as we progress during this series of lessons, that idolatry began to come into the ten tribes more and more after their separation from Judah, and that likewise those who respected the Lord and his promises and were dissatisfied with idolatry, were disposed to leave their own tribes and to emigrate to the land of Judah. This division of the tribes, therefore, tended to sift the Israelites indeed out of all the tribes into the land of Judah.

SIFTINGS OF SPIRITUAL ISRAEL.

Spiritual Israelites studying this lesson should take special note of this feature – should notice that the Lord overruled in all the affairs of the typical people for the welfare of the true-hearted. Applying this lesson to spiritual Israel, we learn not to feel disappointed at what to others might appear to be unfavorable turns in national or temporal affairs, realizing that the Lord is wisely directing, not according to man's wisdom but according to his own plan and in the interest of his own cause, which means also in the interests of his own people. From this standpoint the Lord's consecrated people may seem less patriotic than others, but they may continually have joy and peace in all the vicissitudes of life, knowing that all things are cooperating for good to them that love the Lord.

Verse 16 briefly tells that the ten tribes revolted from Rehoboam in a quiet and peaceful manner, advising the king that he must look to his own tribe for support. Verse 17 refers to the Israelites from all these tribes which dwelt in the cities of Judah, and who from religious or [R3385 : page 188] other considerations were not moved to join with their tribes in rebellion, but preferred affiliation with the tribe of Judah, in which God through the prophet had declared that his blessing should come, and the worship divinely instituted at the Temple, built under divine direction.

The king, uncertain to what extent the dissatisfied ones would carry their threat, sent to them Adoram, the Secretary of the Treasury, the one having charge over the assessments, etc., the same mentioned in I Kings 4:6, called Adoniram, who presided over the forced labor. He was probably commissioned to do as previously, call for levies of laborers to serve the king as troops and for general national services. The people promptly resented it, and after the manner of their time the king's messenger was stoned. At this, the king realized that the people were not only sullen but angry and determined, that a rebellion was not only threatened but accomplished, and that his own life would probably be in danger unless he got back into the boundaries of Judah. The ten tribes chose Jereboam for their king and supported a separate government. King Rehoboam, loath to lose so large a part of his empire, at first thought to compel the union by putting down the rebellion, but the Lord warned him to the contrary – this also being in accordance with what we have heretofore seen, that it was part of the divine plan that the nations should be divided, and that, as we have seen, for the greater blessing of the Israelites indeed.

THE LORD ABHORRETH THE PROUD.

Our Golden Text fits well to the king. He had evidently overlooked, as many others have done, his father's words of wisdom, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." We will not claim that if the king had taken a less haughty course he

would not ultimately have lost the ten tribes from his kingdom; on the contrary, we believe that would have been the result anyway. Nevertheless, the Lord has a peculiar way of causing fore-intended events to come to pass in accordance with natural laws, etc.

The force of the proverb is still greater to us who are spiritual Israelites than to any others in the world at any time, for by the grace of God we who have received the high calling have reached a position, a standing, never previously granted to any, and the higher the standing the more serious would be the fall, and the greater the blessing the more serious would be the loss by destruction. Let us, dear brethren, as those who have tasted of divine favor, as those who have been made recipients of so great blessings, let us walk humbly with the Lord; let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Let us remember that pride leads to destruction; that a haughty spirit, a domineering, self-satisfied disposition, tends to undermine the character, and ultimately to precipitate the haughty one from his vantage position into degradation – in some cases into death, the Second Death.

