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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

AHIJAH FORESEES A DIVIDED KINGDOM
(Lesson for April 25)
Golden Text—If thou wilt hear-
ken unto all that I command
thee, and wilt walk in my
ways, . . . I will be with
thee, and build thee a sure
house.—1 Kings 11:38
THE LESSON AS A WHOLE
By J. C. Macaulay, D.D.
Approach to the Lesson

The story of the northern
kingdom of Israel is indeed a
sad one. It could not be other-
wise, for it started with an act
of rebellion against the house
of David, God's chosen line.
While it is true that Ahijah the
prophet declared that God was
giving the kingdom to Jeroboam,
as a judgment on the sins of
Solomon, nevertheless Jeroboam's
attitude was not one of humble
acceptance of a divine appoint-
ment, but of haughty rebellion
against the house of David. First
he tried to wrest the kingdom
from Solomon instead of waiting
God's time. Then, when the
kingdom fell to him, instead of
establishing it in righteousness,
he sought to secure it by a
wretched expedient—idolatry.

It is not surprising, then,
that the northern kingdom en-
dured only about two hundred
years before being wiped out of
existence. And those two
centuries were marked by con-
stant upheaval. Instead of a
stable dynasty, it had nine dif-
ferent dynasties, the change-
over usually taking place in an
act of violence. Although a few
were prosperous to a degree,
every one of its nineteen kings
was bad.

Over against that, the king-
dom of Judah survived its nor-
thern neighbour by more than
a century, yet it had only the
same number of kings, all of
the house of David. (There was
one brief usurpation, when
Athaliah, daughter of Ahab,
seized the throne for six

years.) In addition, Israel (the
northern kingdom) came down
with no prospect of recovery,
while Judah preserved the sure
hope of the unfailing promises
of God.
Despite the awful apostasy of
the northern tribes, God's pa-
tience and longsuffering were
shown in His sending them
prophets, including Elijah and
Elisha. Although they forsook
Him, He would not forsake
them. In the remaining lessons
of this quarter, we shall meet
some of those valiant servants
of God who carried the word
of the Lord to backslidden Is-
rael.

Verse by Verse
I Kings 11:29—"Ahijah the
Shilonite found him in the
way; and he had clad himself
with a new garment. . . . A
Shilonite was a native of Shi-
loh. His finding of Jeroboam
must not be regarded as a
chance meeting, but a divine
appointment. Jeroboam's new
garment can be explained by
verse 28.

Verse 30—"And Ahijah . . .
rent it in twelve pieces." Hav-
ing one's new garment ripped
in pieces before his eyes would
be no pleasant experience. I
wonder what Jeroboam's im-
mediate reaction was! At any
rate, he restrained himself.
(Some think that it was his
own garment which the pro-
phet tore.)

Verse 31—"Behold, I will
rend the kingdom out of the
hand of Solomon, and will give
ten tribes to thee." It was a
symbolic act, to represent the
division of the kingdom. Such
acted parables are common in
the prophets.

Verse 32—"But he shall have
one tribe for my servant Da-
vid's sake, and for Jerusalem's
sake. . . ." Jerusalem must re-
main with the seed of David
as the seat of God's house. For
the ten tribes of verse 31 and
the one tribe of verse 32 see
Topics for Development. No-

tion that verse 32 is paren-
thetical. For the reason of
verse 31 we go to verse 33.

Verse 33—"Because that they
have forsaken me . . . and
have not walked in my ways
. . . as did David his father."
Notice the plural "they." It is
not surprising that when the
king acted as he did, many of
the people took their cue from
him and drifted into idolatry.
The practices connected with
the worship of these gods were
cruel and debasing in the ex-
treme.

Verse 34—"But I will make
him prince all the days of his
life for David my servant's
sake. . . ." Two alleviations of
judgment God made with re-
gard to Solomon: He did not
take away the whole kingdom,
and He did not take it away in
Solomon's day. But these con-
cessions were for David's sake,
and because of God's covenant
with David.

Verse 35—"But I will take
the kingdom out of his son's
hand. . . ." Was this making
the son suffer for the father's
sins? We can only say that
Rehoboam showed himself un-
worthy of the kingship, and it
was the grace of God that re-
tained a kingdom to him at all.
See chapter 12.

Verse 36—"And unto his son
will I give one tribe, that Da-
vid . . . may have a light . . .
in Jerusalem. . . ." Here again
is the double reason. The house
of David must be preserved,
and Jerusalem must fulfill its
destiny as "the city of the
great King."

Verse 37—"Thou shalt reign
according to all that thy soul
desireth. . . ." It was God's act
to set Jeroboam on the throne
of Israel, but even here is an
indication that his reign would
be one of willfulness—not ac-
cording to the will of God.

Verse 38—"If thou wilt hear-
ken . . . and wilt walk in my
ways . . . I will . . . build thee
a sure house. . . ." Neverthe-
less he is challenged to walk
obediently, after the manner
of David, with promise of like
perpetuity and divine preser-
vation. This, however, was en-
tirely a conditional promise,
not like the "sure mercies of
David."

The Heart of the Lesson

Solomon was the son of Da-
vid and Bathsheba. The name
Solomon (signifying "peace-
ful") was given by his mother,
but God, through Nathan the
prophet, named him Jedidiah,
which means "beloved of Je-
hovah." But there was some-
thing prophetic in the name
given by his mother: God had
revealed to David that a son
of his, who would be a man
of peace, would build the house
of God that David himself had
desired to build. David and
Bathsheba seem to have recog-
nized in this child the one of
whom God had spoken.

It is clear, then, that Solo-
mon was one of God's chosen,
set apart from birth for a holy
calling. Moreover, he was
greatly blessed with a knowl-
edge of God, who appeared to
him twice, besides endowing
him with great wisdom and un-
derstanding. Yet this man turn-
ed away from his early integ-
rity, followed a course of self-
indulgence, and so lost his vi-
sion of God that he not only
permitted his wives to prac-
tice their idolatry, but made
provision for them to do so.
There is some dispute as to
whether or not Solomon him-
self engaged in idolatrous wor-
ship, but his promotion of it
was certainly equivalent to
personal practice, and it is evi-
dent that his actions introduced
an epidemic of idolatry among
the people. Certainly the most
favored child of God needs the
warning, "Let him that think-
eth he standeth take heed lest
he fall!"

God cannot indulge, nor eas-
ily deal with, the sins of His
people. While it is true that
"there is therefore now no con-
demnation to them which are
in Christ Jesus", it is equally
true that He will chasten His
people for their sins. Not only
in the political sphere are
crowns and thrones lost. The
spiritual sphere witnesses the
same. Solomon is only one of
many who have forfeited their
crowns. The damage wrought
by the sins of the saints is
beyond reckoning.

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