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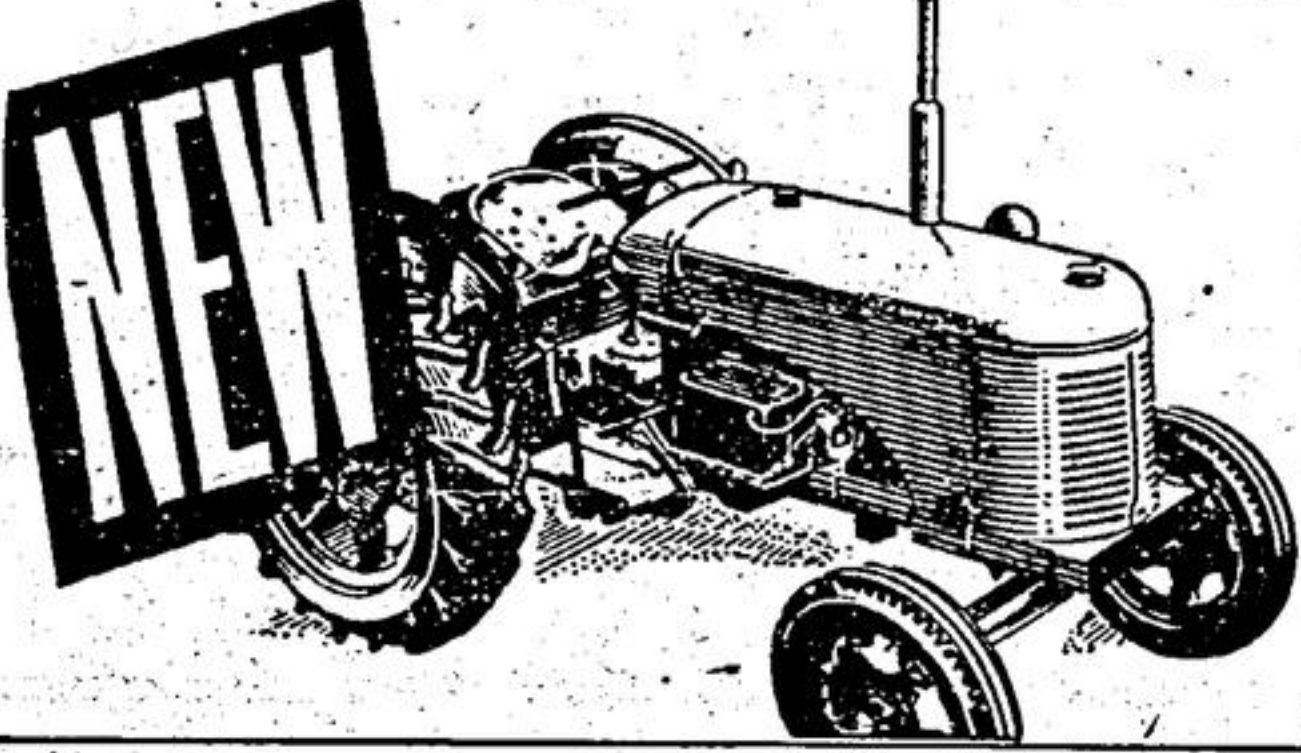


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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUDGMENT ON JEROBOAM

(Lesson for May 2)
Golden Text—Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments.—Deut. 8:11.

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

Approach to the Lesson
It is time to get out your Bible atlas and mark some places mentioned in this lesson. First, there are the two cities which Jeroboam built, or fortified—Shechem and Penuel. Shechem was in Ephraim, lying between the spurs of Gerizim and Ebal, where Israel had its great assembly in the days of Joshua. To this place Rehoboam had come for inauguration as king over Israel, and from it had fled for his life when, instead of crowning him, the northern tribes rebelled against him. A punitive expedition against the rebels would hit Shechem first, so Jeroboam lost no time in fortifying it. But why did he trouble about Penuel on the east side of Jordan? Probably to block any flanking movement that Rehoboam might undertake, and defend his trans-Jordan territory.

Next, we have the two locations at which Jeroboam set up the "calves of gold"—Bethel and Dan. Bethel had associations with their father Jacob, and would appeal to the people as a sacred site. Besides, it was at the southern extremity of his kingdom, right on the border of Benjamin. It would be an excellent spot at which weary travelers to Jerusalem would be induced to go no farther. Dan was near the northern extremity, and would serve the northern section admirably. Even in the days of the judges it had become a center of worship (of a kind!), with a priesthood.

Finally we have the king's residence—Tirzah. True, he lived first at Shechem, but soon moved his capital several miles north. The narrow defile in which Shechem was situated was hardly a suitable place, from a military standpoint. The situation was beautiful, and not so easily sealed by enemy forces.

Our lesson does not include chapter 13, but this ought not to be neglected. It is one of the strangest and saddest stories in the Old Testament, and carries some solemn lessons for the child of God—especially this, that when God speaks, we should obey, and not listen to false prophets who pretend to have special revelations.

Why was a prophet imported from Judah to rebuke Jeroboam for his sin? (13:1.) Why did not Ahijah, who revealed to Jeroboam the fact that he was to be king, and who lived in Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim, cry out against the evil? We do not know, and we must not jump to conclusions. Certainly Ahijah was faithful in rebuke in the incident which constitutes our lesson.

Verse by Verse
1 Kings 14:5—"Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; . . . she shall feign herself to be another . . ." The blindness of Ahijah (v. 4) would have made him, like Isaac (Gen. 27), an easy victim

of the queen's deceit, but God prepared him for her coming. Verse 6—"Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? . . . heavy tidings." Think of the astonishment and humiliation of the queen when she saw that the ruse of disguise had not hidden her identity, and that the prophet already knew her errand. Her deceit was rebuked, and the prophet prepared her for bad news.

Verse 7—"Thus saith the Lord God . . . I exalted thee . . . prince over my people Israel." The first part of the message was a reminder to Jeroboam that it was God who had exalted him, and therefore required of him homage and obedience.

Verse 8—" . . . thou hast not been as my servant David . . . to do that only which was right in mine eyes." If the kingdom had been rent from the house of David, despite David's adherence to the Law of the Lord, how could Jeroboam expect to retain it in face of his rebellion?

Verse 9—" . . . for thou has gone and made thee other gods . . . and hast cast me behind thy back." Jeroboam is accused of going further in iniquity than either Solomon or Rehoboam. However much he might have passed off the golden calves as simply symbols of the true God of Israel, God denounced it as idolatry. The images were "other gods."

Verse 10—"I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam . . ." The house of Jeroboam was therefore to be reduced to a state of refuse, and utterly cast out.

Verse 11—"Him that dieth . . . in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls . . . eat." The house of Jeroboam was the first of several northern royal houses to have this curse laid upon them (16:4; 21:24).

Verse 12—" . . . get thee to thine own house; and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die." A hard command, if she believed that what the prophet said would come to pass. Perhaps she took refuge in unbelief! But that was poor refuge.

Verse 13—" . . . he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord . . ." The son taken was the best of the family. Perhaps God took him for his own salvation. What godliness he had, exempted him from the contemptible end of the others of the family.

Verse 14—"The Lord shall raise him up a king . . . who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam . . ." See 15:29. Even wicked kings are raised up by the Lord in order to fulfill His purposes of judgment in the earth.

Verse 15—"For the Lord shall smite Israel . . . and shall scatter them beyond the river . . ." Not only was the house of Jeroboam to perish, but the kingdom which he had established was to perish also. Here is the first specific prophecy of Israel's captivity, as apart from warnings to the whole nation. For fulfillment, see 2 Kings 17.

Verse 16—"And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam . . ." The judgment, inflicted nearly two centuries later, was nevertheless traceable to the sins of Israel's first king, Jeroboam. Sin and righteousness alike have a long reach.

The Heart of the Lesson

Why did not Jeroboam go himself to the prophet when his son was sick? Surely that was a time for the mother to be on hand, tending the sick boy, rather than going on a journey! Was he ashamed and afraid to go himself? He probably was no more anxious to see Ahijah than Ahab was to see Elijah at a later date. His actions were not such as would make him comfortable in the presence of the Lord's prophet. He had not obeyed the commandments of the Lord as Ahijah had exhorted him to do (11:38). Instead, he had followed a policy of political expediency, even when it meant banishing the Lord God from the realm, as is being done too much today under cover of the First Amendment and the principle of the separation of church and state.

Now if, with the hand of the Lord heavy upon him, Jeroboam had been ready to confess and forsake his sin, he would gladly have gone to the prophet, seeking mercy of the Lord. But, wanting repentance, he was both ashamed and afraid, and had his wife go for him. How "conscience does make cowards of us all!"

But why did the queen go disguised? That it was not simply to hide her identity from the common people is clear from verse 5. Apparently she shared her husband's attitude to the prophet, because she shared her husband's sins. "Why feignest thou thyself to be another?" the prophet asked. It is a question that needs to be put to every sinner, for if there is one thing that the sinner is unwilling to do, it is to appear before God for what he is. How we cover ourselves with excuses, with self-righteousness, with self-justifications, with rationalizations—anything rather than admit what we are! But it is not until we drop our disguises and our pretenses, and confess our own proper name before God, as Jacob did at Jabbok, that the blessing of God can be ours, whether the blessing of salvation, or the further blessings of Christian experience. Heavy tidings always await the hypocrite and the pretender, but the soul that freely confesses its lost estate before God will hear the words of life eternal.

The sin of King Jeroboam cost him the life of the only one in his family that had any good in him (v. 13). It robbed his children of their royal heritage and condemned them to a miserable end (vs. 10, 11). It gave a "set" to his kingdom that doomed it to utter and permanent overthrow (vs. 15, 16). How costly is sin! No wonder it requires nothing short of the blood of Christ to save us from it.

GOODWOOD

Thursday, April 22, C.G.I.T. group from Goodwood visited Yonge St. United Church last Friday evening and saw the Easter play "In Thy Kingdom". This was a very inspiring drama and everyone enjoyed it. Mrs. Don Speveley made arrangements for this outing. Afterwards everyone went for a ride on the subway. Car drivers were Mrs. A. Pratt and Mrs. P. Evans, C.G.I.T. leader.



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