

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

by Mario Seiglie

OT-71 7-12-2008

1 KINGS 12-14 HOUSE OF ISRAEL REBELS; JEROBOAM'S SIN



With the death of Solomon, the 120 years of the United Monarchy comes to an end. Saul had reigned for 40 years and so had both David and Solomon.

Even though Solomon left Israel as a mighty and prosperous state, in his last years he had turned from God, and Israel had thus lost God's protection and blessings. God told Solomon his kingdom would be divided after his death because of his religious apostasy (1 Kings 11:11-13).

Shortly after Solomon's death, around 927 B.C., the twelve tribes met at Shechem to crown the successor, Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1). He was Solomon's eldest son, and 41 years old, but his mother was an Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21), one of Solomon's pagan wives that likely turned his heart to the Canaanite religion. She would probably pressure for her son to continue in this way, as he finally did.

The JFB Commentary adds, "Her heathen extraction and her influence as queen mother are stated to account for Rehoboam's tendency to depart from the true religion. Led by the warning of the prophet (1 K. 12:23), as well as by the large immigration of Israelites into his kingdom (1 K. 12:17; 2 Ch. 11:16), he continued for the first three years of his reign to follow the true religion (2 Ch. 11:17). But afterwards he began and encouraged a general apostasy; idolatry became the prevailing form of worship, and the religious state in his reign is described by the high places, the idolatrous statues, the groves and impure rites that with unchecked license were observed in them. The description is suited to the character of the Canaanite worship."

At Shechem, God worked it out so Solomon's punishment of a divided kingdom would take place. Solomon's grand style and the expenses of his many wives caused the people to be heavily taxed and have forced labor. Now that he was gone, they wanted relief. So Jeroboam and the elders of Israel pleaded with Rehoboam to reduce the tax and the forced government labor on them. They said, "Your father made our yoke heavy, now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and this heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you. So he said to them, 'Depart for three days, then come back to me. And the people departed'" (1 K. 12:3-5).

Expositor's explains, "Particularly burdensome were the corvee, or compulsory service (over which interestingly enough, Jeroboam had been appointed

by Solomon), and the taxation that Rehoboam's father levied on the land. Both lay on the people like a heavy yoke."

Rehoboam wisely consulted first with the elders who had served Solomon and they told him, "If you will be a *servant* to these people today, and *serve* them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever" (1 K. 12:7). Notice that *servant leadership* is taught throughout the Bible—but few kings followed through.

Then he did a foolish thing and turned to his inexperienced and mostly spoiled royal friends for advice. The Bible continues, "But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him...Then...they said, 'Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!'" (1 K. 12:7-11).

So Rehoboam threatened the people with heavier taxes and additional forced labor—he wanted to continue his lavish lifestyle with his friends. The Bible adds, "So the king did not listen to the people, for the turn of events was from the Lord, that He might fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah, the Shilonite to Jeroboam. So when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, 'What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David'" (1 K. 12:15-16).

This begins the period of the Divided Kingdom, which would last 300 years until both houses are taken into captivity (Israel, some 200 years later, and Judah, some 300 years later).

Rehoboam still thought he could bully them into submission and went to them with Adorinam, an experienced tax collector, who was promptly stoned. Rehoboam himself barely escaped being killed. Then the ten tribes of Israel named Jeroboam as their king, just as God had predicted. When Rehoboam was about to start a civil war against them, a prophet from

God warned him not to do it and he obeyed. Yet there would be violent skirmishes throughout their reigns.

Jeroboam set up Sheshem as his capital as a rival to Jerusalem. He then committed one of the greatest of sins. “And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to him.’ Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this *became a sin*, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a Feast *on the fifteenth day of the eighth month*, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places...which he had *devised* in his own heart” (1 K. 12:26-33).

So began a fraudulent parallel religious system in Israel that included false feasts and wrongly appointed and commandment-breaking priests. Jeroboam even appointed himself as a chief priest.

There are parallels here with what the apostate Church did when it “devised” its own feasts (Christmas, Easter, etc.), and changed the Sabbath to Sunday to avoid having dates similar to the Jews. They also “devised” all of this in their own heart—not from God’s Word. And thus we have a fraudulent parallel Christianity with mighty man-made religious festivals and a commandment-breaking clergy existing right up to our days!

This whole false religious system Jeroboam devised will later be called in the Bible, “Jeroboam’s sin”—and Jeroboam’s sin is still being repeated today!

When God saw what great apostasy Jeroboam was committing, He sent a prophet to warn him in a dramatic fashion. After all, God had hopes Jeroboam would follow His way of life. He had said, “If you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, then I will be with you and build

for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you” (1 K. 11:38).

But Jeroboam became fearful, was corrupted by power and did not obey God. As the Bible says, “And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, ‘O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, a child, *Josiah* by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men’s bones shall be burned on you.’ And he gave a sign the same day, saying, ‘This is the sign which the Lord has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out.’ So it came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God who cried out against the altar in Bethel, that he stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, ‘Arrest him!’ Then his hand, which he stretched out toward him, withered, so that he could not pull it back to himself. The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. Then the king...said, ‘Please entreat the favor of the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.’ So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored to him...Then the king said, ‘Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward.’ But the man of God said, ‘If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.’ So he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel” (1 K. 13:1-10).

Yet, an old, meddling prophet wanted to have this man of God at his home, so he found him and lied, saying God had told him he could eat with him. The man of God gullibly believed him and disobeyed God’s command. As a result, he was killed by a lion, and the prophet, realizing his error, gave him a proper burial. This is a lesson for a man of God never to go against God’s command, no matter what.

Meanwhile, Jeroboam had not learned anything from his withered hand and God’s stern warning. The Bible says, “After this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests from

every class of people for the high places; whoever wished, he consecrated him...And this thing was the *sin* of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate it from the face of the earth” (1 K. 13:34).

God again sent a warning to Jeroboam to desist in his mad apostasy. His son Abijah became sick, and Jeroboam wanted to know if he could be healed, so he sent his wife disguised as a common woman to the shrine in Shiloh. But God warned the priest who she was, and he told her the child would die, and the rest of the family would die an even more terrible death as a result of following Jeroboam’s sin.

Jeroboam died after reigning over the house of Israel for 22 years. He fought the house of Judah all of that time and, due to his ambition and fears, set the pattern for religious apostasy for the next 200 years.

Rehoboam, after the rebellion of Israel, kept the commandments of God for three years, but then left the true faith. The Bible says, “He reigned over Judah for 17 years...Now Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. And there were also perverted persons in the land” (1 K. 14:21-24).

Who are the “perverted persons”? *Gill’s Commentary* explains, “*And there were Sodomites throughout the land*--Such as were *addicted* to unnatural lusts between men and men, which the men of Sodom were guilty of, from whence they had their name: Jarchi interprets the word adultery and some versions render it whoremongers; and filthy actions of this nature, *both by men and women*, usually attended idolatrous practices among the heathens; in their temples and groves such wickedness was privately perpetrated.”

God lifted the protection from Judah, as He had Israel, and now allows an Egyptian pharaoh to briefly conquer and sack Jerusalem. “It happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house; he took away everything. He also took away all the gold shields which Solomon had made” (1 K. 14:25-26).

This incident is pivotal to establish biblical chronology and synchronize the dates for the Bible and Egyptian history. At the temple of Amon, in

Karnak, Shishak’s (Sheshonk I) the conquests of 156 towns and cities of greater Israel are recorded.

Unger’s Bible Handbook adds, “In Rehoboam’s fifth year, Shishak invaded Judah, and Israel as well. Archaeology shows Shishak is [very likely] Sheshonk I of Egypt (c. 945-924 B.C.), founder of the Twenty-second Dynasty, whose gold-masked body was discovered at Tanis in 1938-1939. His triumphal Karnak (Thebes) inscription lists towns taken in Judah as well as in Israel and Gilead. Part of his stele was excavated at Megiddo, showing that he actually took this city, as the Karnak relief shows” (p. 215).

Rehoboam replaced some of the stolen items, but only made bronze shields instead of gold ones. He died as a mostly foolish and disobedient king. “So Rehoboam rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David...Then Abijam his son reigned in his place” (1 K. 14:31).

Just as Solomon had feared about his successor turning out to be a fool (Eccl. 2:18-19), so it had happened—of course, Solomon was greatly to blame for how things had finally turned out.

Eugene Merrill has this to say, “Like his father, Rehoboam was polygamous (had multiple women). He married a granddaughter of David (thus his own cousin), Mahalath (2 Chron. 11:18), and Maacah, daughter of Absalom. Altogether he accumulated eighteen wives and sixty concubines...Rehoboam and his compatriots reached a new low in idolatrous behavior. They set up high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles and even engaged in ritual prostitution featuring sodomites. Given the religious syncretism introduced by Solomon because of his pagan wives, including Naamah the mother of Rehoboam, one is not surprised at this turn of events [allowing idolatry and sodomy]. The last twelve years of Rehoboam’s reign seem to be viewed more favorably by the narrators. Because ‘Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord’s anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed’ (2 Chron. 12:14) (*Kingdom of Priests*, p. 321- 325).