

1ST KINGS

Week 22, chapter 12

There are events in the Bible that are so history-changing that it is hard to put into words; and yet, most of the time these events are given but brief mention or spoken of rather dispassionately. This is one of the many aspects of the underlying nature of Holy Scripture that is so at odds with the typical literature of the ancient Middle East. Usually if an author was chronicling the dissolution of a Kingdom, the fall or rise of a King, or victorious war battles we would see abundant use of hyperbole, exaggeration, flattery of the royalty, gory details and superhuman heroic acts and no mention whatsoever of the actors' faults or the leadership's failures; but this is not so in the Bible.

Especially here beginning in 1st Kings Chapter 12 we are given a rather emotionless report of the secession of the 10 northern tribes from the nation of Israel, the death of Solomon, and the rise of 2 new Hebrew kings, **Rehov'am** and **Yerov'am**, who were a vast departure from David and **Shlomo**. So I'd like to interject a couple of thoughts to begin today's lesson. First is that we're going to see that all the Scriptural focus is on the leadership of Israel. We don't see any but the slightest mention of the general population of Israel. And this is because (as we have discussed in past lessons) the fate of a nation always rests on its leadership. Indeed our carnal humanness and the way that all humankind operates on a societal level inevitably means that we will have leaders and the direction of our community (small or large) will to one measure or another be placed into the hands of these leaders. It is self-evident that what they choose and how they behave will play the pivotal role in the development and fate of any particular society whether it is a small tribe or a modern Superpower nation. But there is also another reality invisibility at play; the spiritual reality. And it is by means of this unseen spiritual reality that God will judge mankind on two levels: as individuals according to our relationship with Messiah and corporately according to our community and national membership.

Our eternal salvation and thus our eternal future is on a purely one-by-one basis; but much of our earthly experience will revolve around God's perspective of the leadership of our common government. Thus the kings of Israel, whether upright or wicked, will be the determining factor used by God as to whether He will bless and protect Israel or will turn His back on them and even draw down enemies upon them as punishment. We are told in 1st Kings that the Lord has determined to split Israel into two uneven portions, and to strip Solomon's and his

descendants of the larger one, due to Solomon's lack of faithfulness to Yehoveh. It was all on the King. This principle has not changed. And it has little to do with the system of government under which a nation operates. Whether it is an Eastern monarchy or a Western democracy the character of the leadership and whether that leader heeds the Word and commandments of Yehoveh God of Israel will determine the destiny of the nation. And what else is a nation but a group of individuals with a common bond and culture who share a single leadership? There is no escape from this reality whether we think it fair or not.

The second thing I'd like to point out is that the loss of King Solomon, the coronation of King Rehoboam, the arrival of Jeroboam and the split of Israel into 2 separate Kingdoms was a highly charged emotional event that would have sent the majority of Israel's population (north and south) into a long term state of depression and fear. No doubt the leaders who wanted this split were self-satisfied because they had achieved personal power and control; but at the grassroots level the very nature of Israel was now changed. Just as with the American Civil War there were those on both sides who wanted and longed for two separate nations with separate leadership and separate cultures and goals; and there were also those who felt that the break-up of the union was the tragic demise of the greatest social experiment ever conceived. Thus as the end of the war when the union was preserved, there were those who felt defeated and humiliated because they were now forced, against their will, to remain as part of a national community they did not want; and there were also those who were jubilant that the split was avoided. No doubt most of the population had emotions that vacillated and most had no sense of stability and lacked confidence in a good future.

So whatever life had been for each citizen before the American Civil War it was different afterwards. An enormous amount of the young male population of America had been killed. Another segment of the population that had been set-apart as African slaves now had to find work and be assimilated into a majority European white society. Somehow the years of hatred between North and South had to be healed. Commerce and trade changed. Although the outcome for the nation of Israel was the opposite of what happened in America, the result for the people was the same. Social upheaval, uncertainty, and family splits based on loyalties and politics were forced upon all. None of this is directly addressed in the Bible; yet this is the foundational context for what we'll see for the next several centuries of Hebrew history. And it is all the result of bad and generally ungodly leadership.

We must never forget that although God's providence is the supreme driving force behind all that happens in our Universe, it is only apparent to us in the physical sphere that we experience on a daily basis. Upheavals due to changes in governments, wars, economic conditions, family relationships and more are under God's sovereign control; but it is these things (unfortunately) that also tend to control our emotions and sense of well-being no matter how much we trust in God. And this is how we have to view these coming chapters in the Book

of Kings.

Let's read 1st Kings 12.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 12 all

We talked a little about **Rechov'am** last week and it seems as though there wasn't any recorded controversy or opposition to him assuming the throne from his father Solomon. What we should question however is just why this coronation ceremony up north in the city of Shechem was necessary, especially since Shechem was the traditional place of assembly for the northern tribes but not for Israel as a nation. It was the law that when a son succeeded his father as king that no kind of ceremonial acceptance of his leadership was required. He also did not have to be anointed by the priesthood or a prophet. However when there is a rival to the throne (like when Solomon had to wrangle with Adonijah over who should succeed David), then indeed a ceremonial anointment was needed to publically settle the dispute. Truthfully the Scriptures don't address the issue; rather we're just told of it. Likely the young and inexperienced Rehoboam thought that it would be both gracious and politically expedient to give in to the demands of the northern tribes to be coronated away from Jerusalem (where if there were to be any kind of coronation it certainly should have been at the Temple). As we see in these passages the tensions between the north and south were at the boiling point and so it probably seemed wise to Rehoboam to travel up north and receive affirmation of his ascendancy even if it meant doing it on the terms of those northern tribes by going to Shechem. His father Solomon and grandfather David would have instinctively known that to do so would have been an admission of weakness. And in this kind of society, that only succeeded in emboldening Rehoboam's enemies.

And predictably by agreeing to this somewhat demeaning demand for the new king to venture north to be confirmed, this presented an opportunity for Jeroboam to return from self-exile in Egypt (he had fled some time earlier because he openly sought to depose King Solomon, and **Shlomo** tried to have him killed). And with Jeroboam leading the way when **Rechov'am** arrived at Shechem the new king was confronted by the demand to reduce the taxation that had been placed upon the northern tribes. This taxation consisted basically of two things: money and labor. It is ironic that before he fled Jeroboam was happily appointed by King **Shlomo** as the supervisor of forced labor that was to be supplied by the 2 most powerful

northern tribes, Ephraim and Manessah. And now here he is representing the northern tribes demanding that the new king of Israel lighten the load.

No doubt the hope was to create a crisis over what had been a populist issue among the common people of the 10 northern tribes: forced labor. And as any experienced politician knows, you never let a good crisis go to waste. So now Rehoboam had a problem; if he gave in to the demand he would lose honor and be shamed. He would also lose the use of valuable forced labor for his government.

On one hand the north was not being unreasonable. King Solomon never should have employed forced Hebrew labor in the first place. Secondly it was implemented in a patently unfair way: only the northern tribes were required to supply it. **Shlomo's** own tribe of Judah was exempt. One can only imagine the level of contempt and outrage this caused. But on the other hand Solomon's programs had made Israel the envy of the known world. The 10 northern tribes had benefited greatly and had experienced a nearly undisturbed peace during the 40 years that he ruled. So the real issue is one that has vexed mankind at all times: who would be in control? For the past 80 years Israel had been ruled by a Judahite: David and then Solomon and now Rehoboam. The north wanted their turn in power.

Verse 4 concludes with the representatives of the northern tribes saying that if Rehoboam will negotiate a substantially reduced amount of forced labor that's currently required of them, then they will agree to serve him (meaning to accept him as king). The King asked for 3 days to think it over. What he didn't understand was that it was already checkmate. The moment he agreed to go to Shechem he made a tactical mistake from which there was no turning back. His very first act as king was to appear weak, and he didn't have enough cunning or support to reassert his power upon the northern tribes.

First he goes to the royal court of advisors that his father had used for so many years. In verse 6 he asks them how they would respond to Jeroboam's demands and they tell Rehoboam that if he will be a servant-king (which is the kind of king that God says is required of all Israelite kings), and he responds to the northern tribal leaders with **tov dabar** (good words), then they will be his servants (loyal to the throne of Rehoboam) all of their days.

In other words their council was for **Rechov'am** to give in to their demands and do so graciously. This was wise advice if one considers Rehoboam's tenuous position. The council of elders knew the box that Rechov'am had created for himself. No doubt had Rechov'am

NOT gone up north to Shechem and instead had told the northern tribes that he needed no coronation, had they demanded the same thing the advice would have been quite different. But he was operating from a position of weakness and so his only hope to remain king and avoid a civil war was to give the northern tribes what they asked for. But the young and impetuous **Rechov'am** didn't like the answer of this council and so in verse 8 he went to some of his friends who he had grown up with (so by definition they were not mature and had little if any experience in diplomacy) and asked them what he ought to do.

Naturally, they told him what he wanted to hear because they were of similar temperament. They recommended the exact opposite of what the wise elders had advised. They advised a show of power to try and recover from his mistake of traveling to Shechem for a coronation ceremony. Verse 10 is a difficult translation but essentially the meaning is "my weakest point is stronger than all of my father's vigor". The rash advisors told Rehoboam to fully acknowledge the heaviness of his father's yoke; but also that since the tribal leaders insult him with their demands that he shall make that yoke even more burdensome in retribution.

Rehoboam went back to Jeroboam and his cohorts with this answer on the 3rd day, as promised. The exact words that his young advisors suggested were what he spoke. These were the words of a tyrant, not a servant-king. Verse 15 says that the king did not **shema** to the people; that is he did not hear and act appropriately. But we are reminded immediately this all of this was God's providence; this was the way that the Kingdom would be split and the larger portion taken from Solomon's son. No doubt no one detected that the Lord was at the bottom of this; everything happened in the context of men dealing with men on political matters. They all operated within their natural character, and all responded as one would expect. And yet it all served to bring about what the Lord had determined He would do in response to Solomon's idolatry.

This was a stupid and irresponsible response by the king, and so in verses 16 and 17 the 10 tribes declare their independence using the colorful language of that era. It is interesting that their angry reply of we have "no share in David, no inheritance in David, back to your tents" are basically the same words used by the rebel Sheba of Benjamin against King David.

^{CJB} **2 Samuel 20:1** *There happened to be there a scoundrel whose name was Sheva the son of Bikhri, a Binyamini. He sounded the shofar and said, "We have no share in David, no inheritance in the son of Yishai; so, Isra'el, every man to his tent!"*

It's about 920 B.C. and **Rehov'am** has just lost his kingdom. In verse 16 when it says that "all of Israel" saw that the king didn't listen to them, we need to apply our lesson from last week whereby we have to begin to apply the word Israel carefully in the proper context. And it is in the same context as in the first verse of chapter 12 where it says "for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him (Rehov'am) king". In other words, here the term Israel is speaking of ONLY the northern 10 tribes. It is speaking in retrospect because these words were recorded as Scripture long after the actual event. And thus once the whole of Israel was split, there were now the 10 tribe Kingdom of Israel and the 1 tribe Kingdom of Judah. And verse 17 acknowledges that just as God's divine decree through Achiyah ordained, Rehoboam now ruled only over the House of Judah.

Of course the rebellious Rehoboam just didn't get it that the matter was now a closed case in heaven and so he decided he would try to make amends on earth. Before he left for Jerusalem he dispatched **Adoram** who in charge of all forced labor throughout the kingdom to go to the leaders of the north and patch things up and get the people to accept Rehoboam as king. The minute he was spotted **Adoram** was killed so **Rehov'am** mounted his chariot and fled to the safety of the south.

When the tribal elders and clan leaders heard that Jeroboam had returned and what had transpired between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the people crowned him as king of the northern tribes and called the nation "Israel". In a few decades the super-tribe of Ephraim became sufficiently dominant in the north that the nation became known simply as Ephraim. Just so as to be a little clearer as we proceed, often from here forward I'll call this 10 tribe nation "Ephraim-Israel" so as to separate it from the former 12 tribe unified nation of Israel and to separate it from the southern kingdom of Judah.

After a failed diplomatic mission to try and recover his lost kingdom, now **Rehov'am** would try brute force. He called upon the tribal army of his home tribe Judah as well as his ally Benjamin and assembled 180,000 warriors. This was to be all out war to regain his kingdom. Apparently his southern tribal coalition agreed with the goal of keeping the Kingdom intact because he was quickly able to raise this huge army and there is no record of disagreement. But suddenly a prophet named **Shemaiah** (meaning hear and obey God) appears and tells the King that he is NOT to attack Israel; that all the warriors of Judah and Benjamin are to go home, because the loss of the northern kingdom was brought about by Yehoveh. Interestingly Rehoboam and the army obeyed.

Perhaps we have to give Rehoboam a bit of a break; it seems that he really didn't know that he was destined to lose his kingdom due to the idolatry his father Solomon had committed. Jeroboam knew about it but Rehoboam didn't. Every Israelite king had at least one prophet that was assigned to him by God; it seems that **Shemaiah** must have been Rehoboam's prophet so when **Shemaiah** told the King the oracle from God (that he was not to go and attack Jeroboam and the northern tribes), **Rechov'am** believed him. So I think we have to give some merit to **Rechov'am** even though his boorish behavior and tyrannical attitude had much to do with the circumstances he now faced.

Rabbi Scherman, a noted Hebrew scholar, makes the observation that **Yarov'am** was probably a God-fearing man at first; otherwise the Lord would not have given him the opportunity to rule the northern tribes with the promise that if he obeyed the Lord's commandments he would have an enduring dynasty. But the power of knowing he would be king, and then when he became king, was too much for him and he quickly fell from grace and soon descended into the worst sorts of idolatry. He would institute policies that would doom his reign and his people and they revolved around setting up an alternative religious system.

Verse 25 starts a narrative that explains that Jeroboam built up Shechem and Penuel, meaning he fortified the cities in case Rehoboam did what Jeroboam probably would have done in a similar situation: attack and try to regain the territory. Interestingly in 2nd Chronicles 11 we find that Rehoboam was afraid that Jeroboam would attack Judah in order to rule over all 12 tribes.

2Chron. 11:4-10 CJB

⁴ *that this is what ADONAI says: 'You are not to go up and fight your brothers! Every man is to go back home, because this is my doing.'" They paid attention to the words of ADONAI and turned back from attacking Yarov'am.*

⁵ *Rechav'am lived in Yerushalayim and built cities for defense in Y'hudah-*

⁶ *he built Beit-Lechem, 'Eitam, T'koa,*

⁷ *Beit-Tzur, Sokho, 'Adulam,*

⁸ *Gat, Mareshah, Zif,*

⁹ *Adorayim, Lakhish, 'Azekah,*

¹⁰ *Tzor'ah, Ayalon and Hevron; these are fortified cities in Y'hudah and Binyamin.*

Yarov'am must have been observing how his people still journeyed to **Yerushalayim** to the Temple to worship, sacrifice, and observe the Feasts and appointed times because he began to get paranoid that with this continued Temple and Priesthood connection his people might decide to kill him and ask Rehoboam to be their king (and thus re-unite the kingdom under the Davidic dynasty). And the truth is that no doubt the common people of the northern tribes weren't as interested in separation and hostility between Judah and Ephraim-Israel as was Jeroboam and the tribal leaders. After all their main beef with Solomon and then **Rechov'am** was their continuing insistence on using the people for forced labor for government projects. His solution? Create a whole new religious system complete with his own gods, idols, high places, and priests.

He had two golden calves manufactured and told that people that going to Jerusalem to worship was too much of an inconvenience. So, "here are your gods, O Israel!" Jeroboam used the same declaration to present his golden calves to the people as Aaron did out in the wilderness during the exodus. In fact he gave these calf-gods the credit for bringing Israel out of Egypt. In my humble opinion, Jeroboam had gone spiritually insane in his desire for power and control. That warped mind put one of the golden calves at the northern most part of Israel in Dan, and another in the southern most part of Israel at Beit-El. That way his people wouldn't have terribly far to go to sacrifice and worship no matter where they lived in Jeroboam's Kingdom.

Frankly it stretches the imagination to wonder how someone like Jeroboam and a people like the northern tribes of Israel could find it acceptable to simply exchange gods (out with the old, in with the new!) for the sake of convenience and political correctness. After but 1 generation from the construction and consecration of Solomon's Temple, the people of northern Israel went whoring not just after other gods, but after a new religious system that they invented. In verse 31 we're told that **Yerov'am** made a Temple that consisted of multiple bamot (high places). He created a new priesthood from non-Levites. But then he went so far as to forsake the much of the Torah, the Biblical Feasts and other appointed times and created his own. Why? In order to separate he and his people as far as possible from the roots of their faith so that a new order with a new agenda could be created and observed.

He created a new holiday in the 8th month of the year that began on the 15th day. In other words it mimicked Sukkot that occurs on the 15th day of the 7th month. As the passage says:

^{CJB} **1 Kings 12:33** *He went up to the altar which he had set up in Beit-El on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had chosen on his own, and instituted a festival for the people of Isra'el; he went up to the altar to burn incense.*

It is my hope that you are perhaps as struck by this as am I. If ever there was a pattern after which early gentile Christianity fell prey it was this one. The early Church bishops, all gentiles, took over the Church movement that was begun, of course, by Jews. How would these new gentile Bishops be able to wrest control away from the Jewish Messianic leadership and maintain it? As with Jeroboam, by separating themselves and their congregations as much as possible from their former Jewish faith roots and that included setting aside most aspects of the Torah and the commandments.

So in relatively little time the God-ordained Biblical Feasts and appointed times were abolished, and new manmade holidays like Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter were invented to replace and somewhat mimic the old ones. Naturally the new ones were decreed to be held at different times and at different places than the ones the Torah commanded. We got a new god; we were told that the Old Testament God was no longer the same and had transformed into the New Testament God. The God that never changes, changed. These gods' rules and commandments were different; the OT God was rigid, legalistic and blood-thirsty. The NT God is tolerant, a pacifist, and full of love, mercy and grace.

The Bible ordained symbols of our faith roots (the Menorah, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Sabbath) were done away with and new symbols arose (the cross, the fish, Sunday rest, the Christmas Tree). The Roman Catholic Church instituted an alternative Priest system, with its own requirements and its own rules. The houses of worship went from being modest buildings to extravagant monuments to religion.

Naturally some vestiges of the old faith roots were retained: tithing, communal worship, even the main elements of the 10 Commandments. And we can be certain that Jeroboam did the same because retaining some of those older customs and traditions brought advantages and a certain comfort level with them. It is something that we, as modern Believers, need to think long and sincerely about, pray about and repent from.

That Yeshua is Messiah does not abolish his heritage or ours. It also gives us no right to determine to change God's laws and commandments merely because they are inconvenient for us. And despite the terrible lie that has been taught for almost 1900 years that Christ did

away with the Torah, the Law, the teachings of the Prophets, just reflect on his words in the Gospel of Matthew:

Matt 5:17-19 CJB

¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.

¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.

¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.