

SESSION SIXTEEN

TROUBLES IN THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

1 Kings 12:1–22:53

I. REVIEW

In 2 Samuel 7, God instituted the Davidic covenant with David. In 1 Kings 1–11 (Solomon's reign), God was faithful to fulfill the promises to David by (1) establishing his son Solomon on the throne, (2) allowing Solomon to build the Temple to YHWH and (3) correcting Solomon when he committed iniquity. The latter resulted in the division of the kingdom because of Solomon's heart which turned away from the Lord.¹ God would still allow David's line to reign on the throne (maintaining the Davidic covenant), but the privilege would be diminished. The line of David would only reign over two tribes.

In 1 Kgs 9:6-9, God clarified that the Davidic covenant would extend beyond the reign of Solomon. God would deal with each successive king in the line of David on these principles, and would discipline the nation when they did not obey (even with exile from the land if need be). The kings of the Southern Kingdom would be dealt with on this basis. When God made a covenant with Jeroboam, He affirmed to him as well that the Northern kings would be dealt with in similar manner (11:37-39).

Thus, the whole matter of the division of the kingdom was a form of discipline. God could not set aside the Davidic dynasty and introduce a new dynasty, as He had done with Saul. But God essentially said, "What I am going to do as punishment is to divide the kingdom so that the Davidic dynasty will be perpetuated in only two tribes."

II. INTRODUCTION

The second half of 1 Kings will begin to look at how the divided kingdom will fare. These two kingdoms will continue until they come to the final discipline of exile that God had predicted in Deut 28. God had promised that with continued disobedience, He would bring an invading army and eventually bring destruction on the land and lead the people away into exile. The Northern Kingdom will continue until it is attacked and carried away into exile by Assyria in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom will survive longer, lasting until 605 BC when it is first invaded by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

1 Kings 12–22 will primarily deal with three kings: Rehoboam, Jeroboam and Ahab. The vast majority of the material will concern the Northern Kingdom, particularly the reign of Ahab. Each king is evaluated individually, but the way that the material is proportioned seems to suggest that more than an evaluation is involved (note that half of the material concerns the reign of Ahab).

¹Although the division of the kingdom is ultimately a result of Solomon's sin, there were also immediate causes as well. Certainly, the growing tribal jealousy contributed significantly (see Mark Mercer, "Tribal Jealousy and the Division of the Monarchy Following the Reign of Solomon," Th.M. thesis, Dallas Seminary, 1979). Note, for instance, 2 Sam 20:1 and 1 Kgs 12:16! Brindle mentions even further causes to the division such as sectionalism (military policies that reflected a sectional Judahite interest) and Solomon's greedy exploitation of the people (see Wayne A. Brindle, "The Causes of the Division of Israel's Kingdom," *BibSac* 141:563 [Jul-Sep, 1984]:223-233).

Jeroboam and Ahab receive most of the attention, and this may suggest that there is something peculiar about their reigns that the author wants to highlight for the reader. Both of these kings were evil, but the significant thing is that they made drastic changes in the *worship* of the nation. Jeroboam created a new worship system of idolatry with a priesthood, festivals, worship center, etc. Ahab instituted Baal worship as the official state religion.

III. PURPOSE OF 1 KINGS 12–22

to evaluate the successive reigns of the kings in the divided kingdom, with emphasis on the decline of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam and Ahab.

IV. THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

Chapters 12–14 deal with the two successors to Solomon, Jeroboam in the North and Rehoboam in the South. Solomon had been very hard on the people of his kingdom, making them support the luxuries and extravagances of his kingdom. When the people came to crown Rehoboam king, they appealed to him to lighten the load they had been bearing (both in taxes and service). When Rehoboam refused their request, the 10 Northern tribes turned to Jeroboam and rebelled. This situation, however, was simply the way YHWH worked out His judgment on Solomon. Rehoboam's refusal, although a real decision on his part, was the means that God used for the effecting of His will: "So the king did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of events from the LORD" (12:15; cf. 12:24).

V. THE KINGLY DYNASTIES

In the Southern Kingdom, the Davidic dynasty continued throughout the whole period of the kings, with each king being in the line of David. In the North, there was a completely different situation. God had promised Jeroboam that if he continued in obedience, then He would perpetuate his dynasty continually (11:38). Unlike the Davidic covenant, this was conditional. When Jeroboam made an abomination of YHWH worship, God pronounced judgment on him that would include the end of his dynasty (14:14). This was fulfilled by Baasha who assassinated Jeroboam's son Nadab (15:27) and wiped out the house of Jeroboam (15:29-30). This new dynasty did not last long either. Baasha acted corruptly, and God pronounced judgment on him that would include the end of his dynasty (16:2-4). Consequently, his son Elah was assassinated by one of the military commanders named Zimri (16:10). Shortly thereafter, a new dynasty arose with Omri, and this one (which included Ahab and Ahaziah) continued throughout the remainder of 1 Kings. Here is a summary of the dynasties:

<u>House of Jeroboam</u>
Jeroboam
Nadab
<u>House of Baasha</u>
Baasha
Elah
<u>House of Zimri</u>
Zimri
<u>House of Omri</u>
Omri
Ahab
Ahaziah

VI. THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

The reader should carefully note that there is very little said about the Southern Kingdom in 1 Kings 12–22. Rehoboam, the successor to the Davidic covenant, is evaluated in 14:21-31. He turns out to be a sad disappointment in comparison with his grandfather David, going beyond the acts of Solomon in the practice of high places, sacred pillars, Asherim, and even male cult prostitutes (14:22-24). However, God does not wipe out the Davidic line in the south. Rather, He disciplines it. Consequently, Shishak the pharaoh of Egypt invaded Judah and plundered the precious treasures of Jerusalem. Fortunately, the nation (including Rehoboam) repented, and the LORD gave deliverance (2 Chron 12:6-7).

Rehoboam's son Abijah was not wholly devoted to the LORD, but the LORD only allowed him a brief reign. The rest of 1 Kings is taken up by the reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat, both of whom were generally good kings (15:11; 22:43). Little else is said about the south, except that Asa was very fervent to remove many of the idols from the land and to purify the kingdom (15:11-15). Thus, there was a mixture of both good and bad in the Southern Kingdom, but the relative goodness of the south leads the author to concentrate on the events of the north which were contributing to a significant degeneration of these tribes.

VII. THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

Most of the material in 12–22 concerns the Northern Kingdom, because the events were far more serious and the degeneration far more acute. Not one of the kings in the North does right in the sight of the LORD, or adheres to the Mosaic covenant. Consequently, God raised up prophetic mediators (e.g., Elijah and Elisha) who were the true guardians of the covenant and spokesmen for God.

A. The Religious Deterioration of this Period

The Northern Kingdom was allowed to exist for just a little over 200 years before God brought the final judgment by Assyria in 722 BC. During this time, there were three major religious episodes that had a notable impact upon Israel.

1. The Sin of Jeroboam (930-909 BC)

Jeroboam had the opportunity to be a great king, but after becoming king he changed his mind and altered the religion of the nation. His great problem was one of faith, for he could not believe that you could have a politically divided country and yet be theologically united. But that was God's intention . . . to have the northern tribes continue to worship at Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. God's desire was not to separate the two kingdoms forever, but to eventually reunite them.

But Jeroboam did not see it as God's kingdom; he saw it as his own opportunity for greatness in the world. Despite the revelation he had received from the LORD (11:31-39), Jeroboam made a volitional decision to disobey out of fear that he would lose his kingship and the people would reunite under the Davidic dynasty (12:26-27). In particular, he was concerned about the religious factor that might serve to draw the northern tribes back to the south. So, he changed the whole system of worship for the northern tribes to keep them distinct from the Southern Kingdom and divert them from the Temple at Jerusalem. He created rival sanctuaries (at Bethel

and Dan), constructed golden calves for idolatrous worship, established his own festival days, priesthood and sacrificial system.²

Jeroboam's modified worship system contained remnants of YHWH worship, but it was clearly a false worship system. Despite God's warning by a man of God, Jeroboam refused to change:

"After this event Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he made priests of the high places from among all the people . . ." (13:33)

As a result of his refusal to repent, God brought judgment against him through the prophet Ahijah (ch 14). This judgment included the prediction that God would cut off the house of Jeroboam and that Israel would be carried away into captivity beyond the Euphrates (14:14-15). The latter was an anticipation of the Assyrian invasion of 722 BC, an event still 200 years in the future!

Jeroboam's influence on the spiritual deterioration of the Northern Kingdom was so profound that he became the measuring stick against which each king in Israel would be compared.

To not understand the religious reformation of Jeroboam is to not understand the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, for the actions that he took in attempting to insure the political control of the northern tribes became the most profound factor upon the history of the Northern Kingdom. His legacy of the golden calves, the cult centers at Dan and Bethel, and the promotion of high places with a non-Levitical priesthood paved the way for the atrocities of Ahab and Jezebel and remained with the nation until their demise in 722 BC at the hand of Assyria.³

A grand summary of the pervasiveness of his influence is seen in 2 Kings 17:21-23:

"When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin. And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day."

²Some scholars have speculated that Jeroboam was possibly borrowing a bull-god symbol from the Egyptians (the Apis cult of Memphis?). If so, Jeroboam may have brought the bull-god symbol to Israel upon his return from exile in Egypt during the reign of Solomon (so Andrew Hill, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 212). But caution is in order, since a calf/bull figure was utilized in almost every ancient near eastern country. The primary inspiration to the idea, in my opinion, was not Egyptian but the influence of Exodus 32.

³J. Paul Tanner, "An Analysis of the Reformation of Jeroboam I and Its Effect Upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel" (paper submitted for the course "The Religion of Ancient Israel," The University of Texas at Austin, 1986), 35. See Appendix A of this notebook.

Note the irony involved in Jeroboam's attempt to alter the worship system:

The story of Jeroboam and his reformation of YHWH worship has an ironic lesson: the very thing God had promised him (the perpetuation of his dynasty distinct from the Davidic dynasty) became the very thing he lost as a result of taking matters into his own hands. God's promises are secured by obedience and faith to that which He has revealed!⁴

2. The Rule of Ahab (874/3-853 BC)

Ahab was the most spiritually decadent of all the northern kings, and his policies led to tremendous consequences for the Northern Kingdom. His father was Omri, the head of the dynasty. Omri was not only a wicked king, but he built the city of Samaria to be the capital of his ungodly rule (16:24). Ahab turns out to be no better than the rest, doing evil in the sight of the LORD and walking in the sins of Jeroboam. The significant thing about Ahab is that he goes a step further than Jeroboam, making Baal worship the official state religion! He even erects a temple for Baal right in the capital of Samaria. This came as a result of his marriage to the evil woman Jezebel, the daughter of the Sidonian king, Ethbaal. Ethbaal was not only king of the Phoenicians, but the leader and priest of Baal worship. It is this man's daughter that Ahab marries, and as a devoted follower of Baal worship, she causes the kingdom of Israel to be officially switched to the satanic worship of Baal.

"And it came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshipped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria" (16:31-32).

Anyone who has studied Baal worship knows that this was a serious step. Baal worship not only involved false worship but contained many abominable practices such as ritual prostitution and child-sacrifice. This was the very reason God had called the idolatrous worship of the Canaanites an abomination, and now it is the state religion of Israel!

3. The Half-Way Reform of Jehu (841-813 BC)

The third major step in Israel's decline was the "half-way reform" of Jehu. Comments on this stage will be reserved for the next session.

B. God's Counter-Measures: Foreign Powers and Prophets

As the Northern Kingdom degenerated, God basically did two things as a counter-measure: (1) he raised up political rods to discipline the kingdom, and (2) he raised up prophets to reveal the sin of the nation and announce YHWH's judgment.

For the Northern Kingdom, God primarily used the Arameans to discipline the people. They were allowed to grow stronger and stronger, and each blow became more and more

⁴Ibid., 37.

severe. Ahab had extensive dealings with them (20:1-43 and 22:1-40), and was finally slain in battle with the Syrians. Yet it was the Assyrians who eventually extinguished the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC.

God's other counter-measure against the sinfulness of His people were the prophets. Elijah was the most significant prophet in 1 Kings, ministering during Ahab's reign. In fact, Elijah seems to be primarily raised up to deal with Israel's official adoption of Baal worship and for the conflict with Jezebel.

Leah Bronner has provided excellent insight into the Elijah-Baal conflict:

One finds polemical parallelism in these stories of Elijah and Elisha when one compares them to the Canaanite ideas concerning Baal as known to us mainly from Ugaritic sources. The writer . . . was well acquainted with the myths circulating about Baal which attributed to him numerous and varied powers He sent forth lightning, fire and rain. He gave corn, oil and wine.⁵

Bronner has pointed out the striking contrast in the conflict:

<u>Baal (of the Canaanites) vs. Elijah and Elisha (of YHWH)</u>	
Baal, as storm-god, controls the rains.	Elijah commands drought (1 Kgs 17:1).
Baal ensures agricultural fertility and bountiful harvests.	Israel experiences famine and drought, yet Elijah and Elisha provide grain and oil miraculously (2 Kgs 4:1-7, 42-44).
Baal controls lightning and fire.	Elijah commands fire down from heaven in the name of YHWH (1 Kgs 18:38; 2 Kgs 1:10-12; 2:11).
Baal controls life and death.	Elijah and Elisha heal and raise the dead in the name of YHWH (1 Kgs 17:7-24; 2 Kgs 4:8-37; 5:1-20).

Baalism was a deification of natural forces, focusing them in a god Baal. As such, Baal was supposedly the source of agricultural gifts, and the controlling god of storm, rain and lightning. This background is very helpful for appreciating the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). The challenge was very simple: to build a pile of wood with a sacrificial animal on top and ask the true God to ignite the wood (18:24). The crucial thing about the epic is that Elijah was calling the nation to make a decision one way or the other:

⁵Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics Against Baal Worship* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 54.

"And Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you hesitate between the two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him'" (18:21).

The purpose of the prophetic outcry was two-fold:

- 1) to announce YHWH's word and will in this matter . . . asserting YHWH's right to demand that He alone be worshipped.
- 2) to wean the people's adorations away from Baal and idols.

Of course, the successful display of YHWH's power on Mount Carmel demonstrated the divine source of His rule, thereby challenging the very foundation of the people's lives with concrete evidence. The people, in a moment of conviction by the truth, seized the 450 prophets of Baal and slew them. Consequently, God lifted the drought which had been lingering on the land . . . a testimony that the people had made a step in the right direction.

The great victory which Elijah led at Mt. Carmel was followed by Elijah's hasty retreat in fear from the infuriated Jezebel (he could boldly face the 450 prophets of Baal but not this one vicious woman). In fact, he fled all the way to Horeb (i.e., Mt. Sinai) where God had originally given the Law (back to the roots of Yahwism). Declaring "I alone am left," Elijah had come to tell God that he had done all his part and was now ready for God to judge them. Elijah only wanted judgment, not grace (how appropriate to express this at Horeb). Consequently, God gave him an object lesson. God was not in the earthquake or fire. When God sent the "gentle blowing" with the still small voice, Elijah withdrew. This had represented the grace of God, and Elijah had not desired to see God's grace manifested (cf. Rom 11:2). Theologically, this was what God was doing with the Northern Kingdom. God could have righteously destroyed them; He could have raised up the Assyrians in Ahab's time. But He didn't; instead He devastated the Baal worship system and gave further opportunity for the nation to turn from their wicked ways in order to serve YHWH alone. He was manifesting grace, but Elijah preferred judgment (cf. 2 Kgs 13:23). The LORD gave Elijah a new commission (19:15-17) and gave him the gracious insight that He would leave a believing remnant. There would be God's gracious choice of 7000 to ensure that God's program would continue (cf. Rom 11:1-6). God's continued dealings with the nation would not prove vain, for His sovereign provision of a remnant would ensure that.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

In chapter 22, we are introduced to the prophet Micaiah who was completely committed to a faithful stand for the Word of God (22:14). He not only faced the evil King Ahab without fear, but he even suffered for his stance by a cruel and unjust sentence to prison (22:27). Do you speak the truth, no matter what it costs you? Are you willing to make a stand for something that may not be popular with others, but which you have a conviction from the Lord is right? How we need godly men and women who are not afraid to stand up for God . . . to speak for Him . . . to go against the tide!