

**Lecture 1**  
**"A House Divided"**  
**1 Kings 11:26-13:34 and 1 Chronicles 10:1-11:17**

The lesson we had for today began with an introduction to Jeroboam. But let's back up just a bit to King Solomon in 1 Kings 11:1-6. We're told he had married "many foreign women" and had allowed their idol gods to be accepted into his kingdom. This intermarriage was, in fact, expressly prohibited in Deuteronomy 7:1-5. Nevertheless, 1 Kings 11:3 says that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines and these women turned his heart to other gods.

You've probably heard of the "wisdom" of Solomon, but let's review to Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 and see what he was involved in. \

**4** I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. **5** I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. **6** I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. **7** I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves born in my house. I had also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem. **8** I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well – the delight of the heart of a man. **9** I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. **10** I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the

reward for all my labor. **11** Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Now let's picture the situation around Jerusalem during the last part of Solomon's reign. It was splendid but oppressive. All these projects needed supervision and financing. We assume that Jeroboam was both ambitious and competent and we know that he was soon placed in a position of leadership over the Ephraimite work crews that labored in Jerusalem.

When I worked the lesson this week, it seemed to break down into six areas of application:

- The Voice of Challenge
- The Value of Listening
- The Vanity of Power
- The Visit of Warning
- The Virtue of Obedience
- The Valley of Consequences

Rebellion was festering in Jeroboam's heart and God intervened with the "voice of challenge" through the prophet Ahijah. Remember last week I told you about the symbolic actions of the prophets? This is one of them. Ahijah met Jeroboam and tore a new cloak into 12 pieces with the message that God was going to bring about division and that Jeroboam

would be given ten tribes and a perpetual dynasty in the North predicated on his obedience to God. Well, whatever Jeroboam was involved in that revealed his rebellion, Solomon found out . . . . tried to kill him and forced Jeroboam to flee to the protective custody of Egypt.

So here we are in day one of the first lesson and already we're encountering the grace of God. First, God was gracious to let Solomon live out his days and not be an eyewitness to the consequences of his sin.

You know, more than anything, this year's Bible Study should teach us about God's view of sin and remind us that we should hear His challenge to stop tampering with the labels we put on sin. For example:

We lie and call it a "fib."

We steal little things and call it borrowing or scrounging.

We avoid paying fares/admissions/taxes and call it "being smart" when it's really robbery.

We live loose sexual lives and call it "love" when it's lust. Or we use the term "premarital sex" because it sounds nicer than "adultery" or "fornication."

We call it "gay" when it's actually homosexuality.

Cancer is still cancer even if you want to call it indigestion.

Second, God is gracious to Jeroboam offering 4/5<sup>th</sup> of the land of Canaan and the blessing of God! Do you think Jeroboam really believed the prophet's voice? Some things just seem too good to be true. Case in point – do you really believe all the promises of God made to you in His Word? We're still receiving the voice of challenge today. Listen to Jesus in John 14:12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Do you believe that? Are you doing those greater things? If not, it isn't because you don't have the power . . . maybe it's just too hard to believe God could do extraordinary things through you.

For years we've been taught that Egypt where Jeroboam fled is a type/symbol of the world. Like him, where we spend our time influences our character. Character is formed like an icicle . . . a drop at a time; if the water is pure or muddy will determine its final appearance. So our narrative turns from the "voice of challenge" to the "value of listening."

Solomon died, Rehoboam his son was made king and Jeroboam returned from Egypt. So far, we can easily identify

with Jeroboam. Rehoboam, on the other hand, is an unlikable character. He seems arrogant, impulsive and tactless.

Notice when he talked to the elders, it was a general question: "how" should I answer? Now it was a generally accepted practice that a new monarch would make concessions in taxes and labor obligations to endear himself in popularity and obtain a dedicated loyalty of the people. So the older, wiser counselors gave Rehoboam that sage advice on "how" to rule the people well.

Do you think we're getting a glimpse of what God calls a "hard heart?" There's such a thing as involuntary hardening versus voluntary hardening. We might make the analogy of a hand that gets an involuntary callus when it repetitiously handles a tool or a pencil . . . so, the mind/heart can get callused to truth/counsel when it listens in a carelessly repetitious manner. Ever have one of your kids say, "I shouldn't have asked you, I knew you'd say that." The voluntary process of hardening willfully resists the truth and shuts out the light. As we've said before, the same sun that melts wax will harden clay. Are we really heeding the value of listening?

Now, notice Rehoboam's comment to the young men in 12:9 . . . "what" should I answer them? This is a specific question and we can see where his heart lies. He's going to listen to them. Power to Rehoboam was force without concern for feelings. We all probably know of people we'd say "run a tight ship." But their efficiency is usually achieved at a high price of morale and misery, isn't it? So he announced his decision for a heavier yoke, not a lighter one.

Well, Jeroboam made good his threat and took the ten tribes to establish the Northern Kingdom. This brings us to the "vanity of power." It may have begun with a genuine and righteous indignation, but ultimately that passion became confused with self-glory. Jeroboam seems to have shared the tragedy of Saul in that he had great potential given God's blessing, but proved unable to channel it.

Just a side light. If you had a problem with ten tribes to the North and one in the South not adding up to 12, 1 Kings 12:23 reminds us the tribe of Benjamin was often included in the name Judah.

Needless to say, Rehoboam wasn't going to just stand by. He had not listened to wise counsel, nor had he consulted God.

But God is not absent from the affairs of men even if He was not invited. God sent the prophet Shemiah to tell Rehoboam not to go to war with Israel. Rehoboam may have engaged in a young man's folly of not listening to counsel, but he does seem to have matured in wisdom as he did listen to God this time.

The vanity of power began to express itself in Jeroboam. As the old song says, "how you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've see Patee." Well, the paraphrase of this could well have been, "how you gonna keep 'em up in the North after they've seen God's temple in Jerusalem?"

So Jeroboam undertook to revolutionize the religion of Israel by changing four things:

- 1) the symbols of religion – made the golden calves
- 2) the centers of worship – close to home in Bethel and Dan
- 3) the priesthood –now it was open to non-Levites
- 4) the religious calendar – moving major celebrations from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> month

The motive is obvious . . . if Israel kept God's commandment to go to Jerusalem three times a year, people might come to the conclusion that what he was doing was both illegal and

unnecessary. It can be really hard to change people much if they hold on to old habits.

Reminds me of the story about a scholar who had a carpenter living on one side and a blacksmith on the other. Noise was terrible and finally, unable to endure it any longer, he paid both of them to move out and they did. Next morning he awoke to the same nerve-wracking noise. The carpenter had moved into the blacksmith's house and the blacksmith had moved into the carpenter's house. The moral being – the scholar took pains to see who was moving out, but paid no attention to who was moving in. It's like that with habits, isn't it?

Jeroboam wanted to get rid of old worship habits but the people were oblivious to the new bad habits moving in.

Let me say one thing about the golden calves. It's very possible Jeroboam had good intentions of having the calves "point to" God, but just as Satan will pose as an angel of light or a minister of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15), so it became an end in itself. 21 times after this, the Old Testament writers refer to Jeroboam as "the one who made Israel sin." The very expedients he instituted to consolidate his kingdom would lead to its overthrow.

Every man in every generation who cares about the things of God must one day face the crossroad of taking a stand. Utterly disgusted at this drastic departure from divinely revealed law, the vast majority of priests and Levites fled southward to Judah, taking with them the remnant of true believers from the northern tribes and leaving behind them a situation of near-total apostasy.

Chronicles fills us in a little on Rehoboam after this kingdom division. With the return of the priests and Levites there was a three year period of stability. Rehoboam established a good defense system, which, by the way, is not ever at odds with trust in God. He at least maintained legitimate religious institutions in contrast to Jeroboam and, according to 1 Chronicles 11:23, he dealt wisely in government, which is more than our first encounter with him might have led us to suspect.

So Rehoboam the foolish oppressor ends up as the obedient king and Jeroboam the liberator ends up as the eternal example of royal apostasy. We're going to see this ebb and flow of apostasy and reform provide the structural rhythm of the book of Kings and, although the kings are the prime movers in this, the people as a whole share both the guilt and the punishment.

No matter how deep the spiritual darkness of Israel became, God always had a human channel available through whom His Word was proclaimed.

An unnamed “man of God” came to Jeroboam. From this “visit of warning” we will see the “virtue of obedience and the “valley of consequence.”

Confrontation . . . no one likes to think he’s the cause of his own problems. If we have a reputation for being argumentative or hard-headed, it can precede us in times of conflict. Ivor Powell’s book *Bible Windows* tells about a wasp that went to church one beautiful Sunday morning. Flying over the fields, he saw a little country church holding its morning worship service – windows wide open to let the sunshine and fresh air in. The minister was preaching: his audience enthralled and captivated by his brilliant oratory: this was a magnificent sermon! Alas, it was soon to be ruined by the unexpected visitor.

The well-meaning little wasp flew in through the open window, and as he circled the congregation, many eyes followed his flight. The minister frowned! The people should learn to concentrate! The wasp seemed to be looking for a seat. His intentions were peaceful and friendly; however, whenever he

settled for a moment, there was shudder and people moved away from him. Then all of a sudden, WHAP! Down came a hymn book.

It missed, and the little wasp hurriedly made off toward the ceiling. What was this? They'd tried to kill him, and he only wanted to be friendly. This happened not once, but twice . . . what kind of reception was this?

Furiously he buzzed around the church. This was maddening; even the minister resented his coming. Every time he came down from the ceiling, people were swatting at him in mid-air . . . soon the service was in an uproar. Young people were giggling, children were openly laughing. Well, thought the wasp, if this is the kind of reception you get in church, I'm leaving and he flew out through the open window.

He'd made just one mistake; he blamed the people; yet all the time, the cause of the trouble lay in himself and his reputation.

Well, the man of God pronounced the curse, gave the prophecy about Josiah which would be fulfilled some 360 years later, and punctuated his message by the sign of afflicting and then healing Jeroboam's hand.

Now we come to a part of the lesson that has some rich and interesting things to think about. As a moral tale, we find this offensive. Trickery triumphs over the servant of God and the lying prophet is rewarded. Doesn't seem fair, does it? But whoever said life was fair!

We have confidence in this man of God who was a faithful messenger and who turned aside from the challenge of disobedience. He told Jeroboam he would not stay to eat or drink, but proceed directly back to Judah. Think a little about the circumstances of this man of God compared to Christ's temptations. When does Satan want to attack us?

Trials / temptations often come after a time of rich blessing.

Jesus – His baptism

Man of God – encounter with Jeroboam

Trials / temptations often come in an inhospitable environment

Jesus – wilderness for 40 days

Man of God – a long way from Judah/home/supporters

Trials / temptations often come when the body is weak

Jesus – fasting 40 days

Man of God – eating and drinking nothing until back home

One man wrote, "No Christian, however ripe their experience, however established their character, however fruitful in service will ever get beyond the possibility of backsliding."

One little boy was asked, "How do you resist temptation?" His reply was, "I just say get thee behind me Satan . . . and don't you dare push!"

We're frustrated because the story refuses to reveal the prophet's motivation for lying. One thing is for sure, God didn't tell him to lie – there was no trick, no trap, no angel, no revelation. But the man of God believed the trumped up message, accepted the invitation, and died under God's judgment as a result. Why was the penalty so severe? Was it really his fault? Our approach to this is exceeding important.

The unnamed man of God knew God's command. He knew God doesn't contradict His own Word. As Paul said in Galatians 1:8, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any other gospel than that which we preached to you, let him be anathema." So when the man of God heard a contrary message, his heart should have detected the hiss of the serpent and his lips should have cried out, "NO!"

The very fact that the unnatural act of the lion refusing to eat the man of God confirmed to the old prophet that this death was from God and he now understood the prophecy against Bethel was true.

So we have a lesson in obedience: The old prophet was rewarded by protection of his bones for his faith in believing God's Word of prophecy against Bethel in spite of his deception.

The man of God, on the other hand, was punished for violating his calling in spite of his good intentions. Perhaps that is the very thing we need to look at . . . pleading good intentions is ultimately beside the point.

Remember Matthew 25:44 the plea, "Lord, when did we see you hungry?" or Matthew 25:25, "I was afraid, so I hid the talent in the ground." Good intentions are not a substitute for our inadequacies. God's Word is independent . . . it's delivered by messengers and can be set back by their betrayal . . . but it wins out in the end. Even God's agents can become victims if they betray their calling.

Overall I drew three applications from this week's lesson:

1. **God's plan isn't altered by man's poor performance.**

Be it Rehoboam's poor choice of counsel, Jeroboam's throwing away a golden opportunity, or a man of God who succumbs to temptation. God's plan isn't altered by man's poor performance. *God is God and He is in control.*

2. **God's holiness isn't changed by man's heresy.**

Jeroboam thought he could establish religion to suit his own purpose. God's view of idolatry is one of extreme wickedness . . . this trampling underfoot and disregarding the holiness of God is forever termed the "sin of Jeroboam." We need to recognize and remember *God is God and He is holy.*

3. **God's integrity isn't compromised by man's good intentions.**

The God of the universe can be trusted to always do the right thing whether we understand it or not. He extended His grace to Solomon, rewarded a lying prophet, and punished a disobedient man of God. We don't have to understand. By faith in God's character we know He is fair .

. . He has integrity. *God is God and His judgments are always right.*

Where are you today? Has God offered you a challenge? Are you listening for His leading? Have you neglected the power or privilege He has given you? Has this lesson offered some warning about being disobedient or about not being surprised at the consequences of disobedience?

Like the wasp, do we cause our own problem? Like the cancer of sin, are we just calling it indigestion? Like the scholar, do we evict one bad habit only to become neighbors with another? Are we yielding to Satan's push when we meet temptation head on?

We face the difficult every day, but we're not alone. We can't let the difficult defeat us. Who knows . . . the difficult things in life may just be the sand on the track to keep us from skidding. They draw us closer to Jesus . . . the One Who draws nearer to us each day.

Let's pray.