

Evil in the Sight of the Lord  
Divided Kingdom Lesson 2  
1 Kings 14:1 – 15:8; 2 Chronicles 11:18 – 14:1  
By Dellen Ludwig

Last week we studied how Solomon's kingdom was split in two because of the “vanity of power” displayed both by Rehoboam's first decisions and Jeroboam's fear of losing power. Today we are studying how these two kings struggled with the same character deficits to the end of their lives.

The story opens with deep sorrow for Jeroboam and his wife because their son, Abijah was deathly ill. This son could have been born to Jeroboam while he was exiled in Egypt. He was Jeroboam's heir apparent in Northern Israel at this time. But his name gives us a glimpse into Jeroboam's heart when he had first received the prophecy from God that he would be king. The meaning of Abijah was: “Jehovah is my Father.” His father had named him, desiring to give honor to the God he loved and in whom he had placed his faith and future.

However, Jeroboam had changed his devotion now that he was king of Israel. He feared losing the loyalty of his 10 tribes and had established idol worship in Bethel and Dan, in place of Jehovah worship, in the temple at Jerusalem. He and his people no longer followed the practices set up by God's Word for holy days and sacrifices by Levitical priests. He had established other days of worship in Israel's high places and encouraged different sacrifices by different priests to idols, suggesting to his people that it was for their good: “It is too much for

you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” [1 Kings 12:28]

But he really did this out of fear for his life. Don't we replace God out of our own selfish reasons? I want to go to church, but I am so tired from my work schedule that I just want to sleep in one day of the week. The kids have practice this afternoon, so let's just skip church so we can make it there on time. I love to watch the pre-game evaluations so I'll just catch the sermon on line later in the week. I just don't like the music they have at church, so we can just stay home and have church ourselves as a family.

It starts out as a one-time thing, or just until the season is over. But just as surely as it did with Israel, our habit of skipping worship is replaced with our worship of leisure, or sports or personal comfort. Slowly we forget God's command: “You shall have no other gods before me.” [Exodus 20:3] We find that our priorities have changed now, and, like Jeroboam, it takes a life crisis to turn our hearts back to God.

However, Israel's knowledge of God had atrophied. Jeroboam felt he had to sneak-up on God's prophet in order to get an unbiased answer to his need. He realized that his son, his heir was deathly sick. He wanted him to be well again, to follow himself in rule of Israel. But, knowing how sinful he had become, Jeroboam feared God would punish him through the death of his son.

So, rather than ask God through prayer to heal his son, he decided

to send his wife in disguise, to ask for the prediction of this illness's outcome. Matthew Henry commented, "Most people would rather be told their future, than their faults or duty." Jeroboam remembered that the prophet Ahijah, who lived in Shiloh, had prophesied long ago that Jeroboam would be king, and it came true. Therefore it was to this same prophet he now sent his wife, bearing gifts to encourage a positive prophesy.

This act of subterfuge revealed also how thin Jeroboam's faith had grown. He thought a gift to Ahijah and a disguise on his wife could alter the prophesy. He had no idea that all true prophesy came from God, not from the prophet himself. Neither the gifts nor the disguise nor even the fact that Ahijah was now nearly blind made any difference. God revealed the whole story and response to his prophet before the gifts or wife of the king even arrived at his door.

"So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, 'Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news.'" [1 Kings 14:6- 8] Ellicott analyzed Ahijah's prophesy in this way, "The sin of Jeroboam lay in this – that he had had a full probation, with unlimited opportunities, and had deliberately thrown it away in the vain hope of making surer the kingdom which God's promise had already made sure."

In last week's lesson we learned that because of Solomon's slack policy allowing his queens to have the idols of Ashtoreth and Molech to

worship, God decided He would give Jeroboam the northern kingdom while Rehoboam, Solomon's son would only retain Judah as his kingdom. Jeroboam's kingship had a condition, though. "If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me and do what is right in my eyes by obeying my decrees and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you." [1 Kings 11:38, 39] God had promised this kingdom would endure. Jeroboam had only to obey, but he didn't.

God saw that Jeroboam had not kept God's laws. "You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have aroused my anger and turned your back on me."

The language God used was very harsh. Many men and women God highlighted in scripture had done terrible sins. But God compared his kings to David, who although he sinned in sexual immorality and even murder, he never turned away from God. David returned time and again in repentance and prayed for forgiveness. However Jeroboam not only had turned his own heart away from the true worship of Jehovah, he had also turned the hearts of Israel away as well. He "turned his back" on God, and he never repented.

This, then, was Jeroboam's breach of contract. He did not walk in obedience with God and did not do what is right. Therefore, he would

not have a dynasty. In fact, God decided that none of his sons would survive as kings and none would be even buried, except his sick heir, Abijah. He alone would be mourned and buried in honor, “because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good.” [1 Kings 14:13]

There were no scriptural references as to prince Abijah's faith. Some commentaries credit him with allowing the defection into Judah of those who refused to worship the idols of Bethel and Dan. In 2 Chronicles 11:13-17 it is recorded that the priests and Levites who found themselves living in the idol worshiping northern kingdom, left their homes and farms and moved to Jerusalem. Verse 16 recorded: “Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of their ancestors.” This massive exodus left Israel with little to no witness of Jehovah. Faithful witness to the one true God was gone.

So, as his wife heard this terrible prophesy about all of Jeroboam's family, she was further charged with this prophecy: “The Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. Even now this is beginning to happen.” [1 Kings 14:14]

Next week we will learn how this prophecy would come true. Already the person who would eliminate all of Jeroboam's family had been born. But the terminal slide into idol worship had already begun.

The prophet Ahijah also predicted Israel's ultimate fall. "He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their ancestors and scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they aroused the Lord's anger by making Asherah poles. And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit." [1 Kings 14:15-16] The ultimate consequence of Jeroboam's sin would be exile to Assyria for all of Israel, as we will see later in this year's study.

And when the queen set foot inside her home in Tirzah, her son Abijah would die and she would have to relay all of this prophesy to her husband. What a dilemma! Was she tempted to head another way and never return so her son could live longer? I would be. However, she must warn her husband of the dire danger they faced as a family. He had to know the whole prophecy, so she sadly retraced her steps toward home, facing the sorrow of her son's death as she crossed over the threshold.

I Kings 14:18 revealed the nation's sorrow. "They buried him, and all Israel mourned for him, as the Lord had said through his servant the prophet Ahijah. No one knows how the choices we make will affect our families. Jeroboam had been placed in the position of kingship by God. But he didn't trust God to keep his promises. He felt he had to change the state religion to ensure the loyalty of his people. But by doing so, he sealed the end of his dynasty and ensured the overthrow of his kingdom.

What legacy do we wish to leave? The pressures of life can seem

to force us, just like they did Jeroboam, into priorities that are contrary to God's word. Romans 12:2 warned us: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The Message version put it this way: "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

Billy Graham refers to this change of our legacy in the preface of his book, The Journey. "You can't change the past. Whatever has happened in your life so far – both good and bad – cannot be altered, and all the decisions and events that have made you what you are today are indelibly inscribed in the story of your life. But with God's help you can change the future."

Our choices will affect us one way or the other. Let us be challenged by the warnings resulting from Jeroboam's life, to give all our attention, as our life pattern, to God and His ways, rather than to the world's ways. Our legacy can ultimately be a positive one, only if it is based on God's Word.

Jeroboam will be involved in the end of this and next week's study, but we will turn now to the accounts of Rehoboam's kingdom, in Judah that happened during the same time.

Last week we studied a bit of how Rehoboam was raised in the lavish court of Solomon his father. However, we learned too that he did not listen to the wisdom of Solomon in the beginning of his reign, which

led to the split of the kingdom into Israel and Judah. It also appeared that his father's example of allowing idol worship for his wives, had now spread into the entire kingdom.

Even though the priests and Levites lived in Jerusalem in abundance, Judah followed their king's lifestyle and also built "high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites." [1 Kings 14:22,24]

This state of affairs must have slowly spread like a virus among the people. Sure they continued to have the prescribed worship for Jehovah on the appointed days. But they dabbled in the tantalizing idol worship the royal queens had shared too. How innocent it was to set that "good luck" idol into the garden. How fun to learn the hidden practices of other nations. What harm would it be to experiment in the enticing rituals? Everyone was doing it!

But just because their culture changed, didn't mean it was harmless or good for everyone to follow along. However 1 Kings 14:22 read like an epitaph: "Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than those who were before them had done." And in 2 Chronicles 12:1 said, "After Rehoboam's position was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the Lord." Jehovah is a jealous

God. He will not have his people holding onto any other gods. He is the one true God and nothing else comes even close to Him.

Therefore, God allowed an invasion by the Egyptian pharaoh, Shishak. This king Shishak was the one to whom Jeroboam had fled when Solomon tried to kill him. Now, some commentators think, as a favor to Jeroboam, Shishak came to attack Judah. Perhaps he was meant to be the distraction that would keep Rehoboam from the constant border squabbles he had been fighting with Jeroboam. But whether the invasion was for diversion or because Shishak thought Rehoboam was weak, the Lord's reason was because of Judah's apostasy.

In 2 Chronicles 11:5-12, we learned last week, Rehoboam had fortified towns for the defense of Judah. He put his sons in them and supplied them with food, weapons and commanders. “He acted wisely, dispersing some of his sons throughout the districts of Judah and Benjamin, and to all the fortified cities...” [2 Chronicles 11:23] But none of these cities seemed to even slow down Shishak's army of twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen, plus his multinational foot soldier army. Shishak captured the fortified cities and Rehoboam soon found him at the walls of Jerusalem.

Rehoboam had gathered all of his counselors together, in fear of Shishak. It is not stated that he called out to God, but that God sent his prophet Shemaiah to Rehoboam. God's message made the situation very clear: “This is what the Lord says, 'You have abandoned me; therefore, I

now abandon you to Shishak.” [2 Chronicles 12:5] The shock of God's pronouncement rippled through the court and left the king and all of his counselors frozen in dismay, as Shemaiah turned to leave.

In an instant, all of these powerful men recognized the truth of God's word. It didn't matter how fortified they had been, or how strong they thought they were. They realized their complacency with the decline of Judah's faith had truly been an abandonment of God Himself, and that was all that truly mattered. “The leaders of Israel and the king himself humbled themselves and said, 'The Lord is just.'” [2 Chronicles 12:6]

The Lord knew their hearts. “When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, this word of the Lord came to Shemaiah: 'Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak. They will, however, become subject to him, so that they may learn the difference between serving me and serving the kings of other lands.'” [2 Chronicles 12:7,8]

And so, “When Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, he carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including the gold shields Solomon had made.” [2 Chronicles 12:9]

In his commentary Matthew Henry postulated, “The splendor of their temple, the pomp of the priesthood, and all the advantages with

which their religion was attended, could not prevail to keep them close to it; nothing less than the pouring out (of) the Spirit will keep God's Israel in their allegiance to him. Sin makes poor, and weakens people. Shishak, king of Egypt, came and took away the treasures. Sin makes gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it to brass."

We here in America have to face this same choice. Do we rely on our riches to take care of us when trouble attacks? Is our first reaction to danger at our gates, that we must handle it ourselves? Or do we find that our reaction is to humble ourselves and look to our Lord and His just work in us? I must confess that when my husband and I were faced with an economic attack that we feared would take our home, my first reaction was to fear the future. My sleepless nights were filled with tears and thinking, and rethinking repeated scenarios that would not give me any confidence or hope. I cried to the Lord to save us from this attack.

But it wasn't until I turned around, and turned in humility to Him that I found His peace. I had to give up the "gold" I had placed my confidence in. I had to say, "Whatever you want for us, Lord, I will keep my trust in you." Finally, I realized that no matter what, the Lord is my real treasure and not my house. All of the many things He had blessed us with were temporary gifts, and did not indicate His presence.

The situation did require a large portion of our retirement savings, but we were able to finally get a reverse mortgage on our home, and may

live in it until we both go to live with the Lord. We may not have a big monetary gift for our heirs when we die. But we are working on a spiritual and relational legacy with which to influence our children and grand children.

“Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord's anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah.” [2 Chronicles 12:12] Although all the vast wealth left to him by Solomon was gone, Rehoboam understood that his lasting legacy was his relationship with God. Brass shields replaced the golden ones. He now went to the temple for his worship. Every time Rehoboam went to the temple, the guards carrying those brass shields were a reminder of this costly lesson to the king and to the people. It was worth the cost to remind Judah that their Lord was the one true God.

Rehoboam ruled a total of 17 years, “in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put His Name.” [2 Chronicles 12:14] Although Jeroboam had been given a prophecy of doom to his family, Rehoboam was given the encouragement that God was intimately involved in his life and kingdom. What a contrast! Although there was continual warfare between these two kingdoms, and although both kingdoms had dipped into idolatry, God's presence was the treasure that was eternal. He would not easily forsake his people to Satan's dominion.

“In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam, Abijah became

king of Judah..." [2 Chronicles 13:1] Now hearing the name of Rehoboam's son to be the same name that Jeroboam had called his heir apparent, who died, you probably thought, "I guess Abijah must have been a popular name that year!" But remember, Jeroboam was probably in Egypt when his first son was born. 2 Chronicles 11:20, 22 indicates that this Abijah was not Rehoboam's oldest son, but rather the first born son of his favorite wife. Perhaps it was merely the meaning of the name that caused both kings to name their sons Abijah, giving Jehovah honor for their births.

Abijah did inherit his father's war-filled reign. In 2 Chronicles we read that he soon faced Jeroboam in the hill country of Ephraim, which was the territory that buffered the two kingdoms. Abijah felt that this war was justified because God had promised to David and to his descendants forever to always have a king from David's line as king over Israel. Now, his father had been warned not to try to reunite the kingdom by the prophet Shemaiah. He said, "Do not go up to fight against your fellow Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing." [2 Chronicles 11:4] But in this case, there is no further warning.

The commentary by Jamieson-Fausset-and Brown explains the difference here. "The occasion of this war is not recorded...but it may be inferred from the tenor of Ahijah's address that it arose from his youthful ambition to recover the full hereditary dominion of his

ancestors. No prophet now forbade a war with Israel...for Jeroboam had forfeited all claim to protection.”

Standing on Mount Zemaraim, Abijah began a passionate speech, which gave his reason for believing why Jeroboam's army should merely give up. Ellicott summed up the contents of this speech in this way: “Abijah contrasts the moral position of his adversaries with his own, asserting (1) that their separate political existence is itself an act of rebellion against Jehovah; (2) that they have abolished the only legitimate form of worship, and established in it's place an illegal cultus and priesthood; whereas (3) he and his people have maintained the orthodox ritual and ministry, and are therefore assured of the divine support.” Therefore, because Jeroboam had forfeited true worship, he should no longer hold the northern ten tribes separate from the kingdom of Judah.

But Jeroboam was beyond any reason about faith and God's promises to David. Although he seemed to calmly listen to Abijah's well thought out speech, in reality this was a ruse. He had sent a division of his army to the other side of the mountain to ambush Judah's army from the rear, at the same time that he would lead the rest of his army to attack from the front. This strategy failed, and Abijah won the war and gained some territory for Judah, including Bethel.

This singular event in the record of Abijah's reign begs us to closer examine Abijah's relationship with God. His speech seemed to indicate

that he felt this battle was a holy crusade against the idolatry of Israel. However, 1 Kings 15:3 summarizes his life saying, “He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been.”

First of all, Abijah left no record of praying or seeking God's will about this before he marched north for war. He, like his father, trusted his own wisdom above that of God. Just like his father, he listened to his own legacy of pride and self-confidence to make his decisions. The evidence of his sin is his pride in being a descendant of David.

Secondly, he promoted his own religious reputation. Abijah compared the idol worship of Jeroboam's kingdom to the presence of Levitical worship still going on in Jerusalem. But the reality was that he himself still allowed idol worship in Judah. His own religion was a distant ritual, not a relationship of his heart.

Finally, even though Abijah won the victory and gained Bethel back into Judah's territory, he never gave God honor for the victory. Instead of this, Abijah continued to concentrate on furthering his own strength through marriages. “But Abijah grew in strength. He married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.” [2 Chronicles 13:21]

It is important for us to recognize the final phrase about this battle as recorded in 2 Chronicles 13:18. “...the people of Judah were victorious because they relied on the Lord, the God of their ancestors.”

Although Jeroboam and even Abijah himself may not have been trusting the Lord in this battle, the people of Judah were trusting him. The word used here for relied on. “literally signifies to lean on, as a feeble hand might on a staff, or a tremulous arm on a strong one.” MacLaren went on in his definition saying, “A man who leans on some support, does so because he knows that his own strength is insufficient for his need. The consciousness of weakness is the beginning of faith....It is not only that Christ's soldiers are to fight and pray, but that they fight praying.”

Our strength also comes by prayer to the God we lean on. Paul spoke to the new believers in Corinth saying that his credentials as a preacher seemed to be strong. He had the highest training as a rabbi, and he had suffered more than most others as he had faithfully contended for the faith among the Gentile's towns. But it was not his brave actions in which he wanted to boast, but rather he wanted to boast in how weak he was. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 Paul stated, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

We are not trapped by the legacy of our ancestors. The sins of our parents do not have to be our sins. Our present habits of addiction or anger or impure thoughts or even of indifference to God do not have to define us any more. We can choose to lean our weaknesses on the Lord

and take up His strength.

By confessing how weak we are, and how prone to doing wrong things, we are asking God to forgive us, and are relying on His strength to cleanse us from everything we have done. As we read in Titus 3:5 & 6, He saved us because of his mercy, not because of any “goodness” on our part. “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” not because of our heritage or habits from our families. He saved us because we couldn't save ourselves. And we place our weak hand onto His strong arm to lean on His Spirit in our lives which He so generously poured out on us, as our Savior.

The legacy of Jeroboam was passing on idolatry to his heirs and people. The legacy of Rehoboam was war and a half-hearted faith. The legacy of Abijah in his brief reign was hypocritical faith. But we will discover that Abijah's son, Asa would not be pressed into his father's mold.

Let us not be pressed into the world's mold either, but instead, let us be pressed by our weakness into leaning on Christ's strength for our legacy. “You can't change your past ... But with God's help you can change the future.”