



KING JEROBOAM THE FOOL | SESSION 4 | DR. RANDY WHITE

REHOBOAM'S RESPONSE | 1 KINGS 12:21-24

As we indicated in our commentary on verse 21, the Septuagint differs from the Masoretic text, stating that Benjamin was included in the 10 northern tribes. We previously had said that Simeon had all-but dissolved by the breakup of the Kingdom, and that Levi was a tribe with no land and location, therefore Benjamin must have been one of the 10. There are a number of assumptions in the scenario that could be false but dismissing them causes another set of problems. By verse 21 it looks like **the tribe of Benjamin** quickly left Jeroboam and joined Rehoboam. This would, by necessity, leave only nine tribes with Jeroboam, almost immediately showing a weakness in his grasp on power. If this scenario is correct, then it helps to explain Jeroboam's desperate measures soon to unfold. It is worth noting that nowhere in the Scripture, as far as I am aware, is the northern kingdom of Israel referred to as ten tribes after this point of Scripture. The "ten lost tribes" narrative has just been so often spoken that we repeat it without second-thought. Notice that verse 23 refers to the southern kingdom of Judah as **the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people**, with **the remnant** possibly being a reference to the remains of Simeon.

In verse 22 we are introduced to **Shemaiah the man of God**, unknown other than here, who tells the southern forces **Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house** (v. 24). The people (and presumably King Rehoboam) heed this word and do not try to stop the split by means of military power.

An important matter is found in verse 24, where God reveals that **this thing is from me**, referring to the division of the kingdom. Most often our view (if not our statement) is that the division of the kingdom was due to the rebellion of the northern tribes over taxation. Such a view would be an over-simplification of the problem. Since the new kingdom was *from God*, it had great potential for blessing for the northern tribes. Sadly, that blessing never materialized due to Jeroboam's sin, which we shall soon study.

JEROBOAM GETS SETTLED | 1 KINGS 12:25

After the dust settled, so it seems, **Jeroboam built Shechem...and dwelt therein**. Shechem was an ancient city, going back to at least the time of Jacob, so **built** does not mean *started*, but rather *built up as the King's palace*. It was likely made into a chief governmental center for the new kingdom. Later, under Omri, the capital would be established at Samaria.

After this Jeroboam **built Penuel**, which also goes back to the time of Jacob, the site of the famous wrestling match. This would establish a governmental presence on the east side of the Jordan.

The reason I am making special mention of this verse alone is to point out that there must have been a fair amount of time pass between verse 24 and verse 26. Such a time allows for things to become settled after the disruption and then the people begin to second-guess the decision.

There are ten times when the English phrase, **said in his heart** (v. 26) is used, and nine of them are used negatively (the tenth is used of God). The most famous use is in Psalm 14:1, **The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God** (repeated in Ps. 53:1). It appears (though cannot be proven) that Jeroboam has now strayed from being committed to the Lord's word through the prophet to being more concerned of political "realities."

His concern may have been a political reality. Would the people **kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah** (v. 26)? Since people are notoriously politically fickle, I suspect it was a legitimate fear. However, Jeroboam was forgetting that God had promised this Kingdom to him, and promised that if he would be obedient, God would **build thee a sure house** (1 Kings 11:38).

No political leader will be worth anything to God or man if he or she makes decisions based on political realities.

We are not told from whom the **king took counsel** (v. 28), but it was bad advice. Acting as if this was a good thing for the people (for it was **too much** for them to **go up to Jerusalem** -v. 28), Jeroboam created fake gods *and* rewrote history, writing God out of the Exodus story and making a scenario in which Egyptian gods did the work.

This is *incredibly un-Jewish*, yet the Jewish worshipers **went to worship** (v. 30) at both places, without recorded protest. One wonders *why they would do such a thing* and how the king would have such success on such a difficult matter.

Perhaps it goes to show that mankind, especially in groups, can be easily swayed, and that *removal of discomfort* and *connection with the past* (even if make-believe) are two of the greatest tools at the disposal of despots. When Jeroboam said to the people, "*I'm from the government, and I'm here to help,*" the people should have immediately *shut their ears*.

Verse 31 contains the second of Jeroboam's foolish sins. In addition to making Temples, he **made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi** (v. 31). In 2 Chronicles 11:13-15 it is recorded that the Levites abandoned Jeroboam and moved to Judah because of this. While this should have made Jeroboam's political problems even worse, the people seem perfectly comfortable with losing the priestly tribe, and the religion the Levites administered.

Once again, Jeroboam seems to be catering to the basest of political motives by making **the lowest of the people** (v. 31) to be the priests. He wants to create goodwill, and making a fake religion *for the masses* is his strategy.

The third of Jeroboam's foolish sins was to create **a feast that is like unto the feast that is in Judah** (v. 32). This feast was set on the 15th day of the month, **the month which he had devised of his own heart** (v. 33). In short, it appears that Jeroboam wants a *fake religion* that *looks like* the old religion, but in reality, is *totally different*.

Verse 33 contains the last of the foolish sins. When Jeroboam himself **offered upon the altar, and burnt incense** (v. 33), he was making the kingdom into a *government with a church* rather than what the monarchy had been, *a church with a government*. Under the original system of the monarchy, the King had no official religious duty or authority, and very little (if any) legislative authority. The king was a branch of government, but not at all *separate but equal*, as in our U.S. system. The priesthood was the judicial branch of government and the Torah itself was the "judicial branch." Over time (as is common), the monarch took more and more authority unto himself. Jeroboam advances this to an heretofore unseen level, so it seems.