

Holy Cow

I Kings 11

November 20, 2022

A little over 80 years after the colonies formed these United States their union was severely tested by succession. After a four year bloody Civil War, the union was restored. After nearly the exact same amount of time that David formed the Israelite nation, a similar test of **their** unity arose and unfortunately, it resulted in a permanent split and worse. To learn more about that, please open your Bibles to I Kings 11.

The last two weeks we've been thinking about Solomon, first his wisdom and then his stupidity. We had a really good time Wed evening discussing more in-depth than we had a chance to do in the sermon last week so you can go back and get that bonus material on our Youtube Channel. When we left Solomon last week, he was struggling to keep up with 1000 different women who had turned his heart away from the Lord to idols. He had even built temples for idol worship within Israel and was worshipping them himself. Before he died, Billy Graham wrote a book about finishing well. He realized that a good start in life is important, a good run in midlife is crucial, but we must also finish well! We must stay faithful and true even into old age. Temptations don't disappear, they just change as we get older. And we must be prepared to choose Jesus over all of them at every age. Sadly, Solomon did not finish well.

As a result, in the last part of I Kings 11, God warned him that He would tear the kingdom away from him and give it to someone else. Except that, because of David, not because of Solomon, in spite of Solomon, God would still keep part of it for David's family. We then read how God raised up various enemies from surrounding countries to oppose Solomon. Even though he tried to maintain peace by marrying foreign women, God raised up enemies against him anyway because of his unfaithfulness. One adversary was from his **own** country, an Israelite named Jeroboam. Say Jeroboam. His dad was evidently a creative baseball player. His name was Nebat.

Jeroboam had actually been one of Solomon's project managers. He was the supervisor for forced labor for the tribe of Ephraim. There's the story in chapter 11 about how a prophet named Ahijah tears his new cloak into 12 pieces and tells Jeroboam to take 10 of them indicating that Jeroboam would one day lead that many tribes away from the dynasty of David. In verse 33 God, speaking through that prophet, tells Jeroboam, "I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites, and have **not** walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon's father, did." Skip down to vs 37 where God makes an incredible promise to Jeroboam, "However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule

over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. 38 If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes 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. 39 I will humble David's descendants because of this, but not forever." 40 Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon's death.

So God makes Jeroboam almost the same deal He made David! What an opportunity! What will he do with it? For now he's got to wait because Solomon's out to kill him. He high tails it to Egypt where he finds protection until Solomon dies. Verses 42-43 tell us, 42 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. 43 Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.

So when Solomon dies, Jeroboam is still in Egypt and the 12 Israelite tribes are still one kingdom. Solomon's son, **Rehoboam**, is installed as the new king. Even though he looked monogamous compared to his dad with only 18 wives and 60 concubines, big trouble is on the way. If you did your reading you know that he's not on the throne long when all the people come and ask him to lighten up. Although times were good under Solomon, apparently it didn't trickle down to everyone. Even though the law prohibited Israelites from using other Israelites for forced labor, we find here that Solomon had started doing it anyway. It also sounds like his taxes might have been pretty high to support all those wives. So the people ask his son Rehoboam for a reprieve. "Look, we liked your dad and we **loved** your grandad, but you gotta give us a break."

Rehoboam's young and doesn't know what to do. So he asks his father's advisors for advice, the old men. They tell him to listen to the people, to lighten up and the people will be forever grateful and loyal. Not satisfied, and perhaps with a taste for more riches, Rehoboam decides to check with some of buddies his own age. Young upstarts that have no experience or apparently wisdom. They tell him to do the opposite. Who would you listen to? Who does he listen to? Those stupid youngsters. It's not always the case, but many times it pays to listen to our elders. They didn't get to be that age without making some good decisions. Rehoboam miserably fails his first test of leadership and never recovers.

He not only rebuffed the people's request he taunts them by saying in 12:14-15... "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions." Say idiot. Scorpions were leather strips with metal spikes. Instead of honoring them, or even ignoring them, he taunts them! Vs 16 When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: "What share do **we** have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!" They're pretty upset and rightfully so. You can only

take advantage of people for so long before they rise up. In vs 18, King Rehoboam sends out his secretary of Labor, Adoniram, to apparently try to enforce the law or maybe strike a deal. He had been a part of David's and Solomon's administrations. But they stoned him to death because of this new order. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. They really don't like him! Because 1, his father Solomon had abused them, and 2, he promised to make it worse.

Now in the meantime, Solomon's massive buildup of gold has attracted a lot of attention. In 1 Kings 14:25-26 we read that 25 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. 26 He carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace. He took **everything**, including all the gold shields Solomon had made." Things are seriously unraveling for Rehoboam. Due to his own stupidity, and his father's idolatry, Shishak cleaned him out. Pharaoh Shishak or Sheshonk I of Egypt bragged about this event on a 26 foot tall relief in the Temple of Amun at Karnak. Here it is. He went on a tear up through Israel and this record includes Megiddo as well as the highlands of David. Strangely Jerusalem is not mentioned probably because he spared it because Rehoboam bought off with all the gold of the temple and palace.

Jeroboam has now returned from Egypt and the 10 northern disgruntled tribes crown him as their new king. Only Judah and Benjamin stayed faithful to David's house. And from then on, there are two separate nations. The northern kingdom of 10 tribes was ruled by Jeroboam and those who followed him, and was known as Israel, and Judah and Benjamin ruled by David's descendants known as Judah, or the southern kingdom. They sometimes fought against each other and sometimes cooperated over the next 250 years until Assyria conquered the northern Kingdom in 722BC and Babylon conquered Judah in 586BC.

What we read in I Kings 12:26-33 is perhaps one of the saddest scriptures. Vs 26 Jeroboam thought to himself, "The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. 27 If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam." 28 After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." 29 One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. 30 And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there.

The idolatry Solomon started, Jeroboam supersized on someone's bad advice. He set up two golden calves, one at each end of his kingdom, Dan and Bethel, and told the people to worship them. In spite of the warnings and promises God gave him. God had told Jeroboam that it was Solomon's idolatry that caused the kingdom to split and He told him that if he walked in God's ways and kept His commands, he would have a dynasty

like David's. So what motivated Jeroboam to set up idols? Say Fear. Fear that his people would revert to Rehoboam if they went back to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. His fear of losing his position and his kingdom was greater than his fear of God and it caused him to do some of the most heinous things ever. Fear will do that. Fear will motivate us to do some really crazy things. Really evil things. Jesus' followers are not to be ruled by fear but by faith. Why do **we** do the things **we** do? Do we remember the warnings and the promises God has given us or do we go after the idol just like Jeroboam?

Here is a truly phenomenal site. Archaeologists digging in the ruins of Tel Dan in northern Israel have found what they believe to be the actual 10 foot tall block platform that Jeroboam built and sat one of his golden calves on 2900 years ago. There is a massive stairway 27 feet long and 26 ft wide. Many religious objects including altars have been found at the site. It's pretty incredible to find this testimony to God's Word and it remains a warning to us today not to follow idols. Bethel's site has likely been demolished. But this one endures.

Jeroboam made things convenient. Say convenient. "It's too much for you to go **all the way down** to Jerusalem." That was the bait to get them to stay out of the southern kingdom. And it worked. Bethel was 12 miles north of Jerusalem so it saved them some gas. I'm not saying all convenience is bad, but beware of being sucked into sin by convenience. Convenience is why we shop on line and use credit cards, etc. Because they make apps convenient, they can collect all our information. During the pandemic many people quit going to church and have never returned. For some it's legit to watch livestream but many now aren't doing either. Why not? Convenience. People don't serve or tithe or read their Bibles or obey other teachings because it's not convenient. People have stopped washing feet because it's more convenient not to. Some things in the Christian life are difficult. And always will be. Some are uncomfortable. But we are called to be faithful, not convenient. I believe the antichrist will not lead people away from Jesus so much by his laws and decrees as by convenience.

Notice Jeroboam didn't tell them to **stop** worshipping God. Just that this was God's image. His representation. **This** is who brought you out of Egypt. The same thing Aaron said of the golden calf at Mt. Sinai. Calf idols were fairly common in surrounding countries. Remember Baal? These holy cows represented fertility and strength and the belief was that the god, in this case Yahweh, might stand on top of it. So it's not replacing God exactly, just representing Him. Helping them to visualize Him. No, no, no! 1000 times no! Jeroboam broke several commandments and led his people into horrible sin that they continued for several hundred years after.

There's a lot of holy cows today. The term syncretism describes what happens when Christian practices and beliefs are mixed with others to make them more

acceptable. There's a lot of syncretism going on today. Mixing native American customs, New Age ideas, or even patriotism with Christianity. Mixing cultural norms with Jesus' teachings. Don't do it! Stay in the Word!

Many times the enemy doesn't actually say, "Stop worshipping God. Stop following Jesus." He says, "worship this too. Or this besides." In Rome, they never asked Christians to abandon their faith, just continue to believe in Jesus and burn a pinch of incense to the emperor besides. They refused and some were burned alive for it. They would not compromise. Be careful of being manipulated by politicians who want us to behave a certain way to violate Jesus' teachings to serve their own interests. Both parties are good at it. The people went along with Jeroboam. May we have enough courage and discernment not to.

He also ignored God's word regarding priests and appointed his own- whoever would do what he said and endorse **his** political agenda. Meanwhile, the real, God-ordained Levitical priests became refugees fleeing from the northern kingdom and resettling down in Judah. Instead of a brain drain, it was a drain of spiritual leadership. Imagine if all the pastors left VA to go to NC.

In 1 Kings 14:9 God told him he had done more evil than all who lived before him. As a result of Jeroboam's idolatry, his dynasty was cut off and God promised that everyone in his family would be brutally murdered which they were except his son who would die of illness just as God said. His name could have been just as great as David's. Instead Jeroboam becomes the low water mark for bad kings. It says of several of them that they did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam. Friends, you and I set the example for those who will follow us sometimes for many generations! In our families, in our churches, and in our nation. What do you want to be remembered for? Someone who led your family into sin, away from the Lord, or closer to Him? Someone whose family stopped going to church on your watch, or someone who either started or continued to lead your family in a godly direction. It's up to you.

The kingdom David fought for, assembled and solidified, the wealth he began to collect, and the nation he built was almost entirely undone in less than two short generations. King Solomon's wealth only lasted one generation and his son reaped the bitter harvest of his father's bad choices along with his own horrible leadership. Leadership matters and it affects many more than just the leader.

Neither Boam did very well, did they? Both are prime examples of bad leadership. Of taking bad advice and of practicing outright idolatry. Let us learn from them. Beware of allowing fear to lead you into sin and beware of being led into it by someone else, especially due to convenience. If I ever stop preaching truth, I pray that you will take the inconvenience of driving 100 miles or more if needed to find it. And let us be especially careful to never mix the purity of God's Word, of Christ's blood, of the

Holy Spirit's truth with **any**thing else. As soon as you add one drop of sewer water to your drink cooler, it's **all** contaminated. It all becomes an abomination. As holy as a cow might look, it's not even close to God. Stay true to the Lord Jesus Christ.