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The Story (12) – Kings (Part 1)

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I. Introduction and Background

A. Recall last week that when David's successor, his son King Solomon, was old his many foreign wives turned his heart after other gods. He went after these gods and built altars for their worship at the urging of his wives.

B. In 1 Kings 11:9-13 God tells Solomon that during the reign of Solomon's son he is going to divide the kingdom. He says he is going to give ten tribes to one of Solomon's servants, leaving two tribes under the control of Solomon's son.

C. The servant to whom God said in v.11 he would give the kingdom is Jeroboam, an Ephraimite Solomon had put in charge of over his forced labor, his conscripted laborers. When Jeroboam was away from Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah told him that God was going to make him king over Israel, over the ten northern tribes he was going to take from Solomon's son.

D. For that reason, Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt for safety. Solomon's death is reported at the end of 1 Kings 11. He died in 931/930 B.C., having reigned for forty years.

II. The Split

A. Solomon's forty-one-year-old son (1 Kings 14:21), Rehoboam, assumed the throne after Solomon's death. It is perhaps indicative of the existing disaffection of the northern tribes that Rehoboam went to Shechem for his formal appointment as king instead having it done in Jerusalem.

B. After Rehoboam's ascension, Jeroboam returned from Egypt, and with representatives of all of the northern tribes, he offered Rehoboam a deal. He said that if Rehoboam would agree to ease up on what Solomon had demanded from them in terms of forced labor, they would serve him. The old men advised Rehoboam to take the deal, but he went with the advice of his younger peers, which was to tell Jeroboam, in essence, to drop dead. He told the Israelites three days after their offer (12:14), "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."

C. That went over like a lead balloon, so northern tribes split from the tribe of Judah. 1 Kings 12:15 notes, *So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat*.

D. From 12:17, 20 it seems that Benjamin was briefly with the northern tribes, but 12:21 indicates they quickly came to align with Judah. The ten northern tribes were known generally as Israel, and the two southern tribes were known generally as Judah.

E. The split solidified when Rehoboam tested the seriousness of the situation by sending Adoram, the man in charge of forced labor, up to Israel. He was stoned to death, which news sent Rehoboam fleeing back to Jerusalem from wherever he was. Jereboam was officially made king over Israel, the northern tribes.

F. Rehoboam assembled a huge army to fight against Israel, but God told him through a prophet named Shemaiah not to do it. The Lord told him (12:24) that this division was ordained by him ("this thing is from me"), so he was to call off this planned assault. (As a footnote, this indicates that some events in history are the acts of God in a special way, in a way different from his general providential guidance of history, and indicates that some of those special acts in history are not obviously God's work in that special sense. They look like ordinary rebellion.)

III. Divided Kingdom Overview

A. Israel remained divided into two kingdoms of Israel and Judah for centuries. Each kingdom had many kings who ruled one after the other. All the kings of Judah, with the exception of the usurper Athaliah, were descendants of David, whereas the kings of Israel came from a number of different families. Some of the kings of Judah were righteous, but all of the kings of Israel were unfaithful to God, some more than others.

B. The northern kingdom continued until it was conquered by the Assyrians, the final blow coming with the fall of Samaria, Israel's capital, in 722/721 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians, the final blow coming with the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. This marked the last of three exiles (605, 597, and 587) of the residents of Judah to Babylonia. The Jews were allowed to return to Judah soon after the Persian Cyrus defeated the Babylonians in 539 B.C. We will have more to say about this in later classes. For now, I just wanted you to see the big picture.

III. Jeroboam's Apostasy

A. Jeroboam feared that if the people returned to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the temple they would eventually be swayed back to loyalty to Rehoboam, which would result in his execution. So he set up a golden calf in the cities of Dan and Bethel and urged the people to go there for worship instead of to Jerusalem. He also made temples on high places and appointed as priests people who were not from the tribe of Levi. He created his own religious feast to compete with a feast in Judah, and he offered sacrifices to the calves he had made.

B. In 1 Kings 13 a man of God from Judah prophesied to Jeroboam at Bethel and spoke against the altar, which symbolized Jeroboam's religious innovations. He told him a man named Josiah would be born in the house of David and would sacrifice the priests of pagan gods on an altar in Bethel. Three hundred years later, the Judean king Josiah (640-609 B.C.) fulfilled that prophecy (2 Ki. 23:15-20). When Jeroboam signaled for the prophet to be arrested, his hand

shriveled up and was incapacitated. At the prayer of the prophet, Jeroboam's hand was restored, but Jeroboam would not be deterred from his path of idolatry.

C. When Jeroboam's son Abijah became ill, he sent his wife in disguise to the prophet Ahijah, the same prophet who had told him God was giving him the northern kingdom, to learn what would happen to the child. Ahijah knew who she was and told her that the child was going to die as soon as she returned home, which happened, and that God was going to kill all of Jeroboam's male descendants, extinguish his lineage, because of his evil idolatry. This too would come to pass at the hand of a successor named Baasha.

D. 1 Kings 14:30 reveals that there was ongoing military conflict between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, but there is no indication that either gained the upper hand or the final advantage. These may have been border skirmishes. If more serious fighting is intended, presumably the Lord allowed the fighting to go forward, unlike his initial intervention to stop Rehoboam's attack, because Jeroboam had chosen to act in rebellion.

E. Jeroboam son of Nebat became a byword, a symbol of the evil of the northern kingdom; he served in Judean history as a gage for evil. Though God had told him through the prophet Ahijah before he had fled to Egypt that he would be with him and would build him a sure house if he would be faithful to him, Jeroboam acted in the flesh and did what he thought was best for securing his rule, even though it involved flagrant rebellion against God.

IV. Rehoboam's Reign

A. The moral climate in Judah deteriorated under Rehoboam beyond the idolatry of Solomon. 2 Chronicles 12:1 declares that Rehoboam "abandoned the law of the Lord." As a result (2 Chron. 12:5), in the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, God allowed Shishak king of Egypt to capture fortified cities in Judah. This is the same Shishak who earlier had given refuge to Jeroboam when he fled from Solomon (1 Ki. 11:40). When he came against Jerusalem, he was bought off the treasures of the temple and the palace, but because the king and the people had humbled themselves, God spared the city from destruction (1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chron. 12:1-9).

B. In 1825 an inscription dating from 920 B.C. was found at the temple of Amon in Thebes (modern Luxor), Egypt which confirms this raid by Shishak. Shishak is said in the inscription to have destroyed many cities in Judah (and Israel for that matter) but Jerusalem is not listed among them.

V. Abijam/Abijah – **Judah** (913-911) – He followed in his father's footsteps, but he recognized the wrong that Israel had done in trying to establish an alternative religion. The Lord gave Abijah a victory over Jeroboam against all odds, one from which Jeroboam never quite recovered.

VI. Asa – **Judah** (911-870)

1. Asa was one of Judah's good kings. For example, he removed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother because she had made an image for worshiping the goddess Asherah. But he stumbled a bit toward the end of his life, imprisoning the prophet Hanani for

rebuking him and entrusting his foot disease entirely to doctors (who may well have employed magic as well as medicine).

2. God gave him victory when he was attacked by Zerah the Ethipian. But the next year, when the Israelite king Baasha had fortified Ramah, just four miles north of Jerusalem, to choke off traffic to Jerusalem, Asa paid Ben-Hadad king of Damascus to attack Israel. Baasha had to abandon the fortification project, which allowed Asa to go up and dismantle it, but the prophet Hanani rebuked Asa for obligating himself to a foreign power rather than depending on God.

VI. Nadab and Baasha – **Israel** (910-886)

A. Jeroboam died in the second year of Asa's reign. He was succeeded by his son Nadab who reigned only a year before being killed by Baasha. As soon as Baasha became king, he killed all of Jeroboam's descendants, as the prophet Ahijah had told Jeroboam's wife.

B. Baasha quickly fell into the sins of Jeroboam, and God, through the prophet Jehu, pronounced against him the same judgment he had pronounced against Jeroboam. Despite the fact God had allowed him to come to power, all of his descendants would be killed (his lineage would be extinguished). 1 Kings 16:4 has the chilling words: *"Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat."*

VII. Elah and Zimri – **Israel** (886-885) – Elah reigned a couple of years before he was assassinated by a military man named Zimri. Zimri then immediately destroyed the house of Baasha as had been prophesied. But he only reigned for seven days because a sizable portion of the people made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel. The army promptly attacked and took Tirzah, the city where Zimri was located, and he burned his house down around him when the handwriting was on the wall.

VIII. Omri – **Israel** (885-874) – After Omri's supporters killed his rival, a man named Tibni, he was established as the undisputed ruler. He founded the city of Samaria which became the capital of Israel. The next three kings of Israel – Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram – were all descendants of Omri. So Omri's house, his family line, reigned in Israel from 885-841. Assyrian documents from a century after King Omri still referred to Israel as "the house of Omri." Omri did evil in the Lord's eyes and walked in the ways of Jeroboam.

IX. Ahab – **Israel** (874-852)

A. Ahab was a wicked king who, probably for political reasons, married Jezebel, the daughter of the Phoenician Ethbaal the king of the Sidonians. Jezebel was bent on substituting Baal for Yahweh within Israel. She was the one who had Naboth murdered so Ahab could have his vineyard.

B. It was during Ahab's reign that the famous confrontation on Mount Carmel between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place (1 Kings 18). In 1 Kings 21 Elijah prophesied to Ahab that his house would be like that of Jeroboam and Baasha, meaning his

descendants would all be killed, and said that dogs would eat Jezebel in Jezreel. Ahab was killed when, in an alliance with the Judean king Jehoshaphat, he was trying to take the city of Ramoth-gilead from the Syrians. The prophet Micaiah son of Imlah had told him this would happen, but Ahab had him thrown in prison.

X. Jehoshaphat – **Judah** (873-848)

A. Jehoshaphat was a good king, walking in the footsteps of his father, Asa. He sent teachers and Levites into the cities of Judah to teach the ways of the Lord and administer justice. However, he entered into a marriage alliance with Israel's wicked king Ahab (his son Jehoram married Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel) and joined Ahab in the ill-fated attempt to recover Ramoth-gilead from the Syrians. Jehu, the son of the prophet Hanani, rebuked him for this saying "Should you help the wicked and those who hate the Lord?" (2 Chron. 19:2).

B. He later joined Ahaziah king of Israel, one of Ahab's wicked sons, in a ship-building project at the Gulf of Aquaba. But as the prophet Eliezer told him, the Lord destroyed those ships before the project ever took off. He also aligned himself with Joram/Jehoram king of Israel, Ahab's second son, and the king of Edom in an attack on Moab to bring it back into subjection to Israel. King Mesha of Moab rebounded in time to save Moab from complete destruction.

C. Jehoshaphat was attacked by a large coalition of Moabites and Ammonites. He proclaimed a fast, brought the people together, and petitioned God for deliverance, and the Lord gave them the victory.

XI. Ahab's Sons – Ahaziah and Joram/Jehoram – **Israel** (853-852; 852-841)

A. Ahaziah died after only a two-year reign from injuries received when he fell through the upper lattice in the palace. In that time he embarked on the ill-fated ship-building venture with Jehoshaphat. Moab's rebellion no doubt arose after Ahaziah's injuries.

B. Joram/Jehoram

1. This is the king who enlisted Jehoshaphat's aid in trying to put down the revolt of Moab. This is also the king to whom the king of Syria sent his commander Naaman to be healed of leprosy. The prophet Elisha was the one who healed him.

2. Later when the king of Syria sent a large army to seize Elisha to prevent him from revealing his military strategy to the king of Israel, God in response to Elisha's prayer blinded the soldiers. (This is when Elisha's servant was allowed to see the Lord's spiritual horses and chariots of fire all around them.) Elisha led the blinded soldiers to Samaria, the Lord opened their eyes, and then Elisha ordered that they be treated well and then sent home.

3. Still later, Ben-hadad king of Syria brought an even larger force and besieged Samaria. The people were starving, but as prophesied by Elisha, God brought them sudden relief. The Syrians fled when God made them think the Hittites and Egyptians were coming to attack

them. This is when the lepers intending to turn themselves over to the Syrians discovered they had left everything.