

## Jeroboam

I am not of royal stock but for some reason, known only to the LORD, I was given a chance to be a king. I have to tell you that I failed miserably. Let me explain how it happened.

I was employed by King Solomon as a manager for some of his minor construction projects. The Temple and Palace were done but there was work to be finished on the wall and the terraces. The king was impressed with my work and I had a good reputation among the people – I guess you could say I was a natural politician.

Still it astounded me when the prophet Ahijah approached me just outside the city gate and told me I was going to be the king of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel. They were being torn away from Solomon's family because he had not kept the Law and had turned his heart away from the LORD God of Israel.

Whoa!! Solomon, greatest king of Israel, wisest man in the world, to whom the Lord had appeared twice! Is that who we are talking about? Wisdom does not count if you do not apply it to yourself. This should have shaken me to my bones. But it didn't. The prophet's message included the fact that David pleased the LORD because of his heart for God. All this in spite of having done some bad things. All Jewish boys learned about David and sang his psalms. Pleasing the LORD was not just a matter of following rules, but the deeper matters of the heart. As Moses wrote, "Love the LORD your God with all you heart, with all your soul and with all your strength."

I got a glimpse of Solomon's ruptured relationship with God when he got wind of the promise to me through the prophet and tried to kill me. I escaped to Egypt and stayed with Pharaoh Shishak. As I think about it now, in our seemingly innocent table conversations, Shishak got a lot of information from me about the wealth and defense of Jerusalem. He later looted the Temple.

It is good to take advice, unless it is evil advice. My rival, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, took bad advice rather than good advice. That is what made the prophet's word to me come true. When Solomon died and Rehoboam was to be made king, I came back from Egypt at the request of the people. My connections had paid off. I helped frame the question that they all asked Rehoboam, "Will you lighten the burdens that your father placed upon us?"

Now it was a shrewd question. I knew Rehoboam to be a typical spoiled rich boy who most of all did not want to be considered "soft." And true to form, he rejected the seasoned advice of Solomon's experienced counselors to ease up on the people in exchange for loyalty. He went with the rash opinions of his young royal peers and went with the macho, "my little finger is thicker than my father's waist."

So the 10 tribes asked me to be their king. It was what the prophet had promised, and maybe I had greased the skids a bit but here I was, king over the larger part of Solomon's extensive domain. Did my head swell a little? Oh yes! My sense of security was increased when Rehoboam got a prophetic visitor telling him to not go to war with me. OK, God had put me on the throne and it was time to exercise my God-given political skills to rule.

I fortified a major city and built another. Then I began thinking, if people go to Jerusalem to sacrifice, their loyalty may return to the house of David. I sought advice – big mistake! I had already gotten the word of the Living God that to reign, I had to walk in His ways. When God Himself has shown you the road, you don't ask someone else which alternate route is best. I proceeded to make two Golden Calves, proclaim that they were the gods who led Israel out of Egypt and then to top it all off appointed priests who were not of the Levitical priestly line.

A prophet came from Judah and made the astounding prediction that from the line of David a king, named Josiah, would burn the false priests on the same altar I had just dedicated. Now I did not know if that was going to actually happen – you will know – but when I stretched out my hand to call for the seizure of the prophet, my hand shriveled up like a dried fig and I could not even draw it back. I was terrified and asked the prophet to pray for me. He did and my hand was healed. When I asked the prophet to stay for dinner, he said he had been ordered by the LORD to not eat or drink but to head straight home. But I found out later that he had accepted the invitation of an older prophet who said (falsely) that the LORD had sent an angel contradicting that first order. As a result, the prophet from Judah was killed by a lion under very strange circumstances. And when his body was found on the road, the lion and donkey were still standing there, the lion had not attacked the donkey or eaten the prophet! Clearly the LORD God of Israel was sending a message!

The lesson was clear, when God speaks to you, don't exchange it for second-hand advice from someone else, even if they seem sincere, have standing and claim to speak for God. Well, I had gotten the message and the warning. Read it and weep, "Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways." Let it never be said of you!

In the end I got advice once more from Ahijah when I sent my wife to inquire about the illness of our son. The prophet knew who she was and why she came even though he was blind and she had disguised any clues to her identity. My dynasty was going to end in defeat and shame. My son would die, but would be mourned and honored because he was the only one in the family in whom God found anything good. Yet God took him, perhaps to spare him the evil that resulted from his father's disobedience.

Epilogue: My other son, Nadab, reigned briefly until he was assassinated and my entire family, all my descendants, were completely wiped out. My name had become synonymous with evil as the many evil kings who followed were described for the record as, "He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam." Could it have been different?

1 Kings 11:26 – 15:32