



First Kings - Chapter Twelve

Summary of Chapter Twelve

As Moses once led his people out from slavery under the Egyptian pharaoh, so Jeroboam now leads Israel out from 'slavery' under the house of David when Rehoboam refuses to lighten the tax burden on the northern tribes; but 'Jeroboam as Moses' is soon transformed into 'Jeroboam as Aaron' as he fashions golden calves for Israel to worship. Such idolatrous worship will eventually result in disaster for Israel.

II 1 Kings 12:1-14:31 - The Kingdom Is Divided

The kingdom is now torn away, as threatened in Chapter 11. Two kingdoms emerge: Judah and Israel, ruled by Rehoboam and Jeroboam respectively.

II.a 1 Kings 12:1-33 - The Kingdom Torn Away

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.a.i 1 Kings 12:1-19 - The Northern Tribes Secede

When Rehoboam became king following the death of his father Solomon, Jeroboam returned from exile in Egypt and argued the case for fairer taxation for the people of the ten northern tribes whom, he felt, had been harshly treated by Solomon. Rehoboam took advice from the elders who had served his father and they said that Rehoboam should deal fairly with the people and they would serve him faithfully. He also took advice from his contemporaries who advised that he should be even harsher than Solomon had been. This is the advice he accepted and, when he told Jeroboam this would be the case, the people of the north split away from Judah to become a self-governing kingdom under Jeroboam. This whole process was the fulfilment of what the Lord had said through the prophet Ahijah.



The Kingdom Divides 931 BC

When Solomon's son Rehoboam arrived at Shechem for his coronation after his father's death, he refused to lighten his father's heavy tax burden on the people, and the ten northern tribes revolted and set up Jeroboam as their king. The northern kingdom would now be known as Israel and the southern kingdom as Judah. Five years later, Shishak, also called Sheshonq, the Pharaoh of Egypt invaded Judah and Israel, and captured a number of towns. Rehoboam avoided Jerusalem's destruction by paying off Shishak with many of the treasures Solomon had placed in the temple.

¹ Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ² When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. ³ And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ⁴ 'Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you.' ⁵ He said to them, 'Go away for three days, then come again to me.' So the people went away.

1 Kings 12:1-5

Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. This was a logical continuation of the Davidic dynasty. Solomon succeeded David, and now Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was assumed to be the next king.

Rehoboam was the only son of Solomon that is known by name. Solomon had one thousand wives and concubines, yet only one son is referenced to continue his father's name, and he was a fool. This demonstrates that sin is a bad way of building up a family. It is difficult to believe that Solomon had no other sons; yet it is a fact that Rehoboam is the only one mentioned: <<*The descendants of Solomon: Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son*>> (1 Chronicles 3:10).

Shechem was a city with a rich history. Abraham worshipped there (Genesis 12:6); Jacob built an altar and purchased land there (Genesis 33:18-20); and Joseph was buried there (Joshua 24:32). It was also the geographical centre of the northern tribes. All in all, it showed that Rehoboam was in a position of weakness, having to meet the ten northern tribes on their territory, instead of demanding that their representatives should come to Jerusalem.

Shechem was also a place of covenant renewal in Joshua 24:1-27, and the place also where kingship first briefly intruded itself into the tribal life of Israel; refer to Judges Chapter 9. It is the ideal place for a prospective king to be invited and confronted with the question of how he is going to exercise his kingship.



View of Shechem

Shechem was the town that nestled between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, where the blessings and curses were read out to the people; refer to Joshua 8:30-33. The archaeological record demonstrates that the city of Shechem was an important centre of pagan worship in the Middle Bronze Age (2100-1550 BC). Extensive excavations at the mound known as Tell Balatah have revealed a large town surrounded by an elaborate fortification system. Several large and imposing 'courtyard temples' have been discovered there. It is likely that the covenant renewal under Joshua took place in the excavated Fortress Temple at Shechem. It was originally constructed in the 17th Century BC, and it is perhaps the worship centre called El-berith in Judges 9:46.

When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it. Jeroboam was mentioned previously in 1 Kings 11:26-40. God told him through the prophet Ahijah that he would rule over a portion of a divided Israel. Naturally, Jeroboam was interested in Solomon's successor and what he planned for the nation. He was specifically part of the group of elders that addressed Rehoboam.

Your father made our yoke heavy. Solomon was a great king, but he took a lot from the people. The people of Israel wanted relief from the heavy taxation and forced service of Solomon's reign, and they offered allegiance to Rehoboam if he agreed to this. Solomon's regime in the latter years has been unduly harsh. The Israelites are no longer a people living in freedom in the Promised Land; they have become once more a people under hard service, as they had been in Egypt; refer to Exodus 1:14 and 2:23. They toil as oxen would under a heavy yoke.

God had warned Israel about this in 1 Samuel 8:10-19 when, through Samuel, he spoke of what a king would take from Israel. Despite this warning the people still wanted a king, and now they knew what it was like to be ruled by a taking king. Sadly, the elders of Israel made no spiritual demand or request on Rehoboam. Seemingly, the gross idolatry and apostasy of Solomon did not bother them at all.

What is significant now is that the true King of all people offers a truly light yoke for those who choose to follow him: *<<Come to me, all you that are*

weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light>> (Matthew 11:28-30).

⁶ Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer this people?’ ⁷ They answered him, ‘If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants for ever.’

1 Kings 12:6-7

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive. Wisely, Rehoboam asked for the advice of these older, experienced men. They seemed to advise Solomon well, so it was fitting that Rehoboam asked for their advice.

If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, then they will be your servants for ever. The elders knew that Rehoboam was not Solomon, and could not expect the same from the people that Solomon had done. Rehoboam had to relate to the people based on who he was, not on who his father was. If he showed kindness and a servant’s heart to the people, they would love and serve him forever. This was good advice.

Jesus clearly taught on this principle for even he as king serves his people: <<For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many>> (Mark 10:45). He even went as far as to wash the feet of his disciples: <<After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet’>> (John 13:12-14).

And speak good words to them when you answer them. Here was an opportunity for Rehoboam to say what was right. It did not require false promises or words of flattery, but sincere words that he would rule them in the way in which God had ordained a king should. If he had had the wisdom that his father had shown at the start of his reign, all the following trouble could have been avoided, as Solomon had once indicated: <<*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly*>> (Proverbs 15:1-2).

⁸ But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. ⁹ He said to them, ‘What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, “Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?”’ ¹⁰ The young men who had grown up with him said to him, ‘Thus you should say to this people who spoke to you, “Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us”; thus you should say to them, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. ¹¹ Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”’

1 Kings 12:8-11

But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. Before Rehoboam ever consulted with the younger men he rejected the advice of the elders. This is a common phenomenon today - what some call advice shopping. The idea is that a person keeps asking different people for advice until they find someone who will tell them what they want to hear. This is an unwise and ungodly way to get counsel. It is better to have a few trusted counsellors to actually listen to even when they say what the person does not want to hear. These young men were much more likely to tell Rehoboam what he already thought. By turning to those likely to think just as he did, it shows that Rehoboam only asked for advice for the sake of appearances. Their unwise advice shows the wisdom of seeking counsel from those outside the immediate situation and context. Sometimes an outsider can see things more clearly than those who share the same experiences.

My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. The foolish advice of the younger men to Rehoboam is literally in Hebrew ‘my little one is thicker than my father’s thighs,’ most likely a reference to his sexual organ rather than a literal finger. Power and sexual potency were very much connected in the ancient Near East. The equally obscure ‘scorpions’ is probably a reference to a particularly vicious form of whip.

Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. In offering the opposite advice to the elders the younger men suggested an adversarial approach, one that would make Rehoboam more feared than Solomon was. In reacting in this way, Rehoboam is behaving exactly as Pharaoh had behaved before him, responding to the words of Moses by increasing the oppression; refer to Exodus 5:1-21.

Solomon asked a lot of Israel, in both taxes and service. Yet there is no impression that Israel followed Solomon out of fear, but out of a sense of shared vision and purpose. They believed in what Solomon wanted to do, and were willing to sacrifice to accomplish it. Rehoboam did not appeal to any sense of shared vision and purpose - he simply wanted the people to follow his orders out of the fear of a tyrant. With a dozen rash words, Rehoboam, the foolish dictator rather than the servant king, opened the door for four hundred years of strife, weakness, and, eventually, the destruction of the entire nation.

¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had said, 'Come to me again on the third day.' ¹³ The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him ¹⁴ and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, '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.' ¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfil his word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

1 Kings 12:12-15

Come to me again on the third day. Jesus could just as easily said these words on the Cross for on the third day he rose from death. However, what he chose to say was: <<***It is finished***>> (John 19:30b). In the case of Jesus it was the work of redemption that he had completed according to his Father's will; in the case of Rehoboam what he finished was any chance of Israel ever being a truly united kingdom until the Cross! However, even the Cross was not intended for full reunification because God knows the hearts of all people: <<***Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law***>> (Luke 12:51-53). What the Cross did was to bring a choice to all people, just as Moses said that the people of Israel had a choice: <<***I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob***>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

So the king did not listen to the people. In this case, Rehoboam clearly should have listened to the people. This is not to say that a leader should always lead by popular vote, but a leader needs the wisdom to know when what the people want is actually best for them and when it is not. Rehoboam was a fool. Ironically, his father Solomon worried about losing all he had worked for under a foolish successor: <<*I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me – and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity*>> (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19).

It was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfil his word. God managed this whole series of events, but he did not make Rehoboam take this unwise and sinful action. God simply left Rehoboam alone and allowed him to make the critical errors his sinful heart wanted to make. Amid all the human decisions, God's decision is being carried through, as was the case with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart: <<**And the Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go'**>> (Exodus 4:21).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Notice also, dear friends, that God is in events which are produced by the sin and the stupidity of men. This breaking up of the kingdom of Solomon into two parts was the result of Solomon's sin and Rehoboam's folly; yet God was in it: This thing is from me, saith the Lord. God had nothing to do with the sin or the folly, but in some way which we can never explain, in a mysterious way in which we are to believe without hesitation, God was in it all."

¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,

'What share do we have in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

To your tents, O Israel!

Look now to your own house, O David.'

So Israel went away to their tents. ¹⁷ But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah. ¹⁸ When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. ¹⁹ So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

1 Kings 12:16-19

What share do we have in David? Rehoboam's foolishness made Israel reject not only Rehoboam, but also the entire dynasty of David. They rejected the descendants of Israel's greatest king. Kingship cannot be imposed on the people but must have their consent, so they take upon their lips a cry that is similar to that of Sheba in 2 Samuel 20:1, and they leave for their tents.

When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, all Israel stoned him to death. Apparently, Rehoboam did not take the rebellions seriously until this happened. When his chief tax collector was murdered, he knew that the ten tribes were serious about their rebellion. Adoram was the wrong man for Rehoboam to send. He was famous for his harsh policy of forced labour; refer to 1 Kings 4:6 and 5:14. Rehoboam probably sent Adoram because he wanted to make good on his promise to punish those who opposed him. He came not to reimpose conditions of forced labour on Israel, since Israel has not yet been under such conditions, but to initiate them; refer to 1 Kings 9:15-23. If the Israelites thought their experience under Solomon was the 'hard service' of Egypt, they were to discover now that this was as nothing compared to life under the proposed new regime. This regime will regard them as if they were Canaanites.

So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. From this point on in the history of Israel, the name Israel referred to the ten northern tribes and the name Judah referred to the southern tribes of Benjamin and Judah. There was a long-standing tension between the ten northern tribes and the combined group of Judah and Benjamin. There were two earlier rebellions along this line of potential division, in the days after Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 19:40-43), which developed into the rebellion of Sheba (2 Samuel 20:1-2).

To this day. This is a phrase used frequently in 1-2 Kings and is probably a reference to a time before the books actually appeared in their final form because the northern tribes no longer existed as such and Judah themselves had returned from Babylonian exile.

II.a.ii 1 Kings 12:20-24 - First Dynasty: Jeroboam Reigns over Israel

Jeroboam is declared as the king of the ten northern tribes. Rehoboam then draws his troops together to go to war with the north in order to regain the territory but the Lord speaks through the prophet Shemaiah forbidding civil war.

²⁰ When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. There was no one who followed the house of David, except the tribe of Judah alone.

1 Kings 12:20

When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Thus the prophecy of Ahijah in 1 Kings 11:29-39 was fulfilled. At the time the prophecy was made, it seemed unlikely - but God's word through his prophet was fulfilled. This King Jeroboam is sometimes called Jeroboam I to distinguish him from a later king of Israel also named Jeroboam, usually known as Jeroboam II; refer to 2 Kings 14:23-29 for the account of this wicked king.

There was no one who followed the house of David, except the tribe of Judah alone. This is not strictly true for the tribe of Benjamin, whose land allocation included Jerusalem, remained faithful to the Judæan kings. In addition, people from the other tribes who continued to live and work in the lands of Judah and Benjamin, also continued to be governed by the Davidic line. The Levitical priesthood on the whole remained faithful to their calling by God and remained in or close to Jerusalem so that they could fulfil their role in the temple.

²¹ When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen troops to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. ²² But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: ²³ Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, ²⁴ 'Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me.' So they heeded the word of the Lord and went home again, according to the word of the Lord.

1 Kings 12:21-24

To fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. Rehoboam intended to make war against the seceding tribes of Israel, but God spoke through a prophet and stopped him. To his credit - or perhaps due to a lack of courage - Rehoboam listened to God's word through Shemaiah the man of God. Shemaiah is mentioned only here in Scripture and yet his role is quite remarkable because his faithfulness in delivering a message that opposed the king's will restrained one hundred and eighty thousand chosen troops from engaging in what would have become a bitter and bloody civil war.

The word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God. This is a typical phrase that appears for many of the later prophets whom God uses to instruct his people: <<*Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah*>> (Isaiah 38:4), <<*The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of*

Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign>> (Jeremiah 1:1-2), <<the word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was on him there>> (Ezekiel 1:3), <<The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel>> (Hosea 1:1), and many more. The title the man of God was also frequently used to describe a prophet, for example: <<The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the Lord>> (1 Kings 13:5), <<But Elijah answered them, 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.' Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty>> (2 Kings 1:12), <<But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel'>> (2 Kings 5:5).

So they heeded the word of the Lord and went home again, according to the word of the Lord. At least for now a war was averted, but this peace does not last long. The reader will later learn of continual war between north and south throughout the period after the division of the kingdoms, until the two sides see that they are indeed relatives and should accept the status quo.

II.a.iii 1 Kings 12:25-33 - Jeroboam's Golden Calves

Jeroboam could not have got off to a worse start as king if he had tried. After establishing Shechem as his fortified capital city, he feared that the people of Israel would continue to travel to Jerusalem to worship at the temple as the law commanded and would eventually return to serving the Davidic king. So he set up two golden calves to represent God: one in the north at Dan and the other in the south at Bethel. He also established other shrines around the land so that the people could worship there. These were served by non-Levitical priests. Finally, he established an unauthorised festival in the north to rival those that were long ago commanded by God himself.

A ritual complex from the 9th Century BC has been discovered at Tell Dan. It consists of a square enclosure with a raised platform inside, perhaps as a base for a temple, and a sacrificial altar. This sacred centre is possibly what remains of what Jeroboam erected at the site of Dan.

²⁵ Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and resided there; he went out from there and built Penuel.

1 Kings 12:25

Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and resided there; he went out from there and built Penuel. The first task undertaken by Jeroboam was the obvious one of defence. He fortified two major cities. Jeroboam needed a capital city because Jerusalem was in the territory of Judah and Benjamin. The city of Shechem became the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. It seems that Jeroboam's reign began with energy and opportunity. He had a significant promise from God through the prophet Ahijah: *<<If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you>>* (1 Kings 11:38).

²⁶ Then Jeroboam said to himself, 'Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. ²⁷ If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah.' ²⁸ So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, 'You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.'

1 Kings 12:26-28

Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. Despite the promises that God had given to Jeroboam he clearly had no faith that the people of Israel would accept him as their king and would return to being a unified nation once more. He should have done as Solomon did and ask God for wisdom.

If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah. The fact of the divided kingdom did not mean that the northern tribes were exempt from their covenant obligations. They were under the Law of Moses as much as the southern tribes, but Jeroboam feared the political implications of annual pilgrimages down to the capital city of the southern kingdom of Judah.

They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah. Jeroboam seems to forget or ignore the promise God had made to him through the prophet Ahijah recorded in 1 Kings Chapter 11. Jeroboam could best secure his throne by radical obedience to God, not by leading the ten northern tribes into idolatry.

So the king took counsel. Seeking advice is only a good thing if it is sought for the right reasons and from the right people. There was no point in asking advice for this evil purpose. Jeroboam wanted advice on how to do an evil thing in the best way he could. He is making the same ill-informed choices that Rehoboam had made by speaking with the young men who had surrounded him, accepting the advice from them that had led to the split in the first place.

And made two calves of gold. Fear that the presence of the house of the Lord at Jerusalem will lead northern Israel to return to Rehoboam leads Jeroboam to invent his own worship system, central to which are these calves. His words to the people about them – Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt – are almost exactly the words with which the people greeted the construction of the calf by Aaron; refer to Exodus 32:4. These bull icons were unacceptable as representations of the Lord, since Mosaic religion requires a clear distinction between the Creator and the created. The worship of bull icons as representations of other gods was more unacceptable still. It blurs the distinction between the Lord and other gods, a blurring already in evidence in 1 Kings 14:15; refer to the comment made there.

The high god of the Canaanite pantheon, El, is frequently called ‘the bull’ in ancient texts from Ugarit in Syria, and his son Baal-hadad, the biblical Baal, is himself also represented as a bull. The bull is further associated in Sumerian and Akkadian texts with the worship of the moon god Sin, and in Egyptian texts with the high god Amon-Re. A cult site from circa 1200 BC has been found on a hill in northern Samaria. Among the remains was a bull figurine with well-defined genitalia, representing fertility and potency. Baal worship was probably occurring at this high place. Judges 6:25-26 reveals that a rogue Baal cult was in practice among Israelites: *<<That night the Lord said to him, ‘Take your father’s bull, the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father, and cut down the sacred pole that is beside it; and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, in proper order; then take the second bull, and offer it as a burnt-offering with the wood of the sacred pole that you shall cut down’>>.*

²⁹ He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. ³⁰ And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan. ³¹ He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. ³² Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. ³³ He went up to the altar that he had made

in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he alone had prescribed; he appointed a festival for the people of Israel, and he went up to the altar to offer incense.

1 Kings 12:29-33

Jeroboam builds centres of worship within his own territory to rival Jerusalem – one in the far north at Dan and one in the far south at Bethel. This represents the proliferation of ‘high places’ about which the authors of 1-2 Kings are so deeply concerned; refer back to 1 Kings 3:2 and the associated comment.

And this thing became a sin. It was a sin when Jeroboam suggested it, but it was more of a sin when the people followed it. The people were so attracted to the religion of Jeroboam that they went as far as Dan, in the far north of Israel, to worship at the shrine of the golden calf there. Of course, for those living in the northern territories this was far easier than travelling all the way to Jerusalem.

He also made houses on high places. Jeroboam made more places of worship than the main centres at Bethel and Dan. These high places were even more convenient for the people as they would not have to travel too far to reach at least one of them.

And appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. Jeroboam rejected the commandments of God regarding the priesthood of Israel, and established a priesthood of his own liking. The legitimate priests and Levites who lived in the northern ten tribes did not like this. They, along with others who set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, moved from the northern kingdom of Israel to the southern kingdom of Judah during this period; refer to 2 Chronicles 11:13-16. Spiritually speaking, Israel was struck twice - by the ungodly religion of Jeroboam and by the departure of the godly and faithful. There were few godly people left in the northern kingdom.

The sanctuary at Bethel is the more important of the two for these authors, for it was here that Jeroboam invested the major part of his effort to set up his new worship arrangements. He built a temple at this high place, appointed priests to service it who had not been set apart by God for such service, and invented a central festival to celebrate in it – a version of the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles, celebrated in Jerusalem in the seventh month as stipulated in Leviticus 23:33-43, but now in northern Israel in the eighth month. Aaron, too, having made his golden calf, built an altar and announced a festival on a date devised from his own heart in Exodus 32:5; and on that occasion, too, the Levites were not involved in the celebrations; refer to Exodus 32:26. It is false worship, and Jeroboam’s action in leading the people into it will constantly be referred to in the rest of 1-2 Kings, e.g. in 1 Kings 15:26, 15:34 and 16:26. This worship is Israel’s characteristic sin that eventually leads the people to exile, scattered in

many foreign lands: <<*The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had banished them from his presence. When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit great sin. The people of Israel continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed; they did not depart from them until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had foretold through all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day*>> (2 Kings 17:20-23).

He offered sacrifices on the altar; He went up to the altar to offer incense. It seems that Jeroboam personally served at the altar. It was natural that Jeroboam served as his own priest. Jeroboam probably performed the functions of high priest himself, that he might in his own person condense the civil and ecclesiastical power. Thus he reigned supreme more as a dictator than a king chosen by God.

Jeroboam appealed to the natural desire of his people for convenience. Men will usually take the easy way out when they can; therefore it was thought to be good if an idol in Bethel or Dan could replace the journey all the way to Jerusalem and back. Jeroboam became an example of a political leader who shapes religion for his own purpose. The issue of true religion was unimportant to Jeroboam; he was interested in useful religion. There are many people today that say they have a religion or faith but in reality they want to do everything as they themselves prescribe. In other words, they want to be the god of their own lives!