

What Could Have Been — A Lesson from Jeremiah

by Bill Crews

When God makes a promise, it is always solemn, and it is always true, and will always be faithfully kept. ***“And it shall be if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in mine eyes, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.”*** These were the words of God to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:38.

Solomon’s disfavor with God is related in 1 Kings 11:1-13. It was brought on by Solomon’s marriages to many foreign women, by his allowing them to bring their pagan religions (idolatry) with them, by assisting them in providing high places and altars of pagan worship, and, finally, especially when he was old, by even joining them in the idolatrous worship of Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Molech. His great wisdom did not prevent him from foolishly committing great sin. Jehovah was understandably angry with Solomon and appeared unto him to inform him that most of his kingdom, the kingdom of the twelve tribes of Israel, would be torn from him and given to one of his servants. For the sake of his father, David, Solomon would not lose all of the kingdom and the loss, in the form of a rebellion and division, would not come until after his death and when one of his sons was reigning.

The servant referred to was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim and a descendant of Joseph. Jeroboam was *“a mighty man of valor”*; because he was *“industrious,”* Solomon had placed him over all the labor of the house of Ephraim. The prophet Ahijah was sent by Jehovah to inform Jeroboam of his good fortune. Now but a servant of the great king Solomon, he was soon to become a king in his own right, ruling over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. The words of Jehovah through Ahijah to Jeroboam are found in 1 Kings 11:29-39.

Now read verse 38 again. Did Jeroboam want God to be with him? Did he want the newly formed kingdom to be established in his house (meaning that the throne would belong to him and his descendants)? All he had to do was to keep God’s commandments and statutes just as David had done, and the promise was his. Did he? In the very next chapter we learn that he did not. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, becomes king, arrogantly and foolishly heeds the harsh advice of the young men over that of the old men, and precipitates a rebellion that tears away ten of his tribes and puts them under Jeroboam. God even intervenes to prevent Rehoboam from going to war against Jeroboam and the rebelling tribes. *“This thing is of me,”* says God through the prophet Shemaiah.

Jeroboam should have been grateful that God had given him a throne and a kingdom and protected him from a destructive war. But he soon forgot these favors and the conditions of the great promise made to him. He gave in to a foolish fear of his own heart, a fear that, when the Israelites in his kingdom went to Jerusalem, Rehoboam’s capital and the location of the temple of Jehovah, for the annual feasts of the law of Moses, they would turn back to Rehoboam and rebel against him and kill him. Had he trusted God’s promise, he would have known that none of this could occur. In his folly and fear, he took counsel with men, not with God, and decided to make two calves of gold (was he not familiar with the tragic story in Ex. 32?). He said to the people, *“It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the*

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