

Searching For Israel (Part Five): Solomon And The Divided Kingdom

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*"I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and give it to you—ten tribes."
— I Kings 11:35*

I Kings 11:6-10 records God's appraisal of Solomon's performance as King of Israel.

Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded.

God was not well pleased with Solomon. Influenced by his many foreign wives and concubines, Solomon became enmeshed in pagan worship. Failing to heed God's warning of the "snare" which foreign wives would become (Exodus 34:11-16), he allowed his wives to turn him to false gods. I Kings 11:4 sums up the matter of his turpitude: Solomon's "heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David."

The same chapter tersely tells us what was God's reaction to Solomon's apostasy:

Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David. . . ." (I Kings 11:11-13)

God tells Solomon that his descendants would not inherit a throne over *all* Israel. God says He would maintain Solomon's dynasty, however, out of respect for His promise to David that his throne would be established forever (II Samuel 7:16). Under David, the scepter had come to Judah. It was not to depart from Judah, as Genesis 49:10 declares.

The Chastening

When God promised David He would establish his throne forever, He also stipulated that, if his son sinned, He would "chasten him with the rod of men" (II Samuel 7:14). The word *son* refers not only to Solomon but also to any of David's descendants who would become king over Israel. Around 975 BC, Solomon died, having ruled Israel in unparalleled splendor for forty years (I Kings 11:42). "And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place" (I Kings 11:43).

Now was the time for chastening. God, having responded to Solomon's apostasy by committing Himself to ripping a *part* of his kingdom from his descendants, looked about for a suitable ruler of the remaining tribes. He found Jeroboam, a talented and ambitious Ephraimite whom Solomon had years before placed in charge of Joseph's labor force (I Kings 11:28). God, apparently recognizing potential in Jeroboam, made him two promises through the prophet Ahijah:

I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and give it to you—ten tribes. And to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem. . . . So I will take you, and you shall reign over all your heart desires, and you shall be king over Israel. Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you. And I will afflict the descendants of David because of this, but not forever. (I Kings 11:35-39)

One of these promises is conditional, while the other is unconditional.

» **Unconditional promise:** "I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you" (verse 31). God goes on to explain that He will leave one tribe, Judah, under the Davidic monarchy in order "that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem" (verse 36). God did this to honor His promise to David that He would "establish the throne of [Solomon's] kingdom forever" (II Samuel 7:12-13). Christ, the last King, descended from Judah and will sit on that throne forever.

» **Conditional promise:** ". . . *if* you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you" (I Kings 11:38). This is a remarkable promise. God says He will establish in Jeroboam a permanent dynasty over ten tribes *if* he keeps His covenant.

A Kingdom Divided

As Solomon undertook more and more grandiose building projects—all those temples for pagan gods!—the taxation and forced-labor system grew more and more burdensome to "Joe Israelite." Samuel's prophecy concerning the "cost" of supporting a monarchy, recorded in I Samuel 8:10-17, was fulfilled. Upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam seized upon the people's unrest to his own advantage. Just before the coronation of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, he hurled at him the following challenge: "Your father [Solomon] made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you" (I Kings 12:4). After consulting with his advisors, Rehoboam countered, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke . . ." (I Kings 12:14). Rehoboam apparently did not inherit an *iota* of his father's famed wisdom!

With no relief in sight, certain of the tribes rebelled against the house of David, that is, against the ruling authority of the tribe of Judah. I Kings 12:16 records the parting sentiments of the rebelling tribes: "What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!"

Rehoboam's kingdom took its name from its leading tribe, Judah: The Kingdom of Judah. Because it lay south of most of the other tribes, historians often refer to it as the *southern kingdom*. Far smaller in size and population than Solomon's consolidated kingdom, it consisted of only three tribes:

» **Judah:** Rehoboam retained control, as God said he would (I Kings 11:13), over his own tribe in order that His prophecy through Jacob would stand: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Genesis 49:10).

» **Benjamin:** The tribe of Benjamin, situated geographically near Judah's inheritance, voluntarily allied itself with Rehoboam.

» **Levi:** Forced to vacate their priestly positions under Jeroboam (I Kings 12:31), the Levites drifted south to Judah. Since Rehoboam's capital remained Jerusalem, they naturally attached themselves to the Temple service there.

Jeroboam's kingdom, properly called the Kingdom of Israel, consisted of the remaining tribes, of which there were ten. Because it lay to the north of Judah, historians often speak of the Kingdom of Israel as the *northern kingdom*.

So, add to the list of search criteria this point: Someone of the tribe of Judah will always rule Israel, but only a part of Israel. There remains another part, under different leadership. The history of this other part, the Kingdom of Israel, took a totally different path from that of the Kingdom of Judah. Next month, we will look at the changes Jeroboam wrought in the northern kingdom—the Ten Tribes of Israel—and see what the ultimate result of those changes was.

Inset:

***Has God Already Fulfilled His Promises
to the Patriarchs?***

Some people have erroneously interpreted I Kings 4:20-34—a description of Israel's prosperity under Solomon—along with related scriptures, as a fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs. They argue that, since God fulfilled them, they have no further meaning today or in prophecy. Is that so?

Now, it is true that the children of Israel experienced God's blessing during Solomon's reign. Specifically, they enjoyed

» *Population growth:* "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing" (I Kings 4:20).

» *Peace:* Solomon "had peace on every side all around him" (I Kings 4:24).

» *Vast territories:* "Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the [Euphrates] River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt" (I Kings 4:21).

» *Wealth:* Solomon "made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as abundant as the sycamores" (II Chronicles 1:15).

There can be no doubt about it: Israel's stature under Solomon certainly represents *a typical* fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs. However, these blessings were not the final fulfillment. Notice specifically what promises were *not* fulfilled during Solomon's time:

» Unfulfilled remained God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would *possess* the land between the Euphrates and Nile Rivers (Genesis 15:18-21). God specifically listed the inhabitants who would ultimately be dispossessed of their territory: the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, *the Amorites, the Canaanites*, the Gergashites and the Jebusites. Shortly before they entered Canaan, God instructed Israel, through Moses, concerning the conquering of these territories, as related in Deuteronomy 20:16-18:

. . . Of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and *the Amorite and the Canaanite* and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite . . . lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God.

Following these instructions, Joshua totally destroyed certain peoples: "Joshua took and struck [the cities] with the edge of the sword. He *utterly* destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded" (Joshua 11:12). These cities, as enumerated in Joshua chapters 11 and 12, do *not* include those of at least two peoples listed in Genesis 15:18-21 and Deuteronomy 20:16-18: *the Canaanites and the Amorites*.

Israel under Joshua and his immediate successors did *not* totally possess the land God had promised the patriarchs. Some peoples eluded destruction. Indeed, much outlying territory remained to be conquered after his death (Joshua 13:1-6). The unconquered territories, as listed in Judges 1:27-36, include those of *the Amorites and the Canaanites*. Joshua's conquests were as limited as they were thorough.

Early on, Israel had "put [the cities between the Euphrates and Nile Rivers] under tribute" (Judges 1:35). Solomon, after the military exploits of David, extended Israel's hegemony—its sphere of influence—to the point where he could exact tribute from all the nations situated between these rivers (I Kings 4:21). However, Israel neverfully *dispossessed* the inhabitants of their land, *never* dislodged them from it. *The indigenous folk still occupied the land in Solomon's time*. God had not yet fulfilled His promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess the land between the rivers.

» Unfulfilled, as well, was the promise that Israel would be a "company of nations" (Genesis 35:11). Solomon's Israel was a great nation, but *not* a "company of nations." The individual twelve tribes that Solomon ruled were *not* sovereign nations in their own right, constituting a company of twelve nations. Not at all. The tribes were just that—tribes, not distinct nations—for at least two reasons:

a) Each tribe, separately, did not have its own king. Solomon appointed "twelve governors over all Israel" (I Kings 4:7). The tribes had little political autonomy.

b) Each tribe did not have its own unique body of law. Instead, the tribes shared a common heritage of law, that given by God through Moses at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:20ff).

Solomon did not have political or military hegemony over a company of nations. His "empire" was based more on its economic strength than on any military adventurism to which his "forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen" (I Kings 4:26) might have tempted him. In fact, his international liaisons found their roots in his romantic liaisons, of which he had not a few (I Kings 11:3). He dealt with surrounding nations on a give-and-take basis. For instance, he *traded* twenty Galilean cities for the gold and lumber provided by Tyre (I Kings 9:11). He was not in a position to *take* the gold and lumber.

We will see, in future articles, when and where the promises to the patriarchs were actually fulfilled.