**LESSON 15 – THE CRUMBLING NORTH (Israel)**

**Intro:** How does a man devoted to God, at the height of his career and influence end up sacrificing it all?

Solomon knew he was God’s chosen ruler to follow David. In his prayer following his crowning, he asked for wisdom rather than wealth or power, pleasing God and resulting in the Lord giving him all three.

Things that could have led to his apostasy that we also need to be wary of:

* Over-confidence in God’s anointing, minimizing the conditions attached
* Affluence, breeding spiritual and moral complacency
* Weariness as we grow older in pressing on towards the goal of our calling – dimming zeal rather than increasing focus.

Rehoboam’s fatal mistake: listening to young men who had grown up as he had with affluence, untested, rather than listening to those older and wiser with experience. There is often wisdom that comes with experience. The temptation is to listen to what we ***want*** to hear rather then what we ***need*** to hear.

But these external circumstances were merely the events God was using to fulfill his judgment against Solomon for his apostasy. Read 1 Kgs.11:29-39, 12:21-24.

**Outline of the Northern Kingdom’s history: 931-722 BC (picture)**

1. Period of civil strife: Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab
2. Period of wealth and prosperity: Ahaziah, Jehoram., Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II
3. Period of rapid decline: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea

**Characteristics of the Northern Kingdom:**

* Was made up of 10 tribes. While only Judah is explicitly mentioned as following Rehoboam, Benjamin was tiny and engulfed by Judah – ½ went with the Northern Kingdom, while ½ stayed with Judah in the South. Many Levites also fled to the south when Jeroboam set up his alternative religion. Simeon had been absorbed into Judah (see map)
* Kings were not of David’s line and succession was not necessarily based on family lines, and often involved political intrigue, murder
* There was not a single godly king in the entire history of the Northern Kingdom

1. **Period of Civil strife: Noteworthy events**

* **Jeroboam:** he had every opportunity to step up to God’s calling on his life to lead 10 of the tribes of Israel. God clearly told him the reason he was taking the kingdom away from David’s house: *I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshipped (other gods), and have not walked in my ways or done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David…did. “(1 Kgs 11:33). “If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David…did, I will be with you . I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you.” (v. 38)* Very clear opportunity and conditions.

**Jeroboam fails immediately** setting up a rival religion (golden calves, reverting to Egypt’s gods) at opposite ends of the kingdom to

* + de-emphasize Jerusalem as spiritual centre, removing loyalty to the former capital;
  + Unify the 10 tribes around a new spirituality complete with priests, sacrifices, new festivals. He recognized, as David had, the power of a common faith. However he failed to recognize God as the source of his leadership/kingdom.

*“This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth.” (1 Kgs.13:33-34)*

* **Civil strife:** Even though God sends Rehoboam back home when he goes to fight Jeroboam for his kingdom, conflict continued between the two nations until a marriage alliance between Ahab’s daughter and the southern king Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram, finally brought peace.
* **Internal strife:** The bloody succession of kings was often used by God to bring judgment on the ruling king (**Jeroboam**: 1 Kings 14:9-11 fulfilled in 15:29-30; **Baasha** 16:1-4, 11-12).
* **External threats:** When Judah sought Syria’s help to defend itself against Israel, Syria complied, attacking Israel and occupying it until the time of Ahab.
* **Ahab introduces Baal worship:** Ahab married Jezebel, a marriage that forged an alliance with the wealthy Phoenicians. She brought Baal worship to Israel, and exerted tremendous influence over Ahab.

Ahabwas able to drive out the Syrians and brought peace with the South. However, more deadly thanmilitary occupation, was this pagan spiritual influence. *“Ahab…did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.”(1 Kgs.16:30-33)***. The prophets Elijah and Elisha speak out against Baal worship:** Prophets brought messages of both judgment and hope – always the pronouncement of judgment is accompanied by “if you turn from your wicked ways…”

God’s heart is for our salvation*, “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”(2 Pet 3:9)*

Ahab’s reign takes us through the end of 1 Kings. Elisha takes over Elijah’s ministry of prophesying to apostate Israel after Ahab’s son Ahaziah’s, death.

1. **Period of Wealth and Prosperity**

* **Peace brings prosperity:** This is true in every era and within every nation.

With the civil war ended, and Syrian threat abated, attention could be focused on domestic affairs. Wealth had probably begun to flow to Israel through Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel. **Jehoram** (also known as Joram) exacted tribute from Moab, increasing Israel’s wealth and power. He had an opportunity to repent when God displayed his power miraculously in the battle, probably because of Jehoshaphat’s godliness (he had joined Israel to fight against Moab) 2 Kings 3.

* **Prophets Amos and Hosea speak during Israel’s golden Age.** Prosperity brought materialism, and with it corruption. The message continued to be a call to repentance, and a promise of deliverance if she would turn back to him. It was particularly hard for Israel to take the prophets message seriously when things were going so well! The prophets are ignored, bringing on swift destruction.
* **Moments of grace: Jehoahaz** briefly sought the Lord when Syria was oppressing Israel, and the Lord had mercy (2 Kings 13:4-5, 22-23). His son **Jehoash** wept over Elisha’s impending death, showing some respect, even affection for him and the Lord had mercy again (13:25). In **Jeroboam II**’s reign God had pity up on his people in spite of the evil they did (14:26-27). All are indications that God’s judgment is always mixed with mercy. He continues to love his people.

1. **Period of Rapid Decline**

* A rapid succession of kings through conspiracy and murder – those who live by the sword die by the sword
* Assyria had become a world power, and moved against Israel. Israel paid tribute to avoid war. **Pekah** foolishly decided to try rebelling, joining forces with former enemy Syria, tries to get Judah to join the alliance (Jotham wisely refused).
* Isaiah is warning Israel of the foolishness of military alliances when it is God’s hand that moves kings and nations, and only God can deliver Israel. The warning is ignored, and **Hoshea**, a vassal of Assyria makes one final attempt to rebel by appealing to Egypt.
* In 722 BC Assyria invades and deports all of the Israelites to Assyria, resettling Israel with peoples from other conquered nations.

**Conclusion:** This is the end of the 10 tribes. After being carried off into exile they disappeared. Today’s Jews are those from the tribe of Judah.

God speaks clearly so that those who both experience his judgment and those who observe will understand his purposes. He summarizes Israel’s history as a nation to this point in 2 Kings 17:13-18, 40-41. **His exhortation is also to us – will we hear it, believe it and obey?**