

Exegetical Notes – 1 Kings 12:25-33

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Verse 25

²⁵ Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel.

- The kingdom over which David and Solomon ruled has now been divided into two kingdoms. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, rules over the southern part of his father's kingdom which is now called Judah. Jeroboam rules over the northern part of the kingdom of David which retains the name Israel.
- In this passage our attention shifts from Judah to Israel.
- Jeroboam, the king of Israel, made Shechem its capital city and built up the city of Peniel as a military outpost to prevent Rehoboam from attacking Israel.

Verses 26-27

²⁶ Jeroboam thought to himself, "The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. ²⁷ If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam."

- When the kingdom split, the center of Hebrew worship remained in Jerusalem which was in the kingdom of Judah. The Temple was there. The priesthood was centered there. The feasts were held there. The Hebrews were commanded by the Law to attend worship in Jerusalem. Jeroboam reasoned that if the people of his kingdom traveled to Jerusalem to worship YHWH, their allegiance would revert, over time, to Rehoboam.
- He feared that the people would kill him and that the kingdom would reunite under Rehoboam.

Verses 28-30

²⁸ After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." ²⁹ One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. ³⁰ And this thing became a sin; the people came to worship the one at Bethel and went as far as Dan to worship the other.

- He sought advice from his advisors. They decided to create an alternate religious system which would not require the people to worship YHWH or go to Jerusalem to do so.
- The reason given to justify this change was convenience. He told the people that it was just too much of a demand on them to go all the way to Jerusalem to worship YHWH. (The undivided kingdom of Israel was about the size of the state of New Jersey. Jerusalem was in the southern part of the kingdom. Today one can travel from the northern part of New Jersey to the southern part in less than three hours. In Biblical times the trip would have taken days. Jeroboam's reasoning was that this was an excessive expectation on the people.)
- So he made two golden calves and proclaimed that these calves were the gods of Israel (see Exodus 32:1-6). This was not the first time the people of God had made golden calves and named them their gods. He set one god in the southern part of his kingdom and one in the northern part. He ordered the people of Israel to worship these calves and not YHWH.

Verses 31-33

³¹ Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. ³² He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. ³³ On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

- He also made it easy to worship other gods. He created places where other gods could be worshiped as the people might choose.
- He established an alternate priesthood which supported and justified these religious changes.

- He instituted a system of religious celebrations to replace the feasts of YHWH.
- Because it was easier to go along with these changes, the people of Israel followed Jeroboam's new religious system and stopped worshiping YHWH.

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