

This is Part Ten of the Serial Publication in PDF and Video,
including the first half of Chapter Seven.

The
PRODIGAL SON
PROPHECY

God's Amazing Plan for the Restoration of the Two
Hebrew Houses and the Salvation of the Gentiles

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CHAPTER SEVEN:

THE TWO HOUSES BECOME TWO KINGDOMS

After he completed the building of the Temple, David's son Solomon received a conditional promise from God that if he remained righteous before Him, David's kingdom would belong to him and his descendants in perpetuity -- the same promise He made to David:

“As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel. But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name’ ” (1 Kings 9:4-7).

Sunday school lessons about Solomon tend to emphasize the great wisdom he displayed in his youth, but when he grew old, his wisdom waned and he broke faith with God, becoming one of the most wicked men generally and the single most prolific polygamist in all of Scripture:

*“King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites [Mamzers and Canaanites]. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, **'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.'** Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. **As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites.** So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 11:1-6).*

Consider just how deep was Solomon's betrayal of God:

“On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices

to their gods” (1 Kings 11:7-8).

What was the hill east of Jerusalem? And how were Chemosh and Molech worshipped?

That hill is known to us today as the Mount of Olives, and these demons were worshipped with sexual perversion and human sacrifices -- child sacrifices to be exact (Leviticus 18:21). In other words, it was King Solomon himself who led the Hebrews into the demon worship on the very hillside where Jesus would be betrayed by Judas, that would first split David’s Kingdom in two and then lead eventually to the banishment from the promised land of each of those kingdoms in turn.¹

Here, then, was the cause of the division of David’s Kingdom and the origin of the Two Kingdoms:

*“The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord’s command. So the Lord said to Solomon, ‘**Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen**’ ” (1 Kings 11: 9-13).*

TAKE CAREFUL NOTICE OF THIS TRUTH. From the instant of this division, until the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, the priority of God was and is the eventual restoration of the two houses. Every historical and prophetic event of the Bible, every teaching, every parable, every word and action of Jesus Christ relates in some way to this central focus of God. Indeed, the very purpose of Christianity -- “to seek and to save that which was lost” -- is inextricably linked to this plan as we will see.

But let us continue to chronicle the historical events as they unfolded.

REHOBAM AND JEROBOAM

Despite Solomon’s phenomenal wealth, beyond all the other kings of the earth (described in 1 Kings 10: 14-29), he was not satisfied. In the latter days of his reign he enslaved the Hebrew population with an enormous tax burden and a system of forced labor to build public works. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam succeeded him in a ceremony at Shechem in the territory of Ephraim. (Significantly, Shechem is the site where the Bible first identifies Abraham by the term “Hebrew” -- Genesis 14:13 -- and where he built the first Hebrew altar to God -- Genesis 12:4.)

“Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nedab heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: ‘Your father put a heavy yoke

on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you' ... The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, he followed the advice of the young men and said, 'My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions' ” (1 Kings 12:1-4; 13-14).

Jeroboam the Ephraimite had been a high-level servant of Solomon, who had appointed him head over the labor forces of the House of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). After the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh prophesied that Jeroboam would become king over the northern 10 tribes, Solomon tried to kill him, so he fled to Egypt (1 Kings 10:26-40). Upon his return, and Rehoboam's refusal to enact reforms, the people rebelled against Rehoboam and made Jeroboam king over them: by that act establishing the Kingdom of Israel.

“King Rehoboam sent out Adoram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death...and made [Jeroboam] king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David. [Then] Rehoboam ... mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin—a hundred and eighty thousand able young men—to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon. But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God ...Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.’ So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again, as the Lord had ordered” (1 Kings 12:18-24).

Thus the former unity of the twelve tribes of Israel was shattered and the House of Jacob divided in two: the House and Kingdom of Judah and the House and Kingdom of Israel.

WAYWARD ISRAEL

“Jeroboam thought to himself, ‘The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. 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. 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.’ One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan...Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. 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” (1 Kings 12:26-32).

The Kingdom of Israel got off to a bad start and never recovered. King Jeroboam was afraid that his subjects would defect to Judah because the Temple of God was located in its capital, Jerusalem, and their religious duty was to make pilgrimage there three times per year (for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). So Jeroboam the Ephraimite, fresh from exile in Egypt, and likely mindful of his Egyptian heritage (the wife of Joseph, mother of Ephraim and Manasseh, was a daughter of the Egyptian Priest of On -- Genesis 46:20), created his own religion: a hybrid version of “Judaism” centered on the Golden Calf rather than the Temple.

Jeroboam further departed from Judaism by ignoring God's exclusive assignment of priestly duties to the Tribe of Levi, and making priests of the common people. It would seem almost a foregone conclusion that the Levites would gravitate back to Judah, since their very identity was enmeshed in the rituals and upkeep of the Temple -- and they did.

“For the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had excluded them from serving as priests to the LORD. He set up priests of his own for the high places, for the satyrs and for the calves which he had made. [As Jeroboam had feared] Those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD God of Israel followed them to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers” (2 Chronicles 11:14-16).

So as a practical matter, Jeroboam would have needed to recruit clergy from outside the legitimate priesthood. And we must remember that Levi was not actually one of the “Ten Tribes of Israel” anyway, since his special relationship with God substituted for a land inheritance -- he was assigned the Cities of Refuge instead of a twelfth portion of the promised land (Joshua 18:7). (Why then were there not just 11 tribes if Levi wasn't counted among them? Because Joseph, recipient of the firstborn blessing from his father Jacob, received a double portion per Deuteronomy 21:17, meaning that Joseph's inheritance was that his two sons each got a full share of land, being listed as equal partners with their uncles as the Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.)

God was angry with the Kingdom of Israel for its pagan idolatry, but His mercy endured from generation to generation until the rise of King Ahab.

*“Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him. It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nedab, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshipped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus **Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him**” (1 Kings 16:30-33).*

Ahab's sin represented the “straw that broke the camel's back” as it were, and the prophet Micaiah declared the outcome of it, saying to Ahab “*I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, like sheep without a shepherd*” (1 Kings 22:17). The immediate context of this comment related to the result of Ahab's imminent battle with the Syrians, but the phrase “sheep without a shepherd” carries a much deeper meaning, and prophesies the future identity of the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom as “lost sheep.”

Importantly, the “lost sheep” metaphor in the Bible is primarily used as a symbol of the House of Israel (though it is sometimes used for all the sons of Israel). It's first use in Scripture is by the elderly Moses, praying for a worthy successor to lead the twelve tribes “*so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd*” (Numbers 27:17). That man is Joshua the Ephraimite. Note that the Hebrews are not “lost sheep” at this time, because Joshua is a good shepherd.

We are most familiar with the New Testament references to Jesus as the Good Shepherd of John 10,

and Luke 15 who seeks after the lost sheep, and especially the parallel passages in Mark 6:34 and Matthew 9:36: “Jesus...had compassion on them [the huge crowds of Galileans who began following him] because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” This was the precise context in which he first sent out the twelve disciples, saying, “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6, parallel to Mark 6:7).

Galilee is at this time, of course, a Roman-controlled province in the northern-most territory of what had once been the Northern Kingdom (of Israel), populated with descendants of Hebrew exiles who had drifted back to the land over the centuries (while the far greater portion had been scattered throughout the nations).

In these passages, Jesus is directly fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, as spoken by God to Ezekiel:

*“...They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them...**Behold, I Myself (Jesus) will search for My sheep and seek them out.** As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day...I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment...**Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people...** As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God” (Ezekiel 34:5-6; 11-12; 16; 30-310).*

Ezekiel 34 (primarily the portion not quoted above) relates in part to the coming Millennial Kingdom, and in part is a rebuke to faithless spiritual leaders (shepherds) who exercise authority over the exiles during Ezekiel’s ministry to them (where he himself lives per Ezekiel 1:1) over a century after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. As noted above, while "sheep" sometimes is used for all the Hebrews, it's most often used in the Old Testament in association with the House of Israel, and this is true of the prophecy of Jesus as Shepherd in Ezekiel 34.

Again, Ezekiel prophesied from exile among the 10 Tribes of Israel during the conquest of Judah by Babylon, and throughout the Book of Ezekiel he clearly delineates his comments and prophecies about Israel from those about Judah. Ezekiel 23 and 37 are two of the best examples. Ezekiel 34, a message to the House of Israel (v30) falls in the middle of a set of rebukes and warnings to Gentile nations, because that's where Israel was at the time, both physically and spiritually.

In contrast to the shepherdless House of Israel (whose “shepherds” had always been illegitimate in God’s eyes), the House of Judah was never separated from it’s legitimate spiritual shepherds, the Levites, whom He had placed over them. Even to this day, the Levites maintain the role they were assigned, one that was expressly endorsed by Jesus in Matthew 23:2 (though He did not endorse the heretical Pharisees and Sadducees who had usurped the Levitical “Seat of Moses” for themselves). Neither was the House of Judah ever divorced by God, despite her great sin. Judah’s status remains in a sort-of spiritual suspended animation “*until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*” (Romans 11).

ISRAEL BUT NOT JUDAH DIVORCED BY GOD

Although the sentence would not be carried out immediately, God finally lost patience with Israel due to Ahab's escalation of evil doing and issued a Writ of Divorce, banishing the kingdom -- all ten tribes -- from His presence, which is how they became the "Lost Ten Tribes of Israel."

*"Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. I thought, After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. **And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception, declares the LORD**" (Jeremiah 3:6-10).*

Notice that Judah *did* return (quite imperfectly) but Israel never did (until after the divorce). Thus God used the Assyrians to carry out His sentence of desolation and in 722BC the entire territory of Israel was desolated of Israelites.

Importantly, God promised to eventually bring Israel back to the land. We will now explore how He has been working to fulfill that promise over the centuries.

¹ It is in my view no coincidence that the demonic guild called Freemasonry traces its origins to Solomon, and there is one very plausible school of thought that Solomon is the model of the end-time Antichrist -- and connected in some way with Freemasonry -- based on 1 Kings 10:14-23. Irrespective of that, I am of the opinion that Solomon later repented and wrote the book of Ecclesiastes before his death, which likely explains why God never banished Solomon from His presence as He had done with Saul (2 Samuel 7:12-15).

