

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF I KINGS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY PART THREE - CHAPTERS 12-14

David had prepared the way and provided the resources for building the temple which would be where God lived among His people, and then he died. Solomon carried out the work, applying all the wisdom of God in the architecture,(6) and the furnishing,(7) using a man with creative ability given to him by God. When the Creator lives in us we can expect that all He will do through us will be very good, imaginative and beautiful in every sense(II Cor.5:17; Gen.1:31)

Once built the temple was ready to receive the ark of the covenant containing the 10 commandments and all the rest of the objects which pictured the way by which we can have a relationship with God through the cross of Christ. God's glory moved in, as the Holy Spirit moves into us, when the death of Jesus has prepared the way, and our hearts are truly ready to receive Him as the Lord of our lives. Solomon now reminded the people of how the temple came to be built and spelt out the basis of their future relationship with God. He told them not only that if they were faithful God would bless them and if they were unfaithful they would be defeated, but also of the way back when they sinned. By means of repentance and sacrifice they could return to blessing.(8)

In chapter 9 the Lord reminded Solomon of the simple condition of His continuing blessing on him and his family for generations to come. The rest of the chapter describes Solomon's wise dealings with a variety of people including neighbouring kings and his own government affairs.

Word of this remarkable king spread around the world of his day and various people came to check for themselves including the Queen of Sheba. Sheba was probably around the mouth of the Red Sea, the so-called Horn of Africa, in modern Eritrea or Ethiopia. She saw outward evidence of Solomon's success but what really impressed her was his God-given wisdom. She returned home, if not a believer in God, certainly deeply sympathetic to the truth. According to Jewish history, it was at this time that a Jewish community began to be established in Ethiopia, some of whom have returned to Israel only in the last few years, nearly 3000 years later.(10)

If only the story of Solomon had ended at chapter 10, it would have been a picture of how God can demonstrate His wisdom and power through one man. The history of Israel over the next few generations might have been vastly different. All of his wisdom did not prevent Solomon making a wreck of his life at home and so eventually of his leadership. Somehow lust took over his life to an almost unbelievable extent with 700 so-called wives and another 300 girl-friends. The problem began with his unwise marriage to a heathen princess for political reasons. His father's own mistakes in multiple marriages must have helped to blind him to the folly of what he was doing. Inevitably Solomon was drawn into worshipping their gods rather than the other way round. In the same way today when believers marry unbelievers it is nearly always the believer who is dragged down rather than the unbeliever being converted. Already the storm clouds of future rebellion were gathering in the shape of Jeroboam.

CHAPTER TWELVE tells of Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, who demonstrated that God's wisdom is definitely not inherited. Right at the start of his reign he was confronted with a demand. His father had imposed tough discipline and taxes to accomplish the building of the temple and the royal palace. That had taken twenty years but in the twenty years which followed the same conditions had been maintained, although the need was no longer there. The people led by Jeroboam demand an easing of the burden. First Rehoboam asked advice of the older men who had served under Solomon and learned much of his wisdom. They advised that he agree with what was being requested. Next he sought the counsel of his contemporaries, young men who had grown up under privileged conditions and knew no more than he did. Their advice was opposite. Heavy taxes meant more revenue in which they expected as the king's friends to share. He listened to his foolish and greedy friends, and the kingdom broke up leaving him to rule only Judah and Benjamin while Jeroboam took over the 10 northern tribes as the kingdom of Israel. Civil war threatened but God warned Rehoboam to back down and he did. Jeroboam realised that with the temple in Jerusalem the people of his kingdom would be drawn into visiting Judah and so perhaps to abandoning him. He ignored God's promise to him to bless his reign if only he would trust Him,(11:38) and set up 2

alternative places of worship. What was worse was that he made golden calves as representations of God, like the calf made by Aaron in Exod.32. When we try to solve a problem God has promised to look after by acting in our own strength, we too are worshipping a god of our own making.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN is a simple story with a powerful message. Jeroboam had been promised so much by God if only he would stay faithful to the real God rather than one of his own imagination. The Lord provided one last opportunity for Jeroboam to turn back to Him by warning him through a young prophet of the future destruction of the idolatrous altar he had built. It was a prophecy which would be exactly fulfilled about 300 years later.(II Kings 23:15,16) Jeroboam's reaction was to order his arrest, but God gave him a dramatic, immediate sign which shocked the king into listening. The Lord had warned the young prophet to stay with no-one, even the king, so he headed for home. On the way he met an old prophet who presumably could have been the one God used to speak to the king had he been faithful. The old prophet was jealous and wanted a piece of the action so he invited the young prophet home. The young man refused at first because of God's orders to him, but the older man overruled by insisting that God had spoken to him too and changed the orders. The young prophet gave in and ate with the older man who told him during the meal that his disobedience would cost him his life. On the way home he was killed by a lion!(I Pet.5:8) The moral of the story - God does not change his mind by giving someone else instructions about our lives. What He has to say He will say direct to us. Ignore this at your peril!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN relates the sad end of both Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Both had other gods before the real God, and both therefore suffered loss, the former of his son and the latter of his treasure. Jeroboam when in trouble sought God's advice - but did not follow it. Rehoboam listened to his mother rather than God. In each case others followed their lead till their whole society was spiritually devastated.(Lk.17:1,2)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. When Rehoboam faced difficult decisions on two occasions to whom did he turn and why? Faced on the first occasion with two different sets of advice, which did he follow and why? His father, Solomon, had given wise advice on how to seek counsel.(Prov.11:14; 15:22; 20:18) What was missing in his search for good advice? What had he not learned from his father? How do we also struggle with finding wise counsel?
2. What opportunity had Jeroboam been given by God?(I Kings 11:20-39) How did he waste the opportunity and why? What final warning did he receive? In what way did God give him one last reminder of the foolishness of leaving God out? What can we learn from his experience?
3. What can we learn from the story of the two prophets, one young and one old? Why may God cease using someone who has previously had an effective ministry? How would Paul later handle those who wanted to make him jealous of their ministry?(Phil.1:15-18) And what would Jesus say about competition among His followers?(Lk.9:49,50) What can we learn from this story about the way God guides us, and the danger of forgetting?
4. In what way did both kings, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, make the same mistakes? How did God deal with each of them? Does God kill children to judge the sins of their parents?(Job 1:18,19; II Sam.12:14-23)