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## The Beginning of the End I Kings 14

**Intro:** In **ch13**, we looked at the sanctity of Yahweh's word and how it was available as a mercy to Jeroboam, as a safety for the man of God from Judah and was the profession of the old prophet from Bethel and how each one failed to avail themselves of the benefits of that Word to their own disappointment or destruction. We should also take a warning from the fact that in **ch13**, it was the one who was closest to Yahweh's word that received the more severe consequences for ignoring or disregarding the sanctity of God's word.

Here in **ch14**, we have another scene from the life of Jeroboam that again centers on Yahweh's Word. There is trouble on the home front. The king's son was seriously ill. This was double trouble because on one hand, the hopes of a succeeding dynasty rest squarely on a male heir yet, at the same time, he was their young child so parental love also must have played a part. Even pagan idol worshippers care about their kids! What to do? The king did what many people still do: they go looking for a minister or a believer they've met at some point in their life. For Jeroboam that was old Ahijah the prophet (ch11). The king wanted a good word from the old prophet but what he gets is a meeting with the word of God, the word that exposes men's hearts and governs history.

**1-6** – if this scene weren't so sad it would be laughable. His son is sick and Jeroboam wants to know if he'll recover. But why does he hide behind his wife? Why doesn't he go to Ahijah himself? Why does his wife need to disguise herself? The writer doesn't explain any of this but if you've been following along in our study, you'll remember that when Ahijah confronted Jeroboam with the prospect of being king over Israel in **ch11**, he admonished him to function according to the David- standard (to be a man after God's own heart), but he hadn't done so. Jeroboam believed that calf worship would do more for royal stability than covenant orthodoxy. He knew Ahijah would have a prejudiced view of his religious innovations so he dare not approach him directly, nor allow his wife to be recognized by him. That would certainly bring a bad word from the prophet.

But, if his wife let on that she was just a worried Israelite mother seeking a word from God concerning her ailing son then the prophet might be more prone to give her a good word. A good gift certainly couldn't hurt either. Bribery doesn't always help but it almost never hurts. Come to find out, the situation was better than Jeroboam had hoped for the old prophet could hardly see anything anymore. Its doubtful king Jerry knew this, not having much contact with Ahijah in recent years. He still remembered the prophet's address but was likely not up to date on his condition.

So, here's the king with his magical view of the word of God. If he can just weasel out a positive pronouncement from this old prophet, then his son will surely recover. "All I need to do is pull a fast one over on him!" Even a manipulated word will be a certain word. But, in life, things don't always go as we plan. For one thing, Ahijah didn't need his eyes because the Lord had his ear (5)! There it is: who, why, what and how – the whole twisted plan was explained to Ahijah before the king's wife ever showed up to put on her show. She may have even practiced a good Southern accent. But as soon as Ahijah heard her feet slapping the steps up to his house, he hit her with the truth (6).

Jeroboam thought he was a pretty sharp king dealing with just a simple old man. He either forgot or never realized that every time one deals with the Word of God one also deals with the God whose Word it is. The word of God is not just some irrelevant object out there for us to squeeze and mold to our liking. Instead, it is always warm with the breath of God's own mouth. God is never detached from His Word. He never forgets about it or disregards it or takes it back. It is His bond, His fidelity; a reflection of His holiness. Jeroboam and all other superstitious people eventually learn this the hard way. God's Word is not mine to capture or manipulate, it is free and it exposes me right down to my hidden motives. This is exactly how the author of the Book of [Hebrews](#) describes it in [4:12](#). God's Word will search you out and unmask your true character, no matter how you disguise yourself.

Now, some may try to give Jeroboam credit for turning to Yahweh's prophet in his time of trouble. There's nothing wrong with that in and of itself but remember, in [ch13](#), Jeroboam was given Yahweh's word and he turned a deaf ear to it. It was his mercy and he rejected it. Now, when hard times come his way, he goes seeking for that which he had despised and he does

so disingenuously. He is never recorded as praying for his people, never asks his wife to pray, doesn't even ask the prophet to pray. No, he only treats Ahijah as a fortuneteller instead of as a man of God.

Clearly, Jeroboam's sin runs deeper than that. He wants the help of the Word in the emergencies of life but not the rule of the Word over the course of life. He only wants the occasional Word of God. He wants God's word for his crisis but not for his lifestyle. He desires light in his trouble but not light on his path. He doesn't want to live with the Word; he just wants to visit it from time to time as needed. Do you know anyone like that?

**7-11** – Ahijah told Mrs. Jeroboam that he had bad news for her and he wasn't kidding! Ahijah identifies the depth of the king's offense – it was a sin against grace! Yahweh had been so good to Jeroboam (7-8a) but the king had not responded in kind (8b-9). Jeroboam had received great grace from Yahweh and he despised it. That's why his dynasty would be annihilated. And what was the premier failure of Jeroboam? It was those other gods.

Some have tried to say that Jeroboam's creation of the golden calves was merely a liturgical assistance in the worship of Yahweh, as if he were trying to do the right thing in a new way. Clearly, Yahweh didn't see it that way. If I'm truly desiring to worship God properly then the last thing I ever want to do is the first thing He told me not to do. It's no wonder Yahweh said that they "provoked" Him to anger. In Hebrew, the word means to irritate, aggravate and exasperate. To provoke someone means to push them over the edge or drive them up a wall. Has that ever happened to you? It happens to God every time His people put their fleshly desires before His will.

Why would King Jeroboam's shiny calves work Yahweh's last nerve so much? Why did they push Him beyond the brink of His patience? None of the other gods or goddesses in the area demanded or expected exclusive worship from their followers. But, Yahweh is no run-of-the-mill deity. He's done what no other god has done – entered into a covenant with His people, a marriage-like relationship, which demands exclusive devotion. The proper character of love within an exclusive relationship is to be jealous, to be rightfully possessive of the one who has promised to be exclusively yours. Yahweh is the unusual God who has entered into covenant with a people and no other gods is His premier commandment. To violate this is to invite His fury. In fact, covenant people have no choice: either seek His face or

face His fury.

**12-18** – Ahijah is just full of good news! He gives Mrs. Jeroboam a supplemental prophecy that builds on and extrapolates his previous prophecy against Jeroboam's dynasty. First, the child will die (**12-13**) then Jeroboam's dynasty will be overthrown (**14**). But, worse than that, the entire nation of Israel is doomed! Yahweh will destabilize (**15a**), uproot (**15b**), scatter (**15c**) and give up (**16a**) Israel because she has willfully followed Jeroboam in his pagan idolatry. Each of these 3 prophecies will be fulfilled: death of the son (**17-18**); destruction of dynasty (**15:25-30**); removal from the land (**II Kings 17:21-23**).

Notice that Jeroboam's wife never speaks in this story. She just turns to go home and when she arrives, the child dies; just as the prophet had said. This event, while tragic, is also critically important for it assures us that just as the first part of Ahijah's prophecy has occurred, so too the rest of it will come to pass. The death of the son is both a sign and a preview of the death of the dynasty and the death of the nation of Israel.

If you'll notice, Ahijah has been speaking from **v6-16**. In fact, his prophecy dominates the whole chapter. His word of judgment encompasses not just Jeroboam's son and dynasty but the nation of Israel itself and is not brought to a conclusion until **II Kings 17**. This tells us that Ahijah's prophecy here in **ch14** is the linchpin that controls the entire history of the northern kingdom. That's what the writer(s) of I & II Kings intended us to see. And, just in case the reader is a little dense, they make sure we don't forget this prophecy by taking the refrain from **v16** and, like a jingle on a radio commercial, it's drummed into our heads again and again. 14 more times, after v16, we will be reminded of the sins of Jeroboam. The curse of Ahijah's prophecy hangs over Israel's history for the next couple of centuries!

What does this tell us? That the very first king of the new 10 tribe nation finished them! The beginning was actually the beginning of the end. Jeroboam became bull-headed and doomed an entire people. But you don't have to be a king to wreak such havoc. Our modern culture is impatient with orthodoxy; rejects fidelity to God's Word and won't tolerate a God who refuses to negotiate on the first commandment. Our contemporaries assure us that we can do as we want and don't need to stay obligated to any kind of Bible-bound worship. Of course, they are correct. You are free to choose

your own calf but you may very well doom your descendents for generations to come.

**19-20** – Here we have a sort of concluding summary, a formula we will see many more times as we make our way through I & II Kings. They often refer the reader who wants to know more to other resources (Chronicles). That would be for the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, or what the writer has not told us here. Like what? How he made war and how he reigned: military and political affairs. None of that is mentioned here because that was not the writers focus. He has been deliberately selective. He has focused solely on how Jeroboam worshipped!

What does such a narrow focus imply? It teaches us that the Word is unimpressed with Jeroboam's achievements. The author clearly has little interest in Jeroboam's military or political successes because he has spilled all his ink in describing how the king responded to the basic covenant demand. Obviously, accomplishments don't matter but faithfulness does.

**V19** should be sobering to every believer and especially ministers – all the energy and exertion we have poured into making our mark in our calling may prove to be one huge irrelevance! The only thing that matters is whether you worshipped God alone and worshipped Him properly. Were you content to worship the real God?

V19 isn't some throw-away bibliographical note. It's actually a disturbing world view. The author's point in this text is simple – why be so interested in military and political prowess when covenant disaster looms so large? Now apply this to yourself? If it's your obituary, will it really matter if you built a successful business from the ground up, or owned a big house or retired early and travelled the world? Does any of these things really matter if you failed to worship the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth?

Now, I've heard stories of certain sports fan who would, on a particular busy Saturday, have a baseball game on the TV while a college game was playing on the radio and an NFL game on in the other room. If one game gets boring, just focus on another one. That's sort of what's going on here. The game in the northern kingdom is looking like a blowout so the writer switches to the game in the southern kingdom. Maybe things will look more hopeful here.

**21-31** –Well, there may be a different game going on in Judah but it's not necessarily a better one. The writer first re-introduces us to Rehoboam and reminds us of the significance of Jerusalem: that God had chosen to put His name there. This, at least, is the center Yahweh focused orthodoxy, maybe the author meant to contrast this against the bull mess that was going on up in Bethel and Dan. Surely things must be better down south! But, all optimism begins to fade when we are reminded (twice [**21, 31**]) that Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonitess from the pagan people of Ammon. This information frames the report of Rehoboam and should inspire a creeping dread. What good can come from such a pagan influence behind the throne?

Of course, this isn't just a report on Rehoboam. The writer describes here exactly what Judah was doing, how they stirred Yahweh to jealousy, built high places etc. the writer is not incriminating Rehoboam in particular but Judah in general. The threat of **v24** is difficult to miss: since the people of Judah delight to mimic Canaanite religion, they will suffer a Canaanite fate – removal from the land. This focus on Judah is deliberate; it is a summary of the whole trend of Judah's kingdom. The text relates the fatal errors of the southern kingdom that began with its first king. Just like Israel, the seeds of its destruction were there at the very beginning. This is not going to be a happy history we will be reading. The divided kingdom is a depressing story from the word go!

It's not by coincidence that immediately after those 3 depressing verses (**22-24**) we read of Shishack's invasion of Judah from Egypt. We're meant to take Shishack's plundering expedition as the initial blow of Yahweh's judgment against Judah's unfaithfulness – and a sign that there would be more of the same at the end (**24b**). It stings a little, watching all the glitter and glory of the previous era being carted off to Egypt. You can shun Yahweh if you want, but you must remember that He has Egyptian Pharaohs and a whole host of the like – at His beck and call.

There's also a symbolic representation of Judah's eventual demise provided in the text. After Shishak carried off all the gold shields that Solomon had made, Rehoboam replaced them with bronze shields. I'm sure they were also impressive but let's face it, bronze isn't gold. Gold represent wealth, splendor and blessing. Clearly the splendor of Judah is fading. But notice, the pomp and ceremony must continue! If we can't have shields from Saks

Fifth Ave, we'll take shields from the bargain bin because – the show must go on! We may willingly disregard the pure worship of our covenant God but we can't give up our paltry attempts to imitate the old glory with our trinkets and tinsel.

How closely does this describe many churches, at least in western Christianity? How many congregations have been so far removed from pure, biblical worship of the Father and yet, insist on maintaining an air of orthodoxy? We don't worry about opening our Bibles to see what they have to teach us but we just can't have church without stained-glass windows and pipe organs or, for the more contemporary crowd, laser lights and a good fog machine. It's kind of like a kingdom where you still strut around with bronze shields but have cast aside faithful worship

War – Now, you would think that a couple of guys with such similar belief systems would be able to get along swimmingly. They both decided to disregard covenant worship, they both chased after idols. They both were under the threat of Yahweh's judgment. You would think that, at the very least, misery would love company. But that was not the case. You see, the heart that only seeks its own will is not just at odds with its Creator, it's at odds with all other Creation. If I reject a loving relationship with God and choose to live solely for myself, that makes everyone who is not me my enemy, that's because everyone else rudely desires what I desire and they have either taken from me or are trying to. Selfishness doesn't breed unity or camaraderie, it only invites war.

When we submit ourselves to a loving relationship with an unconditionally loving God, only then do we discover what true unity is, true brotherly love. We have God the Father and Jesus Christ Himself as our examples.

The last accusation Ahijah made against Jeroboam's sin is that he had cast Yahweh behind his back (9b). This was a powerful description of intense contempt towards God. It implies more than just neglect but a scorning of God. When we scorn God's Word we also scorn the God of the Word.

What's interesting is this is the same figure of speech used to describe God's forgiveness of our sins. He puts them behind His back or in other words, He forgets them ([Isa 38:17b](#)). That is wonderfully good news when it describes God's treatment of our sins but it is tragically bad news when it

describes a person's treatment of God. 😊