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September 24th: 1 Kings 14 & Hebrews 12:18-29

September 23, 2020



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Jeroboam and Rehoboam's reigns. Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer
(<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Kings 14. At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick, and Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise and disguise yourself, that it not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh. Behold, Ahijah the prophet is there, who said of me that I should be king over this people.

Take with you ten loaves, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what shall happen to the child. Jeroboam's wife did so.

She arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. Now Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were dim because of his age. And the Lord said to Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam is coming to inquire of you concerning her son, for he is sick.

Thus and thus shall you say to her. When she came, she pretended to be another woman. But when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he

said, Come in, wife of Jeroboam.

Why do you pretend to be another? For I am charged with unbearable news for you. Go, tell Jeroboam. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you leader over my people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you.

And yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes. But you have done evil above all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back. Therefore, behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung, until it is all gone.

Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat, for the Lord has spoken it. Arise therefore, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die, and all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him.

For he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to the Lord, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam. Moreover the Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam to-day. And henceforth the Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers, and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger.

And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin. Then Jeroboam's wife arose and departed and came to Terzah. And as she came to the threshold of the house, the child died, and all Israel buried him and mourned for him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Ahijah the prophet.

Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred and how he reigned, behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. And the time that Jeroboam reigned was twenty-two years, and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his place. Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah.

Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done.

For they also built for themselves high places and pillars, and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree. And there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything.

He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made. And King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. And as often as the king went into the house of the Lord, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.

Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite, and Abijah his son reigned in his place.

In 1 Kings chapter 14 we see God's judgment upon Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Jeroboam had set Israel off on the path of idolatry in chapter 12. He had established the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

Their purpose was in large part political. They were designed to avoid the prospect of Israel rejoining with Judah as they went down to worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam was still worshipping the Lord, but he was worshipping the Lord with idols, directly breaking the second commandment.

He was repeating the sins of Aaron. There were several similarities between Jeroboam and Aaron. In chapter 12 Jeroboam was like Moses and Aaron confronting Pharaoh concerning the oppression of the people.

But then he ends up building golden calves. He's confronted by the man of God in chapter 13, and the altar is split in two, like Moses split the tablets of stone in chapter 32 of Exodus. Now in this chapter we discover that he has two sons named Nadab and Abijah, much as Aaron had two sons who were condemned to death by the Lord, Nadab and Abihu.

Severe judgment comes upon Jeroboam and his house in this chapter on account of his sin. We should recognize the similarity here with the judgment that comes upon the house of Eli and upon the house of Saul. As Jeroboam's son Abijah falls ill, he sends his wife to speak to Ahijah the prophet, the same prophet that had declared that he would have the kingdom from David.

He sends her with ten loaves, perhaps representing the ten tribes that are in his hand. Now however, the message is not a good one. There will be a great judgment upon his house and upon the nation.

Jeroboam's wife's visit to Ahijah the prophet might remind us of the visit of Saul to the witch of Endor back in 1st Samuel. That had been on the eve of judgment upon the house of Saul, and now this is the eve of judgment upon the house of Jeroboam. There is an inverted Passover here as well, a reverse story of Israel.

Israel will be stricken like a reed by the water, and return to the land from which Abraham was first called on the far side of the Euphrates. There is a sort of reversal of both the Passover, the Red Sea, and then a return to the land from which they first came. Both as the wife of Jeroboam comes to Ahijah, and as she enters her own house and her son dies, the importance of the door is prominent.

The door is associated with birth, it's also associated with death. The association between the death of the firstborn and the doorway is clearly a Passover theme. There is a sort of inverse Passover here, it's the righteous son that dies, to spare him from the harsher judgment that will come upon others.

Israel is already doomed to exile at this point, from the very beginning of its life as an independent kingdom. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, sets the course for Israel, and Israel never truly departs from it. Jeroboam's wife is condemned to become the silent herald of her own son's death, seemingly fatalistically resigned to her doom.

There is no repentance, pleading with God for forgiveness, or a quest for mercy here. Throughout this chapter it's as if the history of Israel and Judah is thrown into reverse. Israel will be uprooted from the land and scattered beyond the river Euphrates.

Jeroboam, who had begun with Exodus themes, will experience a great reversal of the Exodus, as Israel once again finds itself in captivity. The Red Sea crossing will be undone, the calling from beyond the Euphrates would be undone also. While the previous chapter had given signs of hope, Jeroboam's hand was restored to him after he had treated the Lord.

In this chapter no such requests are made. 1 Kings 14 concludes with the account of the king of Egypt invading Jerusalem and plundering it, much as Israel had once plundered the Egyptians. The glorious treasures of the house of the Lord and the king's house were all removed.

To replace the dazzling golden shields of Solomon, Jeroboam had bronze shields constructed in their place, a very clear sign of the decline of the kingdom. In many respects the fall of Solomon occurred as he heeded the voice and influence of the serpent Pharaoh, an influence probably exercised in large measure through his wife,

Pharaoh's daughter. Like Adam broke the law concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Solomon broke the key commandments that were given to the king in Deuteronomy chapter 17.

And the result of his sin was grim. His son Rehoboam lost the rule of the kingdom of Israel to Jeroboam and brother was set at war against brother. And the wily serpent Pharaoh who had been harbouring and arming the future enemies of Solomon all along, shrewdly pursuing a policy of regional division and conquest and manipulation, ended up devouring the very riches for which Solomon had so compromised himself.

Yet for all the failures of the house of David, unlike the kings in the north, the dynasty of David continued and while the later kings of Israel all walked in the path of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin, apostasy never had the final word in the history of Judah. A question to consider, what lessons might we learn about forgiveness and repentance from the contrasting histories of Israel and Judah? Hebrews chapter 12 verses This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is, things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is the Lord of all.

A recurring pattern in the book of Hebrews is warning followed by reassurance. The intent and expectation of the new covenant is great blessing, but yet there is considerable danger for any who reject or abandon what Christ has offered. The author of Hebrews wants to be absolutely certain that the recipients of the book grasp hold of what they have been given in Christ and do not let go.

To this end, at the conclusion of Hebrews chapter 12, he presents us with two alternative mountains, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The contrast between Sinai and Zion is between two relationships between us and God's presence, the terrifying and threatening theophany and the fearful restriction, and the glorious admittance and celebration. He takes his description of Sinai from Exodus, in Exodus chapter 19 verses 17 to 25.

The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the Lord said to Moses, Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look, and many of them perish.

Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them. And Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, Set limits around the mountain, and consecrate it. And the Lord said to him, Go down and come up, bringing Aaron with you.

But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he

break out against them. So Moses went down to the people and told them. And then again in Exodus chapter 20 verses 18 to 19.

The author of Hebrews describes all of this in a way that is designed to have a powerful rhetorical effect. He describes the meeting with God at Mount Sinai in a way that draws upon the different senses. Touch what may be touched, a blazing fire, sight, darkness, gloom and tempest, and hearing the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words.

The most terrifying thing on the mountain is God's voice and the fear of his judgment. The people refused to draw near because of fear, and Moses had fear also. Yet his fear comes at a different point in the story.

Moses' fear is referred to in Deuteronomy chapter 9 verse 19. What he describes here is the terrifying anger of God at sin. In that situation there was not any effective way to deal with the people's sin.

He had to mediate for the people, but the people could not come close because of their sin. And if they did come close, the anger of the Lord might break out at them and they might be destroyed. There is something a bit more subtle than the straightforward contrast between the Old and the New Covenant being drawn here.

God is present of course both on Mount Sinai and on Mount Zion, but in very different ways. On one he is inaccessible to a sinful people that face his judgment. On the other he is accessible to a people who are granted access to his presence through Christ.

It is also important to remember here the relationship between Sinai and the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was based upon the foundational theophanic event of Sinai. The Tabernacle was a sort of immovable mountain.

It moved around the pattern of God's appearance to the people at Sinai to different places. The pattern was received on Sinai for the Tabernacle, but Sinai itself was part of the pattern for that Tabernacle. And much as Sinai was the place of God's awesome and dreadful presence and glory that was inaccessible to sinful human beings, so the Tabernacle was something that kept out the people of Israel.

They all had to remain outside lest God's holy wrath break out against them. Indeed not only human beings were kept out, but even if an animal came near it had to be stoned to death. Mount Zion by contrast is a very different sort of place.

Mount Zion is an assembly. It's a place of fellowship and festivity. It is associated with Jerusalem.

It's a site of dwelling, with God dwelling in the midst of his people. There are innumerable angels. The angels came at Sinai, but the people were kept far off.

The angels had to intermediate between God and the people. Now however the people are invited to join the angels' own assembly. This is the church of the firstborn.

It is associated with all of God's people in Christ who is the firstborn. They're enrolled in heaven. Heaven is their true home.

God's presence of course is at the heart of it all. The spirits of righteous people made perfect are here. Those who have died in Christ and been brought into the fullness of his presence.

This realm of fellowship and festivity, of access and presence, is possible because we have been granted access and welcome by Christ's blood. And there's a contrast drawn with the blood of Abel. In Genesis chapter 4 verses 10 to 12 we read, And the Lord said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.

Abel's blood condemned Cain to exile and exclusion. The blood of Christ, by contrast, grants us admission and access. The forbidding image of Sinai is a picture of a lack of access to God's presence.

A place where there is no sacrifice of Christ for a sinful people. And they must be held afar off or subject to God's judgment. Many of the warnings and encouragements of the book to this point might be heard here.

Once again he is comparing the wilderness generation of the Exodus with the first generation of the church to follow Christ. Once again he is arguing from the lesser to the greater. Learn the lessons from the wilderness generation.

Do not turn back. Do not reject what is set before you. If you reject Christ or turn back from Him, your judgment will be far more severe than what faced the wilderness generation at Sinai.

They heard God's word on earth, but we have the voice of Christ from heaven. There is a new earth-shattering revelation. Christ has warned us from heaven.

Not just a word spoken by angels, but now by the one who is greater than all of the angels. Quoting Haggai 2, verses 6-7, he speaks of a coming judgment. For thus says the Lord of hosts, Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

This judgment shakes the heavenly realm also. Christ has entered into the heavenly

temple, into God's presence itself, and so the heavenly order has been changed also. Man now has access to God's heavenly throne itself.

Yet there still remain things shaken to be removed. The Christians to which the author of Hebrews writes are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Yet there are elements in this world that are to be shaken, and even in the heavens themselves.

Perhaps we should even hear some reference to the events of AD 70 here. The earthly sanctuary of the temple is about to be removed in a few years time. Once that has been removed, it will be clearer that there is no rival way of access into God's presence than that that is offered through Jesus Christ.

Recognising all of this, we will approach God with reverence, awe, and with a godly fear. The God that we are approaching is the God of Sinai, the same God that provoked terror in Moses and the people. And now we have access to his presence, access that gives us peace with God, that gives us an enjoyment of his admittance and his acceptance.

And yet, if we reject, we are in a far more serious position than the Israelites were. We must not turn back. We must not give up.

We must receive what God has given us in Christ, and joining with that heavenly throng, offer God acceptable worship. A question to consider, how might the vision of the heavenly company described in this chapter change the way that we consider Christian worship?