

# DIVISIONS

**Roger E. Dickson**

Cape Town, South Africa

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**2 Kings 12:25-33** is the text for a historical event of division in the history of Israel.

Shechem was Jeroboam's capital during his reign, though the capital was later moved to Tirzah (2 Kg 14:17). At the time he established Shechem as his initial capital, he added to the buildings that already existed, for the city existed long before Jeroboam (2 Kg 12:1; Ja 24:1). Omri later reaffirmed Samaria as the capital of the northern kingdom (2 Kg 16:24). Jeroboam also fortified Penuel that existed long before his time (Gn 32:24-32; Jg 8:8,9,17). All these places laid the foundation for the division of worship in Israel that later led to the "sins of Jeroboam" that were perpetuated throughout the history of Israel.

After the death of Solomon, the twelve tribes of Israel divided. Two remain loyal to David through Rehoboam in the south. Ten gave their allegiance to Jeroboam in the north. Jeroboam extended the division of the Israelites by saying, ***"If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem"*** they would continue religious loyalty to the house of David. Therefore, something very significant happened at this time in reference to Israel violating a fundamental plan of God to keep Israel as a united nation throughout their history. God's original plan was that the tabernacle was to be used as the center for their burnt offerings throughout the history of Israel. For this reason God gave them detailed instructions in the Pentateuch as to how they were to continually repair or rebuild the tabernacle throughout their history until the Messiah came. However, they failed to do this, and thus the center of sacrifices was claimed by various tribes as the tabernacle remained too long in any one territory.

God never intended that Israel centralize the place where they would go to offer the burnt offerings, and thus no tribe would ever be too far away every year (See comments Dt 12). But when Jerusalem was made the capital, and the temple was built by Solomon to centralize sacrifices in Jerusalem, then the foundation was laid for the division of the nation. Building the temple in Jerusalem consigned the northern tribes to being continually too far away to go and offer their burnt offerings before the Lord. At the time of the division, centralization of the sacrifices had been going on since the completion of the temple. The northern tribes were consigned to being too far away to bring their families for the burnt offering. The resentment of the north toward the south grew, and the foundation was laid for division. Jeroboam simply took advantage of this situation. He said to the northern ten tribes, *"It is too far for you to go up to Jerusalem."* And it was. For this reason Jeroboam went too far from the law of God by building an altar in Dan (or, Laish - Jg 18:24-31) and another

in Bethel (or, Luz - Gn 28:10-21; 35:5-15). He thus kept the people away from Jerusalem and away from the ark of the covenant that was permanently located in the temple in Jerusalem. He simply accommodated the northern tribes in the fact that it was too far for them to go on an annual basis to offer their burnt offerings before the Lord in Jerusalem. The centralization of government around a king, and the administration of government in one capital (Jerusalem) where their faith was also centralized, eventually bore the fruit of division among the tribes of Israel. We could blame the division of the kingdom on the harshness of Rehoboam. However, the division had already started to take place years before when Israel rejected God in order to have a king on earth. The kings on earth eventually centralized the administration of the nation's affairs around a single capital where they built a temple after the nations around them. The division was inevitable. God saw their future, and thus worked to use what the people caused to His own advantage.

Jeroboam established many religious practices that were after his own design. He restructured the religious beliefs of the people, who at this time, were ignorant of the word of God, for they had no copies of the law by which to direct their lives (See Hs 4:6). He thus made the people sin by offering them the opportunity to satisfy their religious desires according to his desires to maintain the loyalty of the people. What Jeroboam established as religious behavior was continued throughout the remainder of the history of the northern kingdom. The kings that followed him thus sinned by carrying on with the tradition of his apostasy.

Permenant places of worship do present a foundation for division. While God desired that worship in Israel be regularly centered around the homes of His people, collective places of worship on a weekly basis does not encourage the unity that God would have among His people. Something can be a concession on the part of God, and thus not in and of itself wrong. But the longterm results of any deviation from the desires of God will bring unfortunate consequences.