



Excerpt from "Elijah the Tishbite" - J. Martin
Chapter I - Background 1 Kings 16v29-34 pg 9-10

Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the man "who made Israel to sin", had certainly laid the foundation for this awful apostasy, We read of the way in which he broke away from the Truth in 1 Kings 12v25-33. In that record note the way in which Jeroboam so carefully weaned Israel away from the influence of the Truth which at that time was centred in Rehoboam's kingdom in the south, and headed up by the priesthood in Jerusalem. Knowing that the influence of the southern religion could cause his people to again unite with Jerusalem and thereby rend the kingdom away from him, Jeroboam made careful preparation that he might sufficiently impress the people and keep them in the north. In this way he hoped to keep them separate from their brethren of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. For this purpose he made two calves, one of which he put in Bethel and the other in Dan. Bethel means "the house of God" and Dan means "judgment" and truly judgment would begin at the house of God, for, in this very instance, the apostasy which Jeroboam introduced certainly started that way. It is significant that the people went to worship before the calf that was in Dan. (.v30) Their worship would indeed bring "judgment" upon their heads! Then Jeroboam set about reconstituting the religion of Israel in order that he may impress the people to stay with him as their appointed leader. "He made an house of the high places and made priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi". (v31) The term "the lowest of the people" does not necessarily mean that they were immoral, though, of course, this was the general condition of the nation. The words in the Hebrew indicate that the priests were just common people, "anyone", as it is expressed in 2 Chron 13v9-10. What Jeroboam did was "to give everyone a go". This was the exact converse to the way in which God had appointed the Levites to become the spiritual leaders of the nation. For this reason He ordered the people to pay tithes so that they might keep to the study of the Word and to the dissemination of the Truth among the nation (Num. 8 and 18). In this way God ensured that a priesthood and the tribe of Levi were set apart for the prime purpose of keeping His Word uppermost in the mind of the nation; as Malachi says, "the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth" (Mal. 2v7). The system which Jeroboam implemented was certainly not designed to give the Word of God prime place in the minds of the people. The common people, engaged necessarily in the mundane affairs of life, were hardly in a position to give themselves with an undivided mind to the study of the Word of God and as a consequence of their poor ministrations must have lowered the people's estimation of the lofty Law which God gave to Moses.

Having therefore, laid the foundation whereby the people may lose their contact with the power of the Word administered by the Levites, Jeroboam set about preventing even social intercourse with the people of the south. He ordained a feast on the 15th day of the 8th month which was designed to take the place of the Feast of Tabernacles that was held on the 15th day of the 7th month. (1 Kings 12v32).

The Feast of Tabernacles, the details of which are recorded in Lev. 23v33-44, was a joyous occasion in Israel, when the nation gathered together to dwell in booths and to partake of all the fruits of the land which, by the time of the feast, had been fully gathered in. Thus this feast was designed to create a spirit of fraternal association and of rejoicing in the goodness of Yahweh, for the bountiful season had provided them in abundance so as to make their lives full and happy. Such a feast was very popular and Jeroboam realised the dangers to him if his people gathered together under those circumstances with the people of Judah.

Finally, he himself entered in to worship and officiated upon the alter which he had made at Bethel. This was a personal intrusion by Jeroboam into the appointments of Yahweh, he not coming from the trip of Levi nor of course belonging to the family of the priesthood. This was a clear departure from the foundation principles of the Law of Moses and the verse 33 significantly records that he did that which "he had devised of his own heart".