

Reflections on God's judgement on the Anglican Church of Canada

In seeking understanding from God's Word about what God is doing in the Anglican Church of Canada, my thoughts have been directed much in the last two or three years to the division of the kingdom after the death of King Solomon, which was God's judgement for his not keeping God's covenant and statutes. (1 Kings 11:12-19)

God sent the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam and announced to him that he had been chosen by God to rule over the ten tribes of Israel (in the North) that were to be torn away from the undivided kingdom, leaving the two tribes of Judah (in the South) to be ruled over by Rehoboam following the death of King Solomon. When King Solomon came to hear of this prophetic announcement he sought to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt until after King Solomon had died. (1 Kings 11:26-40)

The thing that has come home to me strongly is the fact that because Jeroboam subsequently "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" as did every single king of Israel that followed him, we have come to have a very negative view about Jeroboam's leading the ten tribes out of the undivided kingdom.

However, scripture states clearly that this division of the kingdom was "a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that He might fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat." (1 Kings 12:15) What is even more remarkable is that God promised Jeroboam His blessing on this breakaway kingdom if Jeroboam walked in the way of God's commandments. "And if you will harken to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you." (1 Kings 11:38)

This central reality of the divided kingdom dominates the life of the people of God until both kingdoms are destroyed and taken into the captivity of the exile, Israel by Assyria in 722 BC and Judah by the Babylonians in 589 BC. The record in 1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, and the witness of the prophetic writings makes it abundantly clear that God's purpose and priority was not organisational unity, but repentance and returning to the Lord. God brought upon his people the judgement of the division of the kingdom in order to bring His people, both in Israel and in Judah, to repentance and a return to obeying God's statutes and commandment. . (Hosea 5:16 – 6:3) God's intention was to bless His people through the judgement of the division of the kingdom.

(Amos 5:4-7) The division of the kingdom was in reality God's act of mercy to lead His people to repentance, which could have prevented the far greater judgement of the exile .

Whether the seventh and eighth century Hebrew prophets lived in Israel, like Hosea, or in Judah, like Micah, they called on both the Northern and the Southern kingdoms to turn in repentance and obedience to the Lord. God spoke through His servants the prophets of His desire to bless His people, whether belonging to the North or the South, if only they would turn to Him in acknowledging their wickedness and in walking again in the way of His commandments. (Joel 2:12-17)

The division of the kingdom after the death of King Solomon and the subsequent call by the prophets to both the North and the South to turn to the Lord in repentance and faith is the great panoramic background of the Old Testament leading up to the exile. Are there things that the Lord might be saying to us through this part of His Word as we see the organisational unity of the Anglican Church in Canada come to an end, and as we see a separate structure for Anglicans in Canada come into existence?

I want to suggest three things.

1) This is a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord (1 Kings 12:15)

This a part of God's judgement on an unfaithful church. At the heart of the unfaithfulness of our church is a turning away from acknowledgement of and obedience to God's Word: the same sin that led to God's judgement on the undivided Kingdom of Judah and Israel. (1 Kings 11:33) Nowhere is this rejection of the authority of God's Word illustrated more clearly than in the preface to the Book of Alternate Services which describes the Holy Scriptures as "the repository of the Church's symbols of life and faith." This description was approved by General Synod in 1985 and has been misleading the people of God in thought and action ever since. The Holy Scriptures do not originate with the church but are the Word of God, given by divine revelation, to be the absolute rule of faith and practice for the people of God in all circumstances, for all issues and for all time.

2) God wants to lead his people back to Himself in repentance and faith through the judgement that He is bringing on His church.

Reversing the division of the kingdom after the death of King Solomon did not seem to be on God's agenda. However, bringing His people back to Himself in repentance and faith and obedient service was God's priority, as witnessed to by the prophets. Those of an orthodox faith who continue to worship the Lord and serve Him and His people in ministry and outreach in the old structure, and those who are called to do this in a new structure must retain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. God did not write off either kingdom at the time of the division of the kingdom. I do not think that we have any indication that the Lord is at this time intending to abandon the Anglican Church of Canada. There are many who love the Lord and His word who

sense the Lord calling them to stay within the old structure. We pray that this will lead to a corporate repentance by the leadership and the rank and file within the Anglican Church of Canada. We pray that those whom the Lord is calling out into a new structure will be kept by the power and grace of God, and particularly be protected from the sin of spiritual pride. We pray that those in the new structure will be released into pursuing God's priorities for a gospel witness in every part of Canada living out a Spirit empowered repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

3) The spiritual unity of those who seek supremely to honour God's Name and God's Word among those who "go" and those who "stay" must be retained.

The enemy wants to separate those who are faithful to the Lord but who take different paths in terms of structure and organisation. I think that the best way for us all to retain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is at every level to bless those with whom we are one in the Lord but who take a different organisational path from us. At the local church level this would mean that a parish that decides to stay with the ACC would intentionally and publicly bless those who chose to belong to the new structure. It would mean that when a parish decided to belong to the alternate structure it would intentionally and publicly bless those who felt called to move to a parish that decided to stay with the ACC. Above all, those who "go" must not judge those who "stay" and those who "stay" must not judge those who "go". What is more, we should continue to pray for each other and long for God's gifts of repentance, faith, courage, love, humility and obedience to be poured out on each other in the respective spheres of influence that God has given us.

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