

APPENDIX A

AN ANALYSIS OF THE REFORMATION OF JEROBOAM I AND ITS EFFECT UPON THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

A Study in 1 Kings

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Section I

I. INTRODUCTION

The most significant event in the life of the Northern Kingdom is the fall of Samaria at the hand of Assyria in 722 BC. In reading through the books of Kings, when one arrives at 2 Kings 17–18, he gains the impression that the author (of the final composition) was obviously building up to this climactic moment. That is, the author composed the details in such a way as to trace the downfall of God's nation, both in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In 2 Kings 17–18, the author carefully reviews for the reader the reasons for the downfall of Israel. Within this indictment of guilt, the following comments focus a serious part of the blame upon Jeroboam I:

Then Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin. And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel from His sight . . . (2 Kgs 17:21-23).

Reading through the preceding chapters, over and over the words are read in regard to almost every northern king that he “did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam.” The fact that his influence carried through all the way to the exile demands a closer investigation of his reign and deeds.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, will be to analyze the reformation of Jeroboam as recorded in 1 Kings 12:25-33, to ascertain his motives, and to note the influence that he had upon the religion and welfare of the Northern Kingdom. Included in this study will be an investigation into the golden calf of Exodus 32 and an evaluation of the calf making of Jeroboam.

Section II

II. THE BACKGROUND TO 1 KINGS 12

A. Introduction to the Books of Kings

The books of Kings serve to trace the monarchy from the time of David through both exiles, or about 971–562 BC. Though an exact knowledge of the time and composition of the books is not presently possible, there does seem to be validity for the idea that the books were composed about the time of the fall of Judah. Nevertheless, scholars are divided as to the manner of authorship. Some critical scholars (such as Martin Noth) prefer a theory of one Deuteronomistic author, whereas others (e.g., Frank Cross) favor a number of different stages of Deuteronomistic redaction.¹ Childs carefully notes the strong Deuteronomistic influence upon the material of Kings:

Even before the entrance into the land the consequences of disobedience to the divine law recorded by Moses were rehearsed in detail before the people (Deut. 28). The culmination of disobedience was explicitly described as being ‘plucked off the land and’ ‘scattered among

¹ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 231-2.

all peoples' (vv. 63f). The editorial shaping of the books which follow offers a theological interpretation of Israel's history in terms of the working out of the stipulations of the Book of the Law. Not only is the correspondence between the prophecy and fulfillment continually made clear, but at crucial points in the history long 'Deuteronomic' speeches are inserted, which interpret theologically the course of Israel's history in the light of the Book of the Law (Deut. 27f.; Josh. 1.2ff.; Judg. 2.6ff.; 1Sam. 12; 1Kings 17 and 24).²

The "strong Deuteronomic influence," however, is a valid and significant observation regardless of one's position in regard to the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy. The historical books are certainly composed in such a way as to evaluate the nation against the background of Deuteronomy, a fact which heightens the curiosity about Jeroboam as a "major culprit" in the drama.

S. J. Schultz, carefully noting the unlikelihood that court recorders would have taken responsibility for delineating the details of the wicked deeds of kings (e.g., Ahab), suggests that the prophets kept records and that one or more of these was responsible for the final edition about 600–550 BC.³ Certainly, there were prophetic centers where prophets were educated (cf. 1 Sam. 7:16). This conclusion, if valid, would weaken the argument that the indictment against Jeroboam is inconclusive, coming from the hand of a redactor loyal to the southern Kingdom who had a bias against Israel. Schultz's arguments point toward a faithful record regarding the deeds of Jeroboam.

B. The Reign of Solomon and Transition to Rehoboam

Jeroboam, as a character in the drama, is first introduced in the record of Solomon's apostasy recorded in 1 Kings 11. Several important observations can be made at this stage which bear on our investigation. The first is the record of Solomon's unfaithfulness to YHWH.

. . . his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. And Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon (1 Kgs 11:4-7).

We must not think that Jeroboam rudely interrupted the religious life of the covenant people. The tolerance of idolatry was already there before Jeroboam ever came to power. This is significant, because this would serve to make Jeroboam's idolatrous deeds "less shocking" and thus help explain how his deeds could have been tolerated by the masses.

In 1 Kings 11:28, we learn that Jeroboam possessed strong leadership traits, and was marked as a valiant warrior. He certainly had the courage to be innovative. The fact that as an Ephraimite had been a leader within the "power structure" of Solomon's court and yet had stood up to Solomon

² Ibid., 234. Interestingly, Childs writes this out of concern for establishing a complex post-exilic redaction of the four historical books. At the same time, he assumes the critical position of the non-Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy.

³ S. J. Schultz, "Kings," in *ZPEB*, III:810. He carefully notes the prophetic written sources mentioned throughout the historical books (e.g., 1 Chr 29:29), as well as pointing out that within the prophetic books themselves (e.g., Isaiah and Jeremiah) there is evidence of detailed political and religious knowledge of the kings.

(more accurately, he rebelled against him) certainly gained for him a respectability in the eyes of the northern tribes. Such people tend to have their faults overlooked much easier than others.

Perhaps one of the most alarming observations to make is the fact that Rehoboam had been the recipient of divine grace and prophetic revelation (by means of the prophet Ahijah; 1 Kgs 11:31-39). In this revelation, Jeroboam was given the assurance of divine backing and sanction upon his kingship. This fact stands in stark contrast to his futile attempts to secure his throne as recorded in chapter 12. His deeds were so unnecessary, had he simply been willing to follow the LORD faithfully. There is a corollary to this, however, which might be considered although the text makes no explicit mention of this. The prophetic announcements upon Jeroboam (through the ministry of Ahijah and possibly through the actions of Shemaiah in attempting to halt Rehoboam's aggression) may well have become known to the people at large, and if so, might have been interpreted by them as a divine sanction upon his throne and the actions he took after entering office.

In the transition record from Solomon to Jeroboam, another factor should be observed regarding the severe treatment Solomon had given to many of the Israelites of the northern tribes. In 11:28, mention is made of "the forced labor of the house of Joseph." In the plea of the people to Rehoboam in 12:4, they cry, "Your father made our yoke hard; therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you" (consider further the heavy taxation that Solomon had put upon the people). Though Solomon had been an admirable character in some ways, there was no doubt a growing animosity towards him and the royal throne. Rehoboam's insensitivity simply rubbed their wounds with salt: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (12:14). The reaction of the northern tribesmen is understandable: "What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; to your tents, O Israel! Now look after your own house, David!" (12:16). It is not inconceivable that this strong resentment on the part of the northern tribes toward the Davidic dynasty could easily be translated into a "lessened appreciation" for the Temple and the cultic elements closely associated with the throne. To go up to the Temple to worship also meant going up to the *throne* they so vehemently despised.

C. Jeroboam's Contact With the Egyptian King Shishak

Of possible interest to this study is the mention of Jeroboam's flight to Egypt as recorded in I Kings 11:40: ". . . Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt to Shishak king of Egypt, and he was in Egypt until the death of Solomon." Unfortunately, we do not have adequate knowledge of what influences he came under while staying in Egypt. Interestingly, he comes out of Egypt and goes on to build a golden calf, somewhat parallel to Aaron coming out of Egypt and building a golden calf (though differences abound). Ronald Williams notes: "about 945 BC Sheshonk I, . . . seized the throne and founded the Twenty-second Dynasty, which was of Libyan ancestry, with its centre at Bubastis."⁴ Since the date of Solomon's death is generally agreed upon as about 931 BC, the biblical data is quite in harmony with other historical information. We do know that different forms of a "bull cult" continued to play a part in Egyptian religion even down to the time

⁴ Ronald J. Williams, "The Egyptians," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, 95. However, Edward F. Campbell, Jr., dates the 22nd dynasty at 935 BC, with Shishak I reigning 935-914 BC ("Section B. The Ancient Near East: Chronological Bibliography and Charts," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 223). K.A Kitchen, "Egypt, Land of," in *ZBEP*, II:231, dates Shishak about 945-924 BC.

of Shishak, but we can only speculate as to what influence Jeroboam might have received from this while in the care of Shishak. More attention will be given to this issue in sections III and IV.

D. Evidence for the Dependency of 1 Kings 12 on Exodus 32

In order to properly evaluate the administrative actions taken by Jeroboam as recorded in 1 Kings 12:25ff, it is also necessary to study and compare the narrative of the making of the golden calf by Aaron in Exodus 32. These two narratives are certainly related, and the following evidence will demonstrate the unmistakable parallel between the two:⁵

1. In both, the calf image of gold occupies the center of the stage (Ex 31:4ff; 1 Kgs 12:28f.).
2. In both, it is said of the image, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

אלה [הנה] אלהיך ישראל אשר העלונך מארץ מצרים
3. In both, an altar is built to stand in front of the image (Ex 32:5; 1 Kgs 12:33).
4. In both, a 'feast' (הג) is celebrated in connection with the calf (Ex 32:5ff; 1 Kgs 12:33).
5. In both, sacrifice is offered before the image (Ex 32:6; 1 Kgs 12:33).
6. In both, the act is vigorously condemned (Ex 32:7-35; 1 Kgs 12:30; 13:1-32; 14:1-20).
7. Even the two sons of Jeroboam (Abijah and Nadab) are named after two of the sons of Aaron.

Section III

III. EXODUS 32: THE GOLDEN CALF AT SINAI

A. The Issue of Source Analysis in Regard to Exodus 32

Unfortunately, the study of Exodus 32 has been complicated by the conclusions of a great many scholars who have sought to ascertain the sources, composition, and motives for the text that presently makes up this chapter. Historically, the denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch by critical scholars quickly paved the way to a revolutionary reassessment of the biblical text. As early as Wellhausen, we can see this influence upon Exodus 32. He concluded, "The narrative of

⁵ This evidence was nicely summarized in John W. Davenport, "A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1973), 84-5.

the golden calf has no other meaning than to decidedly condemn the official cult of the Ephraimite kingdom.”⁶ In other words, for him the narrative of Exodus 32 was not a dependable record of historical fact, but rather an artificial composition stemming from a time after the deeds of Jeroboam I, the purpose of which was to make the actions of Jeroboam all the more damnable. Davis aptly states the matter regarding the tradition of Ex 32:1-6:

It is, of course, rather common to see this tradition taken as a polemic against Jeroboam I's calf worship at Dan and Bethel, the tradition projecting the condemnation backwards in order to denounce it out of the mouth of Moses.⁷

A modern-day representative of this approach would be Martin Noth. For him, Exodus 32 characterizes the Jeroboam cult-political act as apostasy from the God of Israel and this “prototype is transferred to Sinai so as to have it condemned there by the appointed spokesman Moses as a breach of the covenant and to have laid upon it a gross and ominous curse.”⁸ Thus, he regards Exodus 32 as polemical and best explained as having originated in the Judean South against the State cult of the neighboring state of Israel.

Not all scholars go to this extreme. Albright, for example, has argued that the basic Golden Calf account derived from the time of the Exodus (which he dates in the thirteenth century BC) and “refers specifically to an attempted return by the Israelites of Moses’ time to the ancient practice of representing the chief divinity in the form of a storm-god standing on a young bull.”⁹ The traditional position involving Mosaic authorship and historical reliability is maintained by Cassuto.¹⁰

The issue is certainly relevant to this study. If Exodus 32 is a reliable record of a true calf-making attempt in the wilderness, then Jeroboam no doubt drew inspiration and creativity from this. However, if Exodus 32 is basically a polemic upon Jeroboam composed after his deed, then we need not look to Exodus 32 for an explanation of what he did.

B. Comments on a Literary Analysis of Exodus 32

Those who adhere in some manner to the viewpoint of Exodus 32 as a polemic seek support by claiming that Exodus 32 has a composite literary character. In fact, Davenport, who has done a thorough investigation of the chapter in his dissertation, reports that “literary investigations since the turn of the century are nearly unanimous that the chapter is a composition of a number of sources.”¹¹ The claim of a composite literary character is supposedly evidenced by inconsistencies

⁶ J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bucher des Alten Testaments*, 92.

⁷ Dale R. Davis, “Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant: A Study In Exodus 32–34,” 71.

⁸ Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 143. In support of his position, he regards the punishments described in vss. 25-29, 35 as later additions and sees the “ash-waters” of vs 20 as expressing an adultery test which was condemnatory but an unfulfilled judgment.

⁹ W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 44.

¹⁰ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 409ff.

¹¹ John W. Davenport, “A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32,” 11. Surveying twelve literary division schemes, quite a variance can be noted among the proposals.

and duplications in the text. The inconsistency is primarily that the calf is sometimes described in the plural (Ex 32:4b, 8a, 23, 31) and at other times in the singular (Ex 32:5, 8b, 20, 24). This claim is not so convincing upon investigation, because the word “calf” is always in the singular, and it is only the use of the word “Elohim” that calls for plural references in the form of pronouns in agreement (i.e., the plural forms were thought to demand a plurality of calves). Appealing to duplications, the claim is made regarding the explanations that (1) the calf was both fashioned by Aaron with an engraving tool (Ex 32: 4) and also that the image was miraculously produced from a fire (Ex 32:24b); (2) Moses was informed twice of the calf making (by Yahweh, Ex 32:7 and by Joshua, Ex 32:17); and (3) Moses interceded twice on the people’s behalf (Ex 32:11ff.; 30ff.).

Unfortunately, space does not permit a detailed investigation of the literary analysis of Exodus 32 in this paper. However, Davenport in his doctoral dissertation, has thoroughly analyzed every claim made in regard to the literary composition of the chapter. His conclusions are interesting, particularly since he follows a traditio-historical methodology and has no special bias toward the integrity of the text. Though he does not necessarily claim a literary unity to the chapter, he does conclude that Exodus 32:1-6 is a unified section of pre-monarchical date and that the evidence is not sufficient for assigning the material of the chapter to the classical sources:

But in addition to the lack of criteria evident in alternative sections, there exist no certain clues for assigning the basic narrative to one of the classical sources on the basis of the nature of the material itself. . . . This investigation of the literary nature of Ex. 32 reveals that, instead of being composed of parallel source strata, the account of the Golden Calf can most plausibly be understood as consisting of one basic narrative where the calf is made and worshiped (Ex. 32: 1-6) and five different responses (vss. 7-14, 15-20, 25-29, 30-34, 35). Unfortunately, except for the Deuteronomistic style evident in vss. 7-14, the characteristics of the material within Ex. 32 provide insufficient evidence for the traditional source assignments. Thus on the basis of literary analysis alone it has not been possible to determine if vss. 1-6 originally stood independently (reflecting a positive Yahweh Calf tradition) or if at the very outset it was linked with one or more of the condemnation accounts providing a unified narrative which sought to denounce the Calf. Yet because literary analysis does reveal that Ex. 32 is composed of pericopes which are not necessarily continuous, the possibility arises that vss. 1-6 could in fact have once been independent of its present context and may originally have reflected a tradition which was only subsequently condemned.¹²

Dale R. Davis, however, seeks to take the matter one step further, and concludes that there is evidence of overall structural design which supports the unity of the chapter. He observes:

¹² John W. Davenport, “A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32,” 48-49.

Idolatry originates, vv 1-6	Idolatry discovered, vv 15-19 a
Expression of Yahweh's wrath, vv 7-10	Expression of Moses' wrath, vv 19b-21 (or, 20)
Quest to conciliate God, vv 11-13	Quest to conciliate Moses, vv 22-24
Total Judgment restrained, v 14	Partial judgment Executed, vv 25-29

The significance he sees in this relates to the inclusion of vv 7-14 in the scheme:

Viewed as such the narrative appears to have a thematic, parallel development . . . However, a common literary analysis holds the basic narrative to have consisted only of vv 1-6, 15-20, 35, while vv 7-14 are usually suspected as being Deuteronomic.¹³

These more recent investigations of the literary analysis of Exodus 32 do point out that a good case can be made for the early composition of the chapter, and certainly the core material most likely stems from a time prior to that of Jeroboam. One final comment deserves mention, however. To hold that the basic story of Aaron and the Golden Calf was fabricated after the time of Jeroboam I demands a corollary that is almost impossible to conceive. Namely, that everyone reading such an account would have to be convinced that such an event never happened with Aaron and the wilderness generation. What is more astounding, however, is that we do not have one record of opposition to this story, from the time of Jeroboam all the way to the critical German schools of the 18th and 19th century AD. If this was some obscure and insignificant story and personage, we could possibly accept such a proposal. But this is Aaron, the founder of the high priesthood. The Jewish priests and prophets would never have tolerated such an unflattering story without some voice of opposition being raised. The only logical conclusion is that we must regard the basic story as recorded in Exodus 32 as historically reliable, and that this existed in public form prior to the time of Jeroboam, such that he drew from it when initiating his reformation after 931 BC.¹⁴

¹³ Dale R. Davis, "Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant: A Study in Exodus 32–34," 73. His opening comment stated, "The thesis of this paper is that the narrative of Exodus 32–34 is a basic unity, that it is more likely to stem from one original hand than from a number of contributors plus the final redactor, and that the connections and materials of the narrative itself reveal and support such a unity" (71).

¹⁴ Neither will it be found acceptable to say that the basic event of making a golden calf was historically true, but that a redactor working after the time of Jeroboam edited the text to reflect the condemnatory pericopes of Exodus 32. Even that would have surely elicited some sort of response from the priestly community.

C. Aaron's Inspiration for a Golden Calf

According to Exodus 32, the people initiate the idea of having a “god who will go before them.” We are not told that they requested a “calf,” but only that Aaron made the “molten calf” (עֵגֶל (מִסִּכָּה). The question needs to be asked, why a calf? Was this related to Egyptian worship from which they had recently come? What was the source for this idea?

The term used for “calf” (עֵגֶל) in Exodus 32:4a can be used to describe a young calf (see Micah 6: 6 which speaks of a עֵגֶל as a sacrifice, being one-year old). However, this could be an older cow strong enough to plow (Jud 14: 18; Deut 21: 3ff), and in one instance as one old enough to have calved (Isa 7:21). Albright regards עֵגֶל to be a bull at the “prime of life and vigor.”¹⁵ A fair assessment is to say that the term עֵגֶל denotes either a young calf or (more often) a bull which has reached maturity.

In regard to Egypt, John Davis notes:

A large number of bulls and cows were considered sacred in Egypt. In the central area of the Delta, four provinces chose as their emblems various types of bulls and cows. A necropolis of sacred bulls was discovered near Memphis which place was known for its worship of both Ptah and a sacred Apis bull. The Apis bull was considered the sacred animal of the god Ptah; therefore the associated worship at the site of Memphis is readily understood.¹⁶

Kenneth A. Kitchen evaluates the possibility of Egyptian influence:

This idol is sometimes thought to be the Egyptian Apis-bull of Memphis . . . or the Mnevis bull of Heliopolis, but these are too far away from Goshen to have been really familiar to the Hebrews. In fact, there were several not dissimilar bull-cults in the E Delta, much closer to the Hebrews in Goshen, which they could have aped later at Sinai. To the SW of Goshen (Tumilat-area), in the 10th Lower Egyptian nome or province, called 'the Black Bull', there was an amalgam of Horus-worship and bull- or calf-cult; farther N and extending along the NW of Goshen itself, the 11th Lower Egyptian nome also possessed a bull-cult linked with Horus-worship; other traces are known. . . . In Egypt, the bull or calf was a symbol of fertility in nature, and of physical strength.¹⁷

Kitchen is probably wise to caution us of assuming too quickly an Egyptian influence for Aaron's Golden calf. This could be an exercise in futility, since a calf/bull figure was utilized in almost every ancient near eastern country, including Mesopotamia, Canaan, the Hittite Empire, and Ras Shamra (see the pictorials at the end of this paper for a sampling). In fact, the universal utilization of the calf/bull figure (which commonly symbolized fertility and strength) may suggest that Aaron chose this figure for no other reason than the fact that it was a familiar way to represent a god or that it was a familiar animal with which a god would be associated.

¹⁵ W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 300.

¹⁶ John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 113. He also mentions that Rameses' own son had been high priest of Apis.

¹⁷ Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Calf, Golden,” in *The Illustrated Bible Dict.*, I:225. For other studies on the historical antecedents of the calf/bull worship, see Lloyd R. Bailey, “The Golden Calf,” *HUCA* 42 (1971): 97- 115, and John N. Oswalt, “The Golden Calves and the Egyptian Concept of Deity,” *EvQ* 45 (1973): 13-20.

D. Conclusions on the Calf-making at Sinai

In the previous discussion, the point was made that the account of the calf making at Sinai certainly predated the reformation of Jeroboam. The parallels between the two accounts are quite strong, and suggest without question that Jeroboam was definitely influenced by the calf making episode at Sinai. His declaration “Behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” conclusively links his actions with the Sinai event.

A few more observations need to be made about the Sinai event. According to Exodus 32:5-6, Aaron does three additional things besides making the golden calf: (1) he built an altar before it; (2) he called for a feast (אָחַד) to the LORD; and (3) he observed the people making sacrifices and offerings before the calf. These elements are also carried over into the actions of Jeroboam. Of particular interest is the fact that Aaron does not simply call for a feast, but a feast to the LORD. In his thinking, the construction of the golden calf was not a total repudiation of YHWH, but apparently a visible representation for YHWH. If so, the same may be true of Jeroboam’s intent (despite the fact that the LORD found this unacceptable).

Though one may wish to segment the passage of Exodus 32 into various components that have been repeatedly redacted so as to form an unharmonious composition (see IIIB above), the text as it stands does condemn the actions of Aaron and the Israelites who participated in this. Throughout the chapter, this is repeatedly called a sin, and the LORD himself declared, “They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it. . . .” (Ex 32:8). Davenport, however, feels that 32:1-6 existed independently of the remainder of the chapter, and reflected what he feels was originally a “positive Yahweh calf tradition.” Thus, he concludes that Jeroboam drew upon this episode because it represented what was originally an acceptable attempt by the people to express their devotion to YHWH.¹⁸ This approach has problems, not only because he must detach verses 1-6 from the other material, but also because he must render the phrase in vs 1 כִּי־יָצְאוּ מִן־מִצְרָיִם מִיַּד יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיאָנוּ as “because the God of Moses, the one who brought us up,” a very strained rendition to say the least. One may question why Jeroboam would have appealed to an action so condemned at its inception, but the evidence stands against the idea that the original act had merit to it.

¹⁸ John W. Davenport, “A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32,” 50-82. He concludes, “Thus instead of portraying a rebellious people eager to snatch the first opportunity to replace Moses, the account describes the people as finding themselves in a crisis situation where they experience the absence of the God who had brought them out of Egypt. Determined to worship Yahweh, the people willingly give their gold so that an appropriate image could be made which would occasion the divine presence. Once the Calf form is constructed, a feast is immediately proclaimed and the people joyfully celebrate Yahweh’s presence”(82).

Section IV

IV. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF JEROBOAM'S CALVES

A. Calf/bull Worship in the Ancient Near East

Though comments have previously been made about the use of the calf/bull motif in the Ancient Near East (see IIIC above), more attention will be given to the subject here, because now this must be considered in terms of the world of Jeroboam and the cultural influences familiar to him.

Though his stay with Shishak may have brought him into greater association with “bull” forms, the primary inspiration was not Egyptian but the influence of Exodus 32. Yet, what about the current state of Canaanite influences? Mazar comments:

The bull motif itself, however, is extremely common—and therefore extremely important — in Near Eastern iconography. It is a symbol both of power and fertility. Sometimes the bull appears as a cult object itself, for example, as a young striding god to be worshipped as the symbol of the deity. Other times it appears as a depiction of an attribute of the West Semitic storm god Hadad who is known in the Bible as Baal.¹⁹

Though El was regarded as the head of the pantheon, Millard has pointed out the great significance of Hadad:

The greatest devotion was given to Hadad, the weather-god, under this, his West Semitic name; as Teshub, the Hurrian equivalent; or simply as Ba'al 'Master'. Controlling the rains, mist, and dew, Hadad held the keys of good harvest²⁰

This raises the question as to the influence Baalism might have had upon Jeroboam. In response, the calves do not appear to have a connection to Baalism for several reasons. When Ahab introduced Baal worship to Israel ca. 876, the text implies that he went beyond the sin of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 16: 31ff.). When Jehoram (2 Kgs 3:1ff.) and Jehu (2 Kgs 10:28) removed Baal worship, they nevertheless clung to the “sin of Jeroboam.” Furthermore, there is no explicit mention of Baal in 1 Kings 12:25ff., nor is there in God’s rebuke in 1 Kings 14:7-16. Though approaching the matter from the redactional standpoint of a latter “Deuteronomist,” Davenport does correctly assess the correlation of Jeroboam's actions with Baalism:

Since the Deuteronomist did not understand Jeroboam’s making of the calves as a worship of the Canaanite Ba'al, it is reasonable to conclude that Jeroboam’s cult was considered a worship of Yahwism, although Yahwism corrupted by images, non-Levitical priests, and a non-Jerusalem location.²¹

¹⁹ Amihai Mazar, “Bronze Bull Found in Israelite 'High Place' from the Time of the Judges,” 38.

²⁰ A. R. Millard, “The Canaanites,” in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, 45. In footnote 58 on page 52, he makes note that the equation of Ba'al with Hadad has been demonstrated by A. F. Rainey, *IEJ* xviii (1968): 1-14.

²¹ John W. Davenport, “A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32,” 95.

Though the calf making of Jeroboam was probably not an attempt to join hands with Baalism, other scholars might contend that he was borrowing a motif from the Ancient Near East of using a figure for a throne-pedestal of a god. This view will now be considered.

B. The Claim of a Bull as a “pedestal” for God

A number of scholars have compared the calves (or bulls) of Jeroboam with other bovine images from the Ancient Near East and have concluded that Jeroboam’s intention was not to establish idols or attempt a representation of YHWH, but rather to provide a visible throne or pedestal for YHWH. Thus, the invisible YHWH would be “mounted” or “enthroned” upon the calves. As early as 1929, K. Th. Obbink pointed out that the “golden calf” must have been the visible pedestal on which the invisible YHWH stood. William F. Albright followed his lead, and pointed out how this served for Jeroboam as a parallel to the cherubim of the Holy of Holies:

Moreover, in presumable reaction against the representation of Yahweh in the Temple of Solomon as an invisible deity enthroned above the two cherubim (winged sphinxes), which is now known to have been influenced by contemporary Canaanite iconography (where kings and gods are shown sitting on thrones supported by two cherubs), Jeroboam represented Yahweh as an invisible figure standing on a young bull of gold. It is true that the “golden calves” have been assumed by most scholars to have been direct representations of Yahweh as bull-god, but this gross conception is not only otherwise unparalleled in biblical tradition, but is contrary to all that we know of Syro-Palestinian iconography in the second and early first millennia BC. Among Canaanites, Aramaeans, and Hittites we find the gods nearly always represented as standing on the back of an animal or as seated on a throne borne by animals—but never as themselves in animal form.²²

In a similar vein, de Vaux suggests the statues were a throne for God:

It seems certain that these statues were not thought of, originally, as representations of Yahweh. In the primitive religions of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Egypt, the sacred animal is not the god and is not confused with the god; it merely embodies his attributes, is an ornament of his throne or a support for it, or a footstool for his use. There are several examples extant of gods riding on the animal which is their symbol. The Temple of Jerusalem had the Ark, and the Cherubim above it formed the throne of Yahweh; Jeroboam needed something similar for the sanctuaries he founded and he made the “golden calves” as the throne for the invisible godhead.²³

For de Vaux, the problem was not that the calves were idols, but that they brought confusion to the scene and would be misunderstood by many:

The bull was the animal which symbolized the great Canaanite god Baal, and the discoveries at Ras Shamra are most instructive on this point. Whatever may be true of the more educated classes, the mass of the people were bound to confuse the bull of Yahweh and the bull of Baal; they would also confuse Yahweh with the cultic statue which symbolized his presence; the door was thus open to syncretism and idolatry.²⁴

²² Wm. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 299.

²³ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, II:333-34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 334.

This view tends to lessen the guilt of Jeroboam. In accord with this view, it must be said that there probably is evidence from other cultures of using animal figures for enthroning purposes. Davenport notes, “. . . the Anatolian and Syrian religions of the second millennium B.C. depicted the presence of the Storm-god, the chief deity of the Hurrian and Hittite pantheons, either as a man standing on a bull or as a bull himself.”²⁵

Though there is Near Eastern evidence for such a theory, this must be evaluated with the text we have. In particular, we have the condemnatory statement in 1 Kings 14:9 addressed to Jeroboam: “You also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke me to anger, and have cast me behind your back.” Kaufmann recognizes the tension, but attempts to escape the dilemma by calling into question the integrity of the biblical text. He suggests that this is an assessment of Jeroboam’s work from a southern viewpoint and altogether different from northern sources. He states:

The interpretation given in the book of Kings is Judean polemic designed to denigrate the calves as fetish-idols. The story itself testifies obliquely that the calves were not “other gods.”²⁶

In defense of this, he points out that Jehu, the prophetically appointed extirpator of Canaanite Baalism, does not remove the calves, nor do Elijah or Elisha utter a word against them. This claim of the calves being a “pedestal” for God must now be evaluated more closely.

C. The Calves Evaluated in Terms of Idolatry

Kaufmann denies a connection with idolatry: “In essence, then, there is no difference between the calves and the cherubs. . . . Yet they are not stigmatized as idolatrous by the Bible.”²⁷ In evaluating this view, we should be careful to note from the outset that there is no mention in the biblical text that Jeroboam suggested the calves were a pedestal for God or that they were a parallel to the cherubim. If Jeroboam had specified such, the theory might be on firmer ground. Furthermore, there are other scholars who have looked into the religions of the Ancient Near East, and have observed that 'high gods' were often represented in animal form by the ancient Semites. For instance, H. G. Guterbock has examined the religious texts contained in the royal archives of the Hittite capital at Boghazkoy (from the two centuries of the New or Great Hittite Empire [c. 1400 – 1200 BC]). In these, he has observed that the main god of the Hittites is the weather God, which is related to a bull form:

. . . the Weather God’s sacred animal is the bull, and according to an older conception he is a bull himself. The connection of a god of thunderstorm and rain with this animal, characterized through its force, its loud voice and its fertility, is easily understood.²⁸

He goes on to say:

²⁵ John W. Davenport, “A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32,” 74.

²⁶ Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 270.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 271-2.

²⁸ Hans Gustav Guterbock, *Forgotten Religions*, 89.

The reliefs adorning the front of the sphinx gate at Aladjahuyuk, which belongs to the end of the New Empire, show the worship of the divine couple: here, the goddess is represented as a seated woman, the Weather God in the form of a bull. In lists of cult statues in the shrines of some small places in the Empire, not only bulls made of iron or other metals are mentioned as images of the Weather Gods of different towns, but even bull-shaped rhyta and some other kind of vessels of unknown form as well as simple stones represent the god.²⁹

In the realm of Mesopotamian religion, Thorkild Jacobsen has noted the abundant evidence of the bull form with both the gods Enlil and An. He comments:

An was god of the sky and father of all the gods. His name means “sky,” and he seems originally to have been envisaged under the form of a great bull, . . . The bovine imagery suggests that he belonged originally to the herdsman’s, specifically the cowherd’s pantheon, . . . He is himself, more than any other god perhaps, the embodiment of majesty and supreme authority.³⁰

In a separate work, Jacobsen has noted:

Frequently he was envisaged as a huge bull. One of his epithets is “Fecund Breed-Bull,” an apt personification of the overcast skies in spring whose thunder recalls the bellowing of a bull and whose rain engenders vegetation far and wide.³¹

But next in rank to An is Enlil, who is often depicted in bull imagery: “. . . Enlil in the shape of a huge bull copulated with 'the foothills' (hursag) and engendered 'summer' (Emesh), and 'winter' (Enten).”³²

If we turn to the Ugaritic material in the Ras Shamra corpus, Marvin Pope has observed that the bull epithet of El is exceedingly common:

El’s procreative powers are symbolized by the epithet *tr*, “Bull” I AB III-IV 34, VI 27; II AB II 10, III 31, IV-V 47; V AB E 18, 43; 1K 41, 59, 76, 169, a common symbol of masculine fertility throughout the ancient Near East.³³

In fact, Davenport is convinced that in Hittite religion, the Storm-god was worshiped directly in the form of a bull as the following figures show.³⁴

²⁹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰ Thorkild Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz and other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, 27.

³¹ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, 95-6.

³² Ibid., 104.

³³ Marvin H. Pope, “El in the Ugaritic Texts,” 35.

³⁴ Figures I & 2 from W. H. Ward, *The Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, 309; figure 3 from *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, ed. by D. Winton Thomas, pl. III.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Second Millennium Cylinder Seals from Anatolia

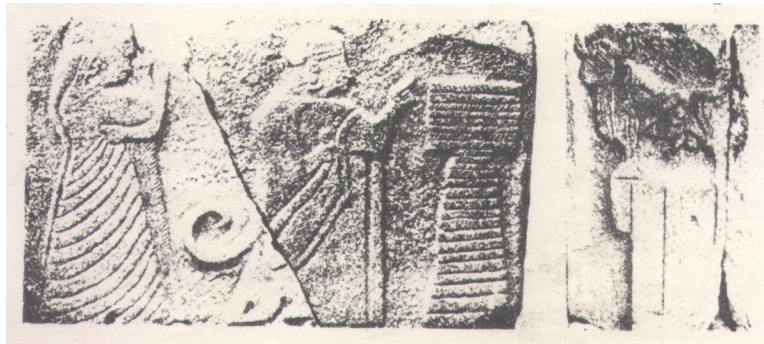


Fig. 3 Orthostat relief of the Empire Period (1460 – 1200 BC) from the city Walls of Alaca Huyuk showing King and Queen Worshipping Hittite Storm God.

The foregoing material is sufficient to demonstrate that animal objects in the Ancient Near East were commonly worshiped as the representation of god(s). This does not mean that the animal itself was identical to the deity as Davenport has well noted:

. . . the image in the ANE (outside later OT tradition) was not considered materially identical to the deity but was a means of providing a locus for the divine essence so that where the image is, so also is the deity.³⁵

This conclusion has the advantage over the other in which the bull is regarded simply as a “pedestal” for YHWH. Not only is it in accord with historical information that we have of the Ancient Near East, but this explains why the biblical text consistently condemned these attempts. Aaron’s calf was burned and ground to powder, and some 3000 men of Israel lost their lives as a result of this sin. Jeroboam is charged by YHWH (through the prophet Ahijah) with idolatry and provoking the LORD to anger (1 Kgs 14:9). Of further interest is the condemnation account of the calf by the prophet Hosea:

With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, that they might be cut off. He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, saying, “My anger burns against them!” How long will they be incapable of innocence? For from Israel is even this! A craftsman made it, so it is not God; surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces (Hos 8:4b-6; cf. 10:5 and 13:2).

³⁵ John W. Davenport, “A Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32,” 77.

Anderson and Freedman have concluded that this is a definite reference to the calves of Jeroboam:

Analyzing the structure, content, and meaning of these verses, we suggest that the central theme is the idol-making proclivities of the people of Israel, which occasions divine rejection and wrath, with cutting down and shattering of the image(s) as the imminent consequence, itself a portent of the destruction of the nation. The principal object is the 'calf of Samaria,' otherwise unattested but perhaps a generic title for the bull-images at Bethel and Dan. . . . This calf is the target of Yahweh's rejection and rage (v 5a); it is the work of an artificer and no true deity (v 6a B); it will be smashed to smithereens (v 6b).³⁶

Regarding the calf (עֲגֹלָה), the Hebrew text of Hosea 8:6 is quite emphatic: וְהוּא חָרַשׁ עָשָׂהוּ וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים הוּא אֱלֹהִים הוּא ("A craftsman made it, so it is not God"). The fact that the prophet deliberately specifies that the calf is "not God" (לֹא אֱלֹהִים) seems to suggest that the matter of identification with deity was precisely the issue (cf. 2 Chr 13:9).³⁷

In conclusion, it seems likely that the calves (both in Exodus 32 and 1 Kings 12) were intended as images of YHWH, i.e., the bull was God infused in that image. Perhaps Aaron presented the calf as a visible symbol of YHWH's strength and power. In any case, this was an unacceptable matter with the LORD, because it was essentially idolatrous and a violation of the second commandment (Ex 20:4). God is so majestic that He cannot be confined to any such image, or be sufficiently represented by such: "To whom would you liken Me, and make me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?" (Isa 46:5; cf. 40:18, 25).

D. The Purpose of Jeroboam's Choice of the Calves

If indeed it is true the calves were essentially idols (although idols for YHWH), the question must be raised why Jeroboam would do such a thing. Considering that he was a man who was just embarking upon a newly established throne, this move seems illogical in that he might very well jeopardize his throne.

Nevertheless, we must remember that his making of the calves was not strictly an invention of his. As has been pointed out already, he was quite plainly acting in a very deliberate recollection of Aaron at Sinai. Or, we might say that he was being purposefully divisive. According to 1 Kings 12:26-28, his actions are specifically designed to prevent the reunification of the tribes under the Davidic dynasty. In particular, he was concerned about the religious factor that might serve to draw the northern tribes back to the south. He needed a religious center to divert them from the Temple at Jerusalem. Since there was no prescribed site in Torah for such a northern center, he sought to establish one himself.

Perhaps he could have done so without such a deliberate "provoking" of the LORD, and the fact that he did may suggest that his purpose was first and foremost to show his repudiation for the south. Keep in mind that this was at a time when tensions were running quite high between the

³⁶ Francis I. Anderson and David N. Freedman, *Hosea*, 492-3.

³⁷ The charge of idolatry is further confirmed in 1 Corinthians 10:7 by the Apostle Paul: "And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.'"

people and the Davidic throne. In fact, there was strong resentment to the throne that had been occupied.³⁸ Solomon had levied burdensome taxes and had made forced laborers of many of “the house of Joseph” (1 Kgs 11:28). When Rehoboam threatened to be more severe than his father, the people could no longer tolerate the “Davidic leadership” (1 Kgs 12:16).

There were cultic traditions in the North (particularly Dan and Bethel), and Jeroboam went back to find an ancient worship tradition with Aaronic credentials that he could link up with these cultic sites. Just as the calf at Sinai was something of a repudiation of Mosaic leadership (cf. Ex 32:1), so the rejuvenation of the calf motif would demonstrate the repudiation of the Temple at Jerusalem so closely aligned to the Davidic throne. Jeroboam was seeking a forceful way to link himself with the opposite doctrine of the Temple, and he found the means in the calf of Sinai. The issue of public acceptability of his decision will be dealt with in V-C of this paper.

Section V

V. AN ANALYSIS OF JEROBOAM’S REFORM MOVEMENT

A. The Choice of Dan, Bethel, and Penuel

1. Penuel

According to 1 Kings 12:25, one of Jeroboam’s first actions was to “build” Penuel. The Hebrew verb *bānāh* (בָּנָה) no doubt has the sense “fortify” in this case, a meaning substantiated in 2 Chronicles 16:1 where we are told that Baasha “fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from going out or coming in to Asa King of Judah.” The fact that Ramah had earlier been the home of Samuel (1 Sam 7:17) and the presence of the purpose clause clarify the point. Hence, Jeroboam fortified Penuel (as well as Shechem) for defensive purposes. The significance for this is readily apparent: Penuel was directly east of Shechem on the main approach from Transjordan, particularly in regard to Rabbath-Ammon. Also, it was on the caravan road which led through Gilead to Damascus. Gray comments, “Jeroboam’s fortification was designed doubtless to secure Gilead, which had remained loyal to David in Absalom’s revolt.”³⁹ This action was strictly a logical one from a military point of view.

2. Bethel

In one sense, Dan and Bethel are appropriately chosen sites because they mark the extremities of Jeroboam’s realm, being something of “gateway cities” to the Northern Kingdom. However, the geographical strategy was only part of the reason for their choice, for

³⁸ For a good assessment of the early roots of tribal jealousy that led to the division of the kingdom, see Wayne A. Brindle, “The Causes of the Division of Israel’s Kingdom,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:563 (July-Sept 1984): 223-33 and Mark K. Mercer, “Tribal Jealousy and the Division of the Monarchy following the Reign of Solomon,” Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979.

³⁹ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 314.

they are also cities of significant religious heritage . . . indeed, they already had a history as cult centers. Bethel was a significant site for the patriarchs Abraham (Gen 12:8) and Jacob (Gen 28:10-22; 35:1ff). In fact, Jacob had declared, “And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house” (Gen 28:22). During the period of the Judges, the ark was there at one point and Phinehas the high priest (the son of Eleazar, Aaron’s son) ministered there (Jud 20:28). When Israel fought against the sons of Benjamin, it was to Bethel that they came to inquire of God’s instructions. Even after the time that Bethel had ceased to be the cult-site of the ark (the ark had subsequently moved from Bethel to Shiloh, and eventually to Kiriath-jearim), we have record at the time near Saul’s coronation of some men going on pilgrimage to Bethel (1 Sam 10:3). Bethel was a “natural” for Jeroboam’s choice of a cult center, particularly since Bethel was situated on the Judean ridge-route, the main road from the North to Jerusalem.

3. Dan

The history of the city of Dan reveals that it was something of a forerunner for what Jeroboam was doing, for it had been a sanctuary of YHWH set up in defiance of all the rules of Yahwehism. In Judges 17–18, we have the story of Micah, an Israelite who initiated his own worship. He appoints his son as a priest, but subsequently secures for himself an unfaithful Levite as his priest. The Levite, in turn, joins up with the migrating Danites that go up to conquer Laish (renamed Dan). The significant thing to note is Judges 18:30-31 which attests an early and continuing tradition at Dan:

And the sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah’s graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

Interestingly, archaeological work was begun on Dan in 1966 under Avraham Biran with sponsorship by the Israel Dept. of Antiquities, and has continued since then. A large cult complex has been unearthed there. Commenting on the first stage of the *bamah* or high place, Biran writes:

We can only surmise who built Bamah A and who destroyed it. The reign of Jeroboam I seems the most likely period for the building of Bamah A with its auxiliary structure. The destruction may be the result of Ben-Hadad’s attack of ca. 885 BC.⁴⁰

John Laughlin adds to the account:

Bamah A consists of an open-air platform approximately 22 feet wide and 60 feet long constructed of dressed limestone blocks on a base of rough stones. Only two courses of Bamah A have survived. It was destroyed by a fierce fire so hot that it turned the edges of the stones red. From this phase of the sanctuary Biran found the remains of incense burners, a decorated incense stand, the heads of two male figurines, and a bowl

⁴⁰ Avraham Biran, “Tell Dan: Five Years Later,” 175. He goes on to say that Bamah B, involving a large expansion of the cult complex, “belongs to Ahab” as has been confirmed by the discoveries since 1974.

decorated with a sign resembling a trident. The bowl contained fragmentary bones of sheep, goats and gazelles which had probably been sacrificed at the sanctuary.⁴¹

In his conclusion, Laughlin states:

Although the Biblical record is silent concerning the specific acts performed at Dan and does not even specify what use was made of the Golden Calf which Jeroboam made, the archaeological evidence suggests that a large, open-air platform was used, that there were altars, incense offerings, votive offerings involving figurines, and some kind of water purification or libation rituals.⁴²

The significant thing about both Dan and Bethel is that they already had a history as cult centers, and made logical choices for a diversion from Jerusalem. In fact, as cult centers, they actually pre-date Jerusalem in terms of Israelite history. In effect, Jeroboam could say, "Why go to Jerusalem (and show allegiance to the greedy Davidic dynasty) when we have significant and older cult centers for worship right here in our own backyard?"

B. Exegetical Analysis of 1 Kings 12:25-33

This passage is the primary source for information about Jeroboam's reformation which involved four significant changes in YHWH worship: (1) the symbols of religion (from the Temple and its cultic apparatus that included the ark and cherubim to golden calves); (2) the centers of worship (there were historical worship centers in the Northern Kingdom); (3) the priesthood; and (4) the religious calendar. Some details related to the exegesis of this passage have already been presented in previous sections; further selected details will now be highlighted that help us understand his actions.

1. Preliminary Actions to Secure the Kingdom (vv 25-27)

Jeroboam's first action was to secure a capital, which he promptly did with the choice of Shechem. The move was logical: the first confirmation of the promises of the Abram was at Shechem (Gen 12:6). Jacob had bought land there, and Mount Ebal and Gerazim were focal points of the covenant. Furthermore, the covenant renewal ceremony with Joshua took place here (Josh 24). Geographically, the choice had numerous advantages as a significant crossroad. See comments in V-A-I above on Penuel.

His problems, however, began in verse 26, where we read **וַיֹּאמֶר יְרֹבָעָם בְּלִבּוֹ** (Lit., "And Jeroboam said in his heart"). The expression **וַיֹּאמֶר . . . בְּלִבּוֹ** means "to think something in one's own mind; to think to one's own self (Gen 17:17; 27:41; Esther 6:6). Hence, "Jeroboam thought to himself." In this case, the implication is a negative factor, for Jeroboam is rationalizing for himself in complete disregard to the divine revelation that had been given to him through the prophet Ahijah:

Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do that is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My

⁴¹ John C. H. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," 33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you (1 Kgs 11:38).

How ironic that Jeroboam would worry so much about the security of his throne, when God had previously promised him not only the security of his throne but even a perpetual dynasty! As he thinks the situation through, he fails to see the security based on the promises of God. Instead, he is of the opinion, “The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David” (vs 26, NIV). The needed action was covenant faithfulness, not politico-religious reformation. Jeroboam’s departure from the pathway to blessing leaves us a significant lesson when we see what he could have had, if he had cherished God’s revelation rather than trying to manipulate his circumstances at the expense of disobedience!

Whereas verse 26 provides us with Jeroboam’s conclusion, verse 27 gives us the rationale for it.⁴³ Though God had provided for the political division of the kingdom, he had not specified a religious division, i.e., the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom still were obligated to appear before the LORD at the Temple according to Torah (though לְעִשׂוֹת זִבְחֵיהֶם need not be limited to the required feasts alone). What was so threatening about this? Jeroboam well imagined that “the allegiance” (לֵב⁴⁴) of his subjects would be directed back to Rehoboam, and that they would kill him, and hence be reunited with Rehoboam.⁴⁵ The trip to Jerusalem could be too enticing: they would likely hear from the Levites that Rehoboam was the legitimate Davidic king. With the additional factor that the glory of the Temple and festivals would be a powerful emotional experience, Jeroboam could have well-imagined that the people would suddenly reconsider his right to the throne and brand him an illegal usurper (not being a Davidic king himself).

2. Jeroboam’s Alternative Worship System (vv 28-32a)

In verses 28-32a, the essentials of Jeroboam’s religious reformation are catalogued, initiated by the phrase “So the king consulted” (וַיִּנְיֶעַץ הַמֶּלֶךְ). The verb means to “advise or counsel” but here in the *niphal stem* would have a reciprocal idea of “consult together.” The word is used earlier in the chapter of King Rehoboam who “consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive” (12:6). We could translate the phrase in verse 28 “And the king *took counsel*.” In other words, he followed standard court procedure of drawing upon an advisor. Though there is nothing wrong with this *per se*, in his case it shows the weakness of his leadership and character, for he allowed their evil counsel to overrule what he knew was right. However, this observation does provide one important clue: Jeroboam did not act entirely alone, and his new policies had the backing of several of

⁴³ In verse 27, we have the pattern of אִם and an imperfect verb (יַעֲלֶה) followed by waw-consecutive on the perfect (וַיִּשָּׁב), the most common pattern for a conditional sentence, in which the latter is logically consequent.

⁴⁴ See *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*, II 4 (page 525a) where לֵב can have reference to “inclinations, resolutions, and determinations of the will.”

⁴⁵ On the possibility that וַיִּשָּׁבִי following וַיְהִי־לִי forms a result clause (perfect plus waw consecutive on the perfect), compare Isa 6:7.

the “higher-ups” of the kingdom (which probably helps explain how he could implement such revolutionary measures, without total rebellion by his subjects).

Jeroboam’s first action is to have two golden calves made, and he presents these to the people with the declaration “Behold your god,⁴⁶ O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (28b). The expression is more than similar to Exodus 32:4; it is almost a precise quotation, and Jeroboam’s intention is obviously to present this to the public in such a way that they link what he is doing with the inception of the idea by Aaron, the esteemed father of the priesthood.

This new measure is prefaced by the words רַב־לְכֶם מְעֻלֹת (Lit., "much for you to do"), which probably have the idea “it is too arduous a thing that you should have to journey to Jerusalem (to worship and serve God).”⁴⁷ This is offered out as some sort of apologetic for his action.

In verse 29, we are told that he sets one up at Dan and the other at Bethel (see section V-A for an analysis of these locations). Since these two sites had historic roots as cult centers in northern Israel, they would no doubt find ready acceptance with the people as an alternative to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the little editorial insertion in verse 30 reminds us that from God’s perspective this whole affair was “a sin” because it resulted⁴⁸ in the covenant people going up to worship⁴⁹ at these cultic sites, even as far as Dan. In light of the similarity of expression with 1 Kings 13:34, this editorial may be concentrated on Jeroboam himself, as though to say this was his sin which disrupted God’s promises to him and eventually caused his dynasty to be terminated.

From verse 31, we learn that Jeroboam’s reformation included other unacceptable features. He established other cultic centers called “houses⁵⁰ of high places,” and according to 1 Kings 13:31 these were set up throughout the cities of Samaria. Even these had altars for sacrifice and were served by non-Levitical priests (cf. 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Kgs 23:19-20). One of his most unacceptable endeavors was the ordination of priests who were not from the sons of Levi. This was a very flagrant violation of the Torah, which had specified that the priesthood was restricted to the line of Levi (Ex 28; Deut 10:8-9). Jeroboam saw no need for restrictions, and accepted anyone for a priest who had a desire to be part of this scandal [see 1 Kgs 13:33

⁴⁶ Though the word אֱלֹהִים can certainly be translated in the plural “gods,” I have chosen to use the singular in regard to 1 Kings 12:28b because this is definitely a quotation of Exodus 32:4, and there the translation would appropriately be the singular. In other words, Jeroboam’s intention is more closely connected to the quotation than the plurality of the two calves he has made.

⁴⁷ See Gesenius (§133c, 430) regarding the syntax of the preposition with an infinitive after adjectives. Burney suggests the idea, “You have gone up long enough” (*The Book of Judges and Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings*, II:177).

⁴⁸ The waw-consecutive on the imperfect (וַיִּלְכֶּי) is a common way of expressing a result clause.

⁴⁹ See *Brown-Driver-Briggs* (p. 1122, correction for p. 231) where the expression לִפְנֵי following הַלֵּךְ has the idea of to “go (and present oneself) before a deity or shrine” (cf. 1 Chr 21:30).

⁵⁰ The singular use of בַּיִת in the expression בַּיִת בְּמִנְוֹת is not really troublesome, as this is used elsewhere with the context clearly indicating a plural idea (cf. 2 Kgs 17:29).

– “any who would (יָהֲרֹסוּ), he ordained”]. Though we do not have all the details of the historical reaction to what Jeroboam did, we do know that the Levites of the north did not simply tolerate this abuse of power. According to 2 Chr 11:14, “. . . the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had excluded them from serving as priests to the LORD.” This may indicate that Jeroboam had substantial political backing (too powerful to resist), and hence their only alternative was a wholesale flight to the south.

Finally, in verse 32, we are told that Jeroboam made a significant change in the religious calendar, by establishing a feast on the 15th day of the eighth month. The Torah had not called for any feast in the eighth month, and this must obviously be seen as a “nose-thumbing” at the climactic festival of tabernacles which the Southern Kingdom would be observing on the 15th of the seventh month (cf. Lev 23:34).

In each of these cases, Jeroboam seems intent on communicating a message that the Northern Kingdom wants to be different from the Southern, and has no need to be bound by their religious pattern.

3. The Inauguration at Bethel (vv 32b-33)

To kick things off, Jeroboam chose the Bethel site for the inauguration of the religious reformation. He himself led the affair by offering sacrifices upon the altar.⁵¹ By doing so, Bethel was thus “ordained”⁵² for the purpose of offering sacrifices to the golden calf. Furthermore, it is in the context of this inauguration ceremony that the priests for the high places are “appointed” to service (cf. 2 Chr 8:14 in which the word עָמַד is used of Solomon’s appointment of the priests and Levites to their duties in conjunction with the Temple). In fact, this ceremony at Bethel has a striking parallel to the ceremony of Solomon’s dedication of the Temple which he had carried out in the 7th month (2 Chr 7). In dedicating the new Temple in Jerusalem, he also offered sacrifices and ordained the priests and Levites who would serve the Temple cult.

Verse 33 reiterates several of the distinctive features of Jeroboam’s reformed worship system, but in a very condemnatory way . . . these were the things which he devised (בָּרָא) in his heart. Unfortunately for Jeroboam, he was a man who too quickly sacrificed religious faithfulness for political ambitions! Interestingly, the very next verse (13:1) shows that God spoiled the day of festivities by sending a prophet that very day to disclaim any divine approval of these abominations, and to discredit Jeroboam publicly (by the dishonoring of Jeroboam temporarily with a withered arm and by cracking his cherished altar he had ordained just moments before). What a divine commentary on Jeroboam’s carefully devised scheme!

C. The Issue of Public Reaction to Jeroboam

⁵¹ *Brown-Driver-Briggs* (756, 7b) notes that עָלָה עַל when used in respect to an altar means to go up for the purpose of carrying out sacrifices (cf. 2 Kgs 16:12b; 2 Chr 1:6; and 1 Sam 2:28).

⁵² For this use of עָשָׂה, see *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 795a, II 8.

The biblical record leaves the clear testimony that Jeroboam's reformation was a great sin before the LORD. The question needs to be asked how he could ever pull off such a venture, without wholesale rebellion by his subjects. This has been touched on at different points in the paper, and will now be dealt with more fully.

To begin with, his policies were not universally accepted. Mention was made that the Levites left their pasture lands and sought refuge in Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chr 11:14). Not only that, but others who desired to be faithful to YHWH went with them: "And those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD God of Israel, followed them to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers" (2 Chr 11:16). These supported Rehoboam and recognized the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty. Thus, one reason why Jeroboam's reformation *went over* is because it went over with a people who were not spiritually loyal to YHWH anyway. Solomon had done quite a bit to spiritually weaken the hearts of the people himself by the promotion of "other gods" for his foreign wives (1 Kgs 11:1ff.). The faithful of the north in Jeroboam's day were obviously in a minority, and they chose to leave.

A second reason for public tolerance of Jeroboam was the deep-seated tribal jealousy between Judah and the others (particularly the house of Joseph). From at least the days of the patriarchs, the tribe of Judah had reason to think in lofty terms (cf. Gen 49:8ff.). Solomon made matters worse by insisting on heavy taxation (1 Kgs 4:7, 22ff.) and by subjecting the house of Joseph to "forced labor" (1 Kgs 11:28). Rehoboam's promise to be more a tyrant than his father proved to be one straw too much, and the northern tribes could no longer tolerate a position of servitude for Judah and the Davidic dynasty (1 Kgs 12:16). Thus, it is no wonder that the masses in the north could go along with a scheme to avoid the Jerusalem Temple; the Davidic dynasty was so closely attached with the Temple cult that pilgrimage to the Temple could not help but be looked upon as an acknowledgment of the supremacy of Judah. Jeroboam's ideas (especially the choice of Dan and Bethel) catered to the historic interest of the northern tribes.

A third reason for Jeroboam's success in gaining public acceptance is the fact that he was looked upon as some kind of hero figure to the people of the northern tribes. He was certainly a talented individual, had leadership experience and no doubt possessed charisma. [1 Kgs 11:28 informs us that he was a valiant warrior and even Solomon had recognized him as being "industrious;" hence he appointed him to a leadership position]. On top of that, Jeroboam had had the guts to stand up to Solomon and rebel against him (1 Kgs 11:26). Furthermore, he had been the subject of prophetic authentication and divine selection for the role of king to the northern tribes (1 Kgs 11:29ff.). This may well have become public knowledge, perhaps even through the prophet Ahijah. Having been so designated by God, the multitudes may have been slow to question his actions.

A fourth reason for the tolerance of Jeroboam is the fact that he did not act entirely alone, but had the backing of some very influential "higher ups." His consultation with other leaders (1 Kgs 12:28) indicates that this core group of leaders was behind his reforms. A significant clue is provided about them in 2 Chronicles 13:7: ". . . and worthless men gathered about him, scoundrels (בְּנֵי בָלְיָעַל), who proved too strong for Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, when he was young and timid and could not hold his own against them." This was a power-hungry caucus, whose religious concerns were certainly secondary to political ambitions. They, no doubt, gave him support and rallied the people to this new cause.

Section VI

VI. JEROBOAM'S IMPACT UPON THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

God's warning to Jeroboam proved true, for the dynasty of Jeroboam did not last. His son Nadab sat on the throne after him, but that was all. Baasha slew Nadab and terminated the short-lived dynasty of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 15:27). Nevertheless, the significance of Jeroboam's reign is demonstrated by the fact that nearly every northern king that follows is compared to him (which parallels the comparison of southern kings to David). In regard to king after king, it is said that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam.

Jeroboam's sin had a significant impact in that it caused serious deterioration in the spiritual condition of the northern tribes. Under Ahab, the Northern Kingdom hits rock bottom, for it is Ahab and Jezebel who give Baal worship the sanctity of the throne. Nevertheless, Jeroboam sets the stage for Ahab (2 Kgs 16:31).

The Northern Kingdom finally gets a glimmer of hope with the purification attempt of Jehu who "eradicated Baal out of Israel" (2 Kgs 10:28). Yet, here we see just how firmly entrenched the influence of Jeroboam was: "However, as for the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart, even the golden calves that were at Bethel and that were at Dan." They could dump Baal worship, but not the influence of Jeroboam!

In fact, Jeroboam's influence was the single most influential factor upon the deterioration of the Northern Kingdom, as borne out in the review account of their history in 2 Kings:

When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin. And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel from his sight, as he spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day (2 Kgs 17:21-23).

Interestingly, the altar at Bethel survived for nearly 100 years after the exile of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria. During the reign of Josiah (about 622–609 BC), the altar at Bethel was finally eradicated:

Furthermore, the altar that was at Bethel and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah (2 Kgs 23:15).

The prophecy of the "man of God from Judah" (1 Kgs 13:1ff.) had finally proved true as Jeroboam was dealt one last blow!

Section VII

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Not to understand the religious reformation of Jeroboam is not to understand the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, for the actions that he took in attempting to ensure the political control of the northern tribes became the most profound factor shaping the history of the Northern Kingdom. His legacy of the golden calves, the cult centers at Dan and Bethel, and the promotion of high places with a non-Levitical priesthood paved the way for the atrocities of Ahab and Jezebel and remained with the nation until their demise in 722 BC at the hand of Assyria.

In this paper, the relationship between Jeroboam's calf-making and that of Aaron in Exodus 32 was pointed out. The conclusion was presented that Jeroboam was deliberately drawing upon the events recorded in Exodus 32 for the express purpose of forcing a division between the southern and northern tribes. Having examined the issue of source analysis and the literary structure of Exodus 32, the conclusion was made that Exodus 32 was not a polemical document composed after the time of Jeroboam to make him appear all the more condemned, but rather was a witness to an actual calf-making attempt at Sinai under Aaron's leadership.

The nature of the bull/calf motif in Near Eastern religions was also studied, in which it was concluded that Jeroboam was not making any type of syncretistic attempt with Canaanite Baal worship, nor were the golden calves of Jeroboam intended as "thrones" or "pedestals" for Elohim (as Albright and many others have argued). Jeroboam's choice of the calf motif was a deliberate attempt to pattern what the Israelites had done at Sinai with Aaron's participation. By doing so, he hoped to be purposefully divisive, exhibit a repudiation for the southern tribes and the Davidic dynasty, and thus prevent the reunification of the kingdom.

Jeroboam's reform movement as recorded in 1 Kings 12:25ff. was analyzed in more detail in section V of this paper. A historical study of Dan and Bethel suggests that these sites were chosen not simply because of their strategic geographical location, but more so for their historic role in the traditions of the northern tribes as significant cult centers. Jeroboam's reform consisted of instituting the religious symbols of the golden calves at the cultic sites of Dan and Bethel, establishing numerous cultic high places, changing the religious calendar, and ordaining a priesthood that spurned the Levitical line. The reasons for the public toleration of Jeroboam's reform were presented in section V-C of this paper, the primary contribution being the growing jealousy and animosity of the northern tribes toward the tribes of Judah and the Davidic dynasty. The deep roots to this problem blossomed under Solomon and Rehoboam.

Though Jeroboam sought to inaugurate his reform movement by a grand occasion of sacrifices and royal pomp at Bethel, God spoiled the occasion by sending a prophet to denounce the whole affair, cause the king to lose face, and predict the eventual doom of the altar. The story of Jeroboam and his reformation of YHWH worship has an ironic lesson: the very thing God had promised him (the perpetuation of his dynasty distinct from the Davidic dynasty) became the very thing he lost as a result of taking matters into his own hands. God's promises are secured by obedience and faith to that which He has revealed!



Fig. 4
The Egyptian god Apis, the bull-calf of Memphis



Fig. 5 **Bull on glazed brick, from walls of ancient Babylon**



Fig. 6

**Storm god astride a bull, with lightning bolts in his hand.
From Arslan-Tash, 8th cent. BC.**

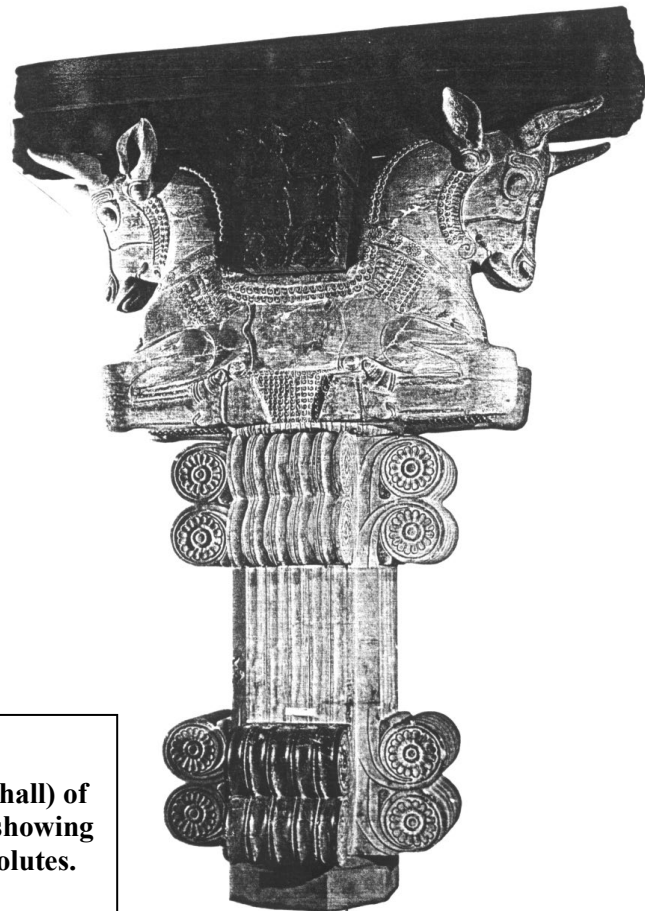


Fig. 7

Capital from the Apadana (audience-hall) of the palace at Susa (Shushan), Persia, showing a double-headed bull surmounting volutes.



Fig. 8

**General view of the sacred area at
Tel Dan.**

**In the back is the high place. Jeroboam
established one of his golden calves at
this cult center.**

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