

The Sad Duties of a Prophet

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On November 12th the Church honors the prophet Ahijah, who lived in the time of Solomon and the kings who followed him.

Solomon, of course, is one of most important kings of the Old Testament. He pleased God by asking for wisdom rather than more worldly gifts, and was given that gift as well as others. He was a poet, writer, and an architect skilled enough to oversee construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. An able diplomat, he secured peace with neighboring nations, and then was able to increase Israel's trade and wealth.

But Chapter 11 of 1st Kings/3rd Kingdom records God's displeasure with Solomon's squandering of his gifts. We read in 11:1 that he took as lovers "Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite women" even though God had told the Israelites, 'You shall not enter into marriage with them...for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods.' "

Ahijah is the prophet to whom God gives the task of telling Jeroboam that God has chosen him to succeed Solomon. Ahijah, wearing a new garment, meets Jeroboam on the road. As a sign of what the future will bring, the prophet tears his garment into twelve pieces, and tells Jeroboam that God intends to "tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon" and give Jeroboam ten tribes.

Undoubtedly Ahijah has great hopes for Jeroboam's rule. After all, God has chosen him and saved him from Solomon's murderous wrath, and has allowed him to be named "king over all Israel" (12:

20).

But Jeroboam fears that his subjects might want to return to Jerusalem, which is not under his control, to worship in the Temple. So he has two golden calves made, and tells his people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (12: 28b). He offers sacrifices on the altars of the calves he's made.

Not only are Ahijah's hopes dashed, but his next encounter with King Jeroboam, or rather the king's wife, is heartbreaking. Jeroboam's son is taken ill, and the king tells his wife to go to Ahijah to ask what will happen to the child. Knowing how he has disappointed the prophet, Jeroboam tells her to meet Ahijah in disguise so he won't know her. But God reveals her coming to Ahijah, and instructs him to tell her that evil will come upon Jeroboam's house because he has misused the gifts God gave him. She returns home with this terrible news, and as she reaches her threshold, the boy dies.

Paul writes in I Thessalonians, read on this day, "...we had courage in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in spite of great opposition" (2: 1b).

Ahijah needed that same courage to deliver his unwelcome message to a disappointing king. Jeroboam used his free will to turn decisively from God, and Ahijah had to be the one to tell him what the consequences of his terrible folly would be.