

Lesson 89

Israel Is Divided

God divided the nation of Israel as punishment for Solomon's disobedience.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Solomon disobeyed God's commands and let his many wives turn him to idolatry. As punishment, God said that his kingdom would be torn away. This happened when Solomon's son Rehoboam lost the kingdom to Jeroboam. The nation was divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Key Passages

Deuteronomy 17:15–17; 1 Kings 11:1–4, 11:11–13, 12:13–15, 12:20–21, 12:24

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe why God became angry with Solomon.
- Explain how the kingdom was divided.

Memory Verse

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

God warned them it would happen. Before the Israelites even came into the promised land, God commanded that the future king should not gather wives and horses for himself or amass great wealth (Deuteronomy 17:14–17). When the people cried out for a king, God warned them through Samuel that a king would abuse them, making their sons and daughters his servants and taking their land and its produce (1 Samuel 8:9–18). God had been their king, but now they would be ruled by a descendant of Adam—a man with a sinful heart.

Although Solomon's reign started off well, he eventually fell into sin. He disobeyed God and did all the things God had warned that the king should not do. Solomon had many horses imported from Egypt and Kue (1 Kings 10:28). He gathered massive amounts of gold into his treasury, counting silver as a common metal (1 Kings 10:16–23). As a way to secure alliances, Solomon married women from all the lands surrounding his kingdom and loved many who were from the foreign nations with whom God had prohibited the Israelites

to intermarry. In fact, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:1–3). Solomon’s sinful heart led him to violate God’s clear commands, and the result was just as God had said—Solomon turned to worshipping the gods of his wives (1 Kings 11:4). Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord. Sadly, this phrase would become a common refrain regarding the kings of Israel.

As a result of his polygamous relationships and idolatrous sin, God appeared to Solomon to deliver a message of judgment: the kingdom would be torn away from him and given to his servant (1 Kings 11:9–11). And yet, even in this punishment, God demonstrated his mercy and faithfulness. For the sake of God’s promise to David, God would wait until after Solomon’s death. Solomon’s son would be the one from whom the kingdom would be taken, yet one tribe would remain under his rule for David’s sake (1 Kings 11:12–13).

After Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam took his place on the throne (1 Kings 11:43). Jeroboam, a servant who had fled to Egypt to escape Solomon, returned. Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh, had told Jeroboam that the kingdom would be divided and that 10 tribes would be given to him (Jeroboam) and only one tribe would remain with Rehoboam (Solomon’s son) (1 Kings 11:29–32). Jeroboam returned to Israel to serve as the advocate and spokesperson for the people before Rehoboam. The people requested that Rehoboam lighten the burdensome service his father, Solomon, had put on them (1 Kings 12:1–5).

King Rehoboam sought counsel. He received differing opinions from the old men who counseled his father and the young men who grew up with him, and his answer revealed just how dark his heart was. Rejecting the counsel of the old men, he announced that he would not lighten the load but would add to their burdens and oppress them even more wickedly than Solomon had (1 Kings 12:5–11).

The people would have served a just leader, but they rebelled against Rehoboam because of the severity of his answer. We see a vivid picture of God’s sovereignty in the affairs of men as we read that “the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (1 Kings 12:15).

This was God’s plan. God was the one who orchestrated these events. God used Rehoboam’s foolish actions to cause the people to rebel against his kingship. God used the sinful heart of man to bring about his purpose in the world. How reassuring it is to know that in a world tossed to and fro by many different political leaders, God controls the hearts of the kings. He holds those hearts in his hands—and he turns them wherever he wishes (Proverbs 21:1). What a relief to know that God is in the heavens and he is doing whatever he pleases (Psalm 115:3), and whatever he pleases is just (Genesis 18:25).

From this point forward, the Israelites would be divided and ruled by different kings. Only the tribe of Judah remained under the authority of the line of David, and its capital was Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:20–21). The southern kingdom is usually referred to as Judah throughout the rest of the Old Testament. The northern kingdom—consisting of the remaining 10 tribes—became known as Israel. The tribe of Benjamin had divided land (and

loyalties). And since the Levites did not acquire tribal land but resided in the Levitical cities, both kingdoms contained descendants from the tribe of Levi.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Polygamy was not uncommon at the time of Solomon. Indeed, it was a sign of wealth and status. Solomon would have taken many of his wives as symbols of treaties with other nations or tribes, but this was against God's commands to him. Solomon had written in the book of Proverbs about avoiding the sexual temptations of women, but he fell into a sinful pattern and was led to worship the gods that his wives served. He built places of worship for Ashtoreth, the fertility goddess of the Canaanites; Molech, the Ammonite god who received child sacrifice; and Chemosh, the Moabite god who also received child sacrifice. It is clear that Solomon engaged not only in marital polygamy but also in spiritual polygamy.

On top of those sins, Solomon had taken much of his wealth from the people. His son Rehoboam compounded that sin by seeking to oppress the people even more. From that point forward, there was constant strife between the north and the south. As we move forward through Israel's history, we will get a brief overview of some of the troubles in each of the kingdoms as different men come and go as kings and as God calls his prophets to deliver his word. Like Solomon, the kings of Israel and Judah will be remembered in Scripture for how they obeyed God's laws—if they were faithful or unfaithful, righteous or evil. Through all of Israel's tumultuous history, we see that God is in control and that he was working all of these events together in a way that would ultimately lead to the coming of the perfect king—Jesus.

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