

WINTER 2025–2026

*The Kingdom Divided*

**LESSON 04**

**DECEMBER 28, 2025**

***LESSON TEXT***

I Kings 11–25; II Chronicles 10–36

***FOCUS VERSES***

Ezekiel 37:15–17

<sup>15</sup>The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,

<sup>16</sup>Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions:

<sup>17</sup>And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

***TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT***

Even though Israel divided, God did not give up on them.

***MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT***

I will serve God with singleness of heart.

***COVENANT CONTEXT***

Although we are only two generations into King David's descendants, the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Yet through the warring between the two nations, God redeemed the division to open the door for the entire world to be in covenant relationship with Him.

***TEACHING OUTLINE***

**Icebreaker:** What is the greatest sibling rivalry you can think of?

**Teacher Tip:** Connect the group's answers to set up the story of the rival nations of Israel and Judah.

**Lesson Connection:** Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE TWO SOUTHERN TRIBES OF JUDAH

A. King Rehoboam

B. Rehoboam's Reign

C. God kept His covenant to David, although not as God intended.

***DISCUSS:*** *Whom do you ask for advice? Are they helping you grow closer to God or further from Him?*

## II. THE TEN NORTHERN TRIBES OF ISRAEL

- A. King Jeroboam
- B. Jeroboam's High Places

**DISCUSS:** *Although the golden calves were intended for Israel to worship the Lord, why did God have a problem with them?*

- C. God's Mercy
- D. I will rely on God's mercy to reveal to me the error of my ways.

**DISCUSS:** *What might be a "golden calf" in your life that you need to repent of? Are you willing to repent and give it to God?*

## III. THE FALL OF BOTH NATIONS

- A. The Fall of Israel
- B. The Fall of Judah

**DISCUSS:** *How can we better learn from others' mistakes so we don't have to make them?*

- C. God's Covenant to the Whole World
- D. I will trust God to use even my failures for His glory.

**DISCUSS:** *What division do you need to mend with God or others? How can you do so?*

### Internalizing the Message

#### **PRAYER FOCUS**

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see His plan even when life is difficult
- For God to redeem us from our troubles

#### **LESSON CONNECTION**

Sibling rivalries and blood feuds between brothers have filled the annals of time. Even when brothers worked together to accomplish great things, division could tear them apart. From Roman mythology, the story of Romulus and Remus founding Rome records that the twin brothers differed on their goals for the new civilization. Orphaned at birth, the two at least had each other. However, Romulus eventually killed Remus because they disagreed on where to build the city. Remus preferred the location that would provide the best farmland; Romulus preferred a more strategic position to protect the city. With his penchant for war, Romulus prevailed, and Rome served Mars, the god of war.

Other wars throughout history pitted brother against brother. The American Civil War is infamous for siblings fighting on opposite sides. The Battle of Front Royal featured an interesting encounter when the Confederate Captain William Goldsborough took his brother Charles, a Union soldier, prisoner. Four brothers fought in the battle at Hartsville, Tennessee, where the Confederates emerged victorious. Three of four Terrill brothers were on the winning side. The other brother, Robert Q. Terrill, was among over 1,800 Union prisoners.

The Battle of Secessionville in June 1862 pitted the Campbell brothers against each other. Confederate James and Unionist Alexander fought close to each other, although they did not know it until after the battle's end. Alexander wrote a letter home to his wife and told of his brother James: "We are not far from each other now...this was a war that there never was the like of before Brother against Brother."

Stories from various families featured different outcomes, depending on who won the battle. The McBeath brothers fought on opposite sides. Thankfully they made their way back home on the same evening at the end of the war. William was dressed in a sharp uniform fitting his station as a major in the Union; Anthony later joined his brother at home wearing rags.

All these stories reflect the dangers of division among biological brothers. If even such close family members found themselves at odds, then brothers and sisters in Christ must be aware of the problems that can arise from disunity. The church must guard against falling into this trap. The Bible provides consistent warnings about problems between brothers. In fact, sibling rivalry is one of the major themes in the Book of Genesis. The older half-brother Ishmael mocked Isaac, so Sarah had Hagar's son Ishmael sent away. Despite his own struggles with his older brother, Isaac still favored his son Esau over Jacob.

The animosity between the two led to Jacob bartering for Esau's birthright and later stealing it. Jacob did not learn his lesson, and he favored his son Joseph over his other sons. Judah pushed to sell his brother Joseph into slavery. Joseph's story also foreshadowed the descendants of each brother. Division would occur when the tribe known as Ephraim, the name of one of Joseph's sons, split from the tribe of Judah. Ephraim became another name for Israel, and the once united nation of Israel divided in two.

## ***BIBLE LESSON***

### **I. THE TWO SOUTHERN TRIBES OF JUDAH**

As we've previously studied, the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land as a mighty army until rebellion raised its ugly head during the days of the judges. The once mighty army turned into splinter groups, and all the other tribes ultimately found themselves in a civil war with the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin somehow survived and gave Israel its first king. Saul's own personal demons of division plagued him. He fought his successor, David.

The war between the house of David and the house of Saul continued even after the mad king's death. David eventually united the tribes. The man after God's own heart set up his son Solomon for success, but the division of the kingdom loomed on the dark horizon. The dismemberment of the nation of Israel left two southern tribes: Judah and Benjamin formed the southern kingdom of Judah; the remaining tribes were known as the northern kingdom of Israel, or Ephraim.

#### **A. King Rehoboam**

Scholars often refer to the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon as the United Kingdom because the next era is known as the Divided Kingdom. After Solomon's death, Rehoboam ascended to the throne, threatening to be even stricter and stronger than his father Solomon was. (See I Kings 12:1–24.) Although many solely blame Rehoboam for the

fracture, Solomon sowed the seeds of division. The break arose because of Solomon's harsh taxation policies. He also required the tribes to engage in forced labor, leaving their homes to work on his projects. If a tribe's service occurred during planting or harvest, the women, children, and elders were tasked with those responsibilities.

### **B. Rehoboam's Reign**

King Rehoboam could have changed the situation. The elders advised him to listen to the people and seek a peaceable solution. "Go easy on them, and they'll follow you for life," they suggested. But Rehoboam's peers disagreed. They urged Rehoboam to be even tougher than his dad was. Foolishly Rehoboam followed his peers' advice and threatened the people with higher taxes and harsher treatment. Rehoboam would have done well to have heeded at least one of his father's proverbs. A wise answer could have turned away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). Instead, his harsh answer severed the kingdom. Rehoboam only retained control of Judah and Benjamin, called the kingdom of Judah, whose life-center was Jerusalem. The initial split was bad enough, but more damage lurked. Political division eventually yielded religious division.

### **C. God kept His covenant to David, although not as God intended.**

Even though the tribes broke covenant with each other, the Lord remained faithful to His covenant He had made with the house of David. In the Davidic covenant, the Almighty promised to keep a member of the line of David on the throne. Rehoboam, the grandson of David, maintained his position as monarch, although his kingdom was greatly diminished.

The situation in the Bible is disturbing, but the message of hope still shines. Even when we make mistakes, the Lord keeps His covenant with us. However, we must be extremely careful not to take God's love and faithfulness for granted. We would do well to have an attitude that maintains unity with our God and the family of God because unchecked division can grow into greater problems.

***DISCUSS:** Whom do you ask for advice? Are they helping you grow closer to God or further from Him?*

## **II. THE TEN NORTHERN TRIBES OF ISRAEL**

The southern kingdom of Judah had the advantage of the Davidic covenant, but the ten northern tribes formed a powerful and fruitful kingdom known as Israel. The Northern Kingdom possessed rich and enticing farmland. Israel often proved to be far more powerful than Judah. Sometimes the Southern Kingdom served as a vassal to the Northern Kingdom, forced to pay tribute and ally with the Israelites in wars.

Anyone looking at the two kingdoms might have assumed the larger and more powerful kingdom would persist. The backwater, smaller kingdom of Judah seemed inconsequential, yet God had great plans for preserving Judah. Israel could have persisted if a certain king named Jeroboam had not committed such a perpetual sin that eroded the kingdom's faith in God and eventually led to its dissolution.

### **A. King Jeroboam**

Rehoboam's counterpart in the north was King Jeroboam. Jeroboam was more a rival to Solomon than to Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Jeroboam had proven himself an able leader over Solomon's work crews. Like his ancestor Joseph

in Genesis, Jeroboam possessed significant managerial skills. He also possessed political savvy.

In response to Solomon's disobedience and Rehoboam's arrogance, Jeroboam led a rebellion against the house of David. (See I Kings 11:26–12:24.) The foolish fledgling king Rehoboam played right into his hand. He lacked the political experience and expertise Jeroboam boasted, so when Rehoboam threatened the people, the nation divided. Jeroboam ruled over the majority of the tribes (the Northern Kingdom), but he predicted a problem in maintaining power. Like Rehoboam, he also made a disastrous decision with enormous consequences.

### **B. Jeroboam's High Places**

In the ancient world, temples were not only houses of worship; they were also places that made money and centralized political power. The politically astute Jeroboam saw a huge problem in the Temple at Jerusalem. It was in the Southern Kingdom's capital city, and since God commanded His people to return there for three feasts every year, Solomon's Temple would generate a great deal of money. Worse yet for Jeroboam, his northern citizens might choose to reunite with their southern brethren.

To prevent that possibility of reunification and to enrich his own kingdom, Jeroboam built golden calves in the city of Bethel. These calves were initially giving the Northern Kingdom a convenient place to worship God so they would not have to travel all the way to Jerusalem. Jeroboam instituted places of idolatrous worship outside of Jerusalem, a sin that plagued the kings of the Northern Kingdom until its demise in 722 BC. (See I Kings 12:25–13:34.)

***DISCUSS:** Although the golden calves were intended for Israel to worship the Lord, why did God have a problem with them?*

### **C. God's Mercy**

Despite all their idolatry and wickedness, God still longed to show His people mercy. They were still His people, so the Lord sent a man of God to prophesy against Jeroboam so he would repent. But the rebellious Jeroboam lashed out in anger. When he stretched out his hand against the prophet, his hand withered. But even in this situation, God was showing mercy. When Jeroboam begged for his hand to be healed, the Lord restored him.

God cared for a man who had brought immense division to His people. After his miraculous healing, we would think Jeroboam would have repented of his idolatry and destroyed the golden calves at Bethel, but he did not. His pride and political ambitions ruled his heart and actions. His sin persisted as a growing cancer in the north. Because of his sin, we read a recurring refrain in the Old Testament of several kings of Israel: "He departed not from the sins of Jeroboam." If only they would have repented of their idolatry, God's mercy would not have had to give way to judgment.

### **D. I will rely on God's mercy to reveal to me the error of my ways.**

Jeroboam may have been too smart for his own good because he failed to change his ways when the man of God confronted him. We must be careful not to rely just on our own knowledge or wisdom. We must not allow the wrong type of ambition to lead us down the wrong path. Instead, we can pursue godly goals to advance God's kingdom, not

our own.

We need to humbly pray for God to reveal the error of our ways to us. Sometimes we can become so caught up in a situation that we cannot see clearly. God stands ready to forgive us. His mercy is new every morning, but we must repent of our sins and accept His mercy. If we do, we will not have to experience His judgment.

***DISCUSS:** What might be a “golden calf” in your life that you need to repent of? Are you willing to repent and give it to God?*

### **III. THE FALL OF BOTH NATIONS**

To be true to His word, God must sometimes bring judgment. Although the Northern Kingdom was the first to fall, the Southern Kingdom did not escape the wrath of God. The nation of Judah was captured around 140 years after the nation of Israel was captured. The southerners are infamous for ignoring a warning sign God placed right before them when the nation of Assyria invaded Israel and killed or captured her citizens.

#### **A. The Fall of Israel**

The northern kingdom of Israel possessed fruitful seeds that led to economic prosperity. But they also held the rotten seeds of destruction from the idolatry of Jeroboam. Yet because of its monetary value, the kingdom was a ripe plum too tantalizing for the savage Assyrian nation to resist. After many prophetic warnings from godly men like Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and Amos to repent and turn back to God—and many repeated rejections of those warnings—the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BC. (See II Kings 17:1–23.)

#### **B. The Fall of Judah**

But the smaller southern kingdom of Judah continued for over one hundred years after the fall of Israel. They had seen what happened to their brothers in the north, and the Lord let them know if they persisted in sinning, the same would happen to them. Unfortunately, the people and their rulers ignored the prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Habakkuk—not to mention the cautionary object lesson from the fall of Israel. After many prophetic warnings, the southern kingdom of Judah tragically fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC (II Kings 25; II Chronicles 36).

***DISCUSS:** How can we better learn from others’ mistakes so we don’t have to make them?*

#### **C. God’s Covenant to the Whole World**

Even in the darkest hours of dissolution of the northern kingdom of Israel and the exile of the southerners, God had a plan. In God’s providence, the falling away of the Divided Kingdom would ultimately open the whole world to enter into covenant with Him. The Jews would begin thinking about their impact on the Gentiles. Zechariah prophesied that ten men would take hold of a Jew, desiring to accompany him because these Gentiles had heard that God was with the Jews (Zechariah 8:23). Even in His people’s faithlessness, God remained faithful.

#### **D. I will trust God to use even my failures for His glory.**

We all make mistakes. Although we strive not to sin or allow our weights to overtake our lives, we can find ourselves struggling. Sometimes we may even fail. Although these moments might make us think God has forever

broken His covenant with us, the Almighty demonstrates His great love for us by using our failures for His glory.

We should not willfully sin like the people of Judah and Israel and expect God to always bail us out. But neither should we hang our heads in despair and refuse to accept the forgiveness Jesus gives. After all, Jesus knew we all would fail Him at some point. Yet He loved us enough to die for us. No division is so great that He cannot heal it and reestablish His lasting covenant with us.

**DISCUSS:** *What division do you need to mend with God or others? How can you do so?*

**Teacher Option:** *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how we need to mend our divisions with God and with others.*

### **INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE**

Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym held on to a family grudge for years in Saki's short story, "The Interlopers." The warring clans fought over a small piece of property teeming with game. The two men traced the beginnings of their dispute back to a lawsuit between their grandfathers. Although the Gradwitzes won the case, the Znaeys continued their illegal hunts on the Gradwitzes' property.

On a stormy night, Ulrich set out to trap and kill his foe. Both men viewed death as the only solution. When they spotted each other in the forest, they froze. In their hesitation, the storm made the first move. A bolt of lightning struck a nearby tree and trapped the two enemies under the fallen limbs. Unable to finish each other off, they raised their voices, accusing each other of thieving and poaching. They were trapped by their foolish arguments as much as by the felled tree, and they persisted in their war of words. Then they started to wonder whose team would arrive first to deliver the victor and kill the victim.

Surprisingly a kind gesture interrupted their hatred. Ulrich freed his arm and took a swig from his canteen. Then he asked if Georg could get a drink from the canteen if he pitched it toward him. But Georg remained committed to hatred. For some reason, Ulrich sought peace. He hoped the two could forgive and hunt on the same land. Maybe, just maybe, they could even become friends.

Eventually the thought of his enemy becoming an ally made Georg picture strange possibilities. Should the two men ride into town together, everyone would be surprised. But if Georg was a welcomed guest, not a trespasser, there was nothing to fight about. In that moment Georg had a change of heart, realizing their two feuding families could finally be at peace.

Committed to resolution, the men shouted to draw their search parties toward them. Each hoped his men would arrive first—not to hurt anyone but to lend a helping hand to a new friend. In the distance, Ulrich spotted nine or ten figures. Georg commented that his group was smaller, so it couldn't be his men. Squinting, he asked if it was Ulrich's group. Ulrich laughed uncomfortably. When Georg again asked who their soon-to-be saviors were, Ulrich revealed the awful truth. The figures were not men; they were wolves.

"The Interlopers" reveals that judgment looms if we are not quick to show mercy and mend our divisions. We must

be especially careful to repent and reconnect with God if we have gone astray. The Lord will show mercy to us and reestablish His covenant. As we make things right with God, we may need to fix our relationships with others. We may even need to show others the mercy the Lord has shown to us. Learn from Jeroboam and Rehoboam and from Georg and Ulrich: mend your divisions so you can enjoy the fruit of peace.