

A Divided Kingdom Overview

Because Solomon's heart had turned away from the Lord and did evil, God told him that the kingdom would be torn away and divided (1 Kings 11:9-13).

Jeroboam, who had been a servant of Solomon, would be

given ten of the tribes and become king of the northern kingdom. He would be given the opportunity to establish his own dynasty in the north. After these promises, Solomon sought the life of Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt until Solomon's death.

When Solomon died, Rehoboam became king. Jeroboam returned from Egypt, and Rehoboam convened a meeting in order to establish his kingship overall both north and south. Solomon had enacted some policies that were harsh on the north, and those who represented the north asked Rehoboam to lighten their load. When Rehoboam listened to his younger counselors, he promised he would be even more harsh. At this, the north rebelled and the kingdom officially divided. From this point, the north is called Israel, and the south is called Judah. Rehoboam remained king of Judah, while Jeroboam became the king of Israel. Rehoboam tried to prepare for war against Israel because of this, but God's message to him was to refrain, for this was God's doing (1 Kings 12:21-24).



Jeroboam had an opportunity to start out with God's blessings, but he quickly created problems by not following the Lord. Out of fear that the people would turn to Judah, he had golden

calves set up in Dan and Bethel (at the tips of the north and south of Israel). The Levites, for the most part, were going to Judah, and Jeroboam appointed priests from other tribes. He also changed the feast days. In short, Jeroboam took control of their religion and standardized idolatry in Israel. Because of this, his dynasty would not last beyond a short reign of his son.

The northern kingdom of Israel never would have a righteous king. Of the nineteen or so who reigned, not one of them turned the people back to the Lord. Judah, on the other hand, would have at least have a handful of kings who tried to initiate reforms and do what is right (including Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah). This is one of the reasons why Judah would outlast Israel. In the end, however, both kingdoms would fall due to their failure to adhere to God's covenant.

The most notorious of the rulers of Israel were Ahab (son of Omri) and Jezebel. While Ahab was savvy as a military commander, he was wicked to the core. Jezebel, from Phoenicia, brought Baalism

to its peak in Israel. Her influence over Ahab and the nation was, sadly, very strong in its negative influence. During this time, God sent prophets to try to turn the people back to Him. Two prophets especially noted for miracle-working were Elijah and his successor, Elisha.

Elijah was sent to Ahab to tell him that he needed to repent. He was a godly man who became known for his uncompromising stand for God. The most well-known episode demonstrating this was when he summoned the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to Mt. Carmel in order to challenge them (1 Kings 18). They each made altars to offer sacrifices. The prophets of Baal called upon Baal, but to no avail. Finally, Elijah, after having his altar drenched with water, called upon Yahweh, who responded with fire that consumed the altar. While the people responded by acknowledging Yahweh, it was too late. The prophets were taken and slain. Jezebel responded by threatening Elijah's life, and he fled for a time in discouragement. His message, however, was loud and clear, and Elijah became a type of John the Baptist.

After these events, Ahab was killed in battle. He would have two sons reign for shorter periods (Ahaziah and Joram). Jehu was commissioned to destroy the family of Ahab, and he did so swiftly. This included the death of Jezebel. However, Jehu did not kill the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, whose name was Athaliah. She would end up trying to kill her own family and usurping the throne of Judah, causing untold damage to the south.

Though there was so much wickedness throughout the land, Elijah and Elisha

demonstrated that God was still at work. The miracles worked by Elisha were powerful reminders that God was still in control. The Lord could heal the land. He could raise the dead. He could feed the people and do what seemed impossible. These miracles showed that God was able to take care of the nation, if only they would repent and turn back to Him. Sadly, for the north, this would not happen.

The northern kingdom of Israel started out poorly because of Jeroboam, and it only spiraled downward and became worse over time. For Judah, there would be a few lights in the darkness, but it wouldn't be enough in the end to overturn their destruction. Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, fell in ca. 722 B.C., while Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, fell in ca. 586 B.C.

Such an overview hardly does justice to the events, but there are many blanks yet to fill in.

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