

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

1Kings 11 – 2Kings 17; 2Chronicles 10-28
Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Hosea

Message 1 – Divided hearts > Divided kingdoms Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam I Kings 11-14 and 2Chronicles 10-12

Review and Overview:

To understand the “Divided Kingdom” period of the Old Testament, it is helpful to see where it fits in the overall scheme of things. Israel’s history in the Old Testament can be overviewed in ten major sections as follows:

- 1. Patriarchs: 2000-1800 B.C.** Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the “patriarchs” of Israel. Jacob’s 12 sons formed the twelve “tribes” of Israel. At the end of Genesis, Jacob and his sons went into Egypt. The clan grew into a nation over the next 400 years.
- 2. Exodus: 1440 B.C.** Israel gained a distinct national identity when they “exited” (Exodus) Egypt by the mighty hand of God, under the leadership of Moses. At Mt. Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel to be His chosen nation through whom He could reveal Himself to all nations. The laws given at Sinai were intended to set apart Israel’s behavior from the pagan nations and to reveal God’s character to the world.
- 3. Conquest: 1400 B.C.** After one generation died off wandering in the desert, a new generation was led by Joshua in the conquest of the land of Canaan. God had waited 400 years for the Canaanites to turn to Him from their idols. His grace and patience gave way to His justice as He used the “rod of Israel” to remove them from their land. Now Israel had their own “promised land.”
- 4. Judges: 1400-1050 B.C.** Once in the land of Canaan, Israel repeatedly fell away from obedience to the covenant with Yahweh and was, as a result, oppressed by foreign powers. They were delivered from oppression by a series of leaders (“Judges”).
- 5. United Kingdom: 1050-930 B.C.** Israel was never supposed to have a human king. God Himself wanted to be their “King.” Yet, the Israelites demanded that God give them a human king so that

they could be like the other nations. Saul, David and Solomon were the first three kings of the “United Kingdom” of Israel.

6. Divided Kingdom: 930-722 B.C. After Solomon, the nation was split into north (“Israel” – 10 tribes) and south (“Judah” – 2 tribes). The rival kingdoms were sometimes at peace and other times at war. The northern kingdom had NO godly kings and was religiously apostate until the end (Assyrian invasion - 722 B.C.).

7. Southern Kingdom Only: 722-586 B.C. The south had numerous godly kings and wavered between periods of devotion to Yahweh and periods of apostasy. Judah survived the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C., lasting another 140 years until the Babylonian invasion (586 B.C.).

8. Captivity: 586-536 B.C. Southern Kingdom Jews were taken in several waves into captivity in Babylon. The entire time in captivity was roughly 70 years. During those years, Persia overtook Babylon as the leading world power.

9. Post-captivity: 536-400 B.C. Cyrus king of Persia permitted a remnant of Jews to return to the land and rebuild their national life and identity. Ezra and Nehemiah were key post-captivity leaders.

10. The “Silent Years”: 400 B.C.-Christ. The Jews lived under various world powers (Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, Romans) up to and including the time of Christ. These were very tumultuous years for the Jewish people. They are called the “silent” years because the voice of prophecy fell silent from Malachi (400 B.C.) until John the Baptist appeared as the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.

We are currently studying the period of the **Divided Kingdom** as recorded in 1&2Kings and 2Chronicles. It was during this period that many prophets (some who wrote books included in the Bible) arose to call the nation back to covenant loyalty with Yahweh. *“The story is that of a nation passing from affluence and influence to poverty and paralysis” (G. Campbell Morgan). “We see here a nation, having rejected Yahweh from being King, attempting to govern itself and failing utterly” (Irving Jensen).*

Why do we study these old portions of the Word of God? *“All these things happened to them as examples, as object lessons to us, to warn us against doing the same things; they were written down so that we could read about them and learn from them in these last days” (1Corinthians 10:11 – Living Letters).* These ancient stories contain divinely inspired timeless truths for our lives today.

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Introduction

Solomon followed his father David as the third king over the United Kingdom of Israel. He inherited a vast, prosperous and influential kingdom at rest from war. Having no wars to fight, Solomon devoted himself to beautifying Jerusalem with glorious royal buildings, the greatest being the temple of God. People came from all over the world to hear the wisdom of Solomon and to see the glory that God had granted in his kingdom. Yet, the glory days of Solomon were short-lived as Solomon's heart drifted away from devotion to Yahweh. The story of Israel as a "divided kingdom" finds its origin in Solomon's own "divided heart."

What is a divided heart? In the New Testament, James warns against being "double-minded," telling people to "purify their hearts" (James 4:8). The term double-minded comes from the Greek word *dipsuchos* which describes someone with divided interests and loyalties; someone torn between two options. In the Old Testament, we read that God is looking for people whose heart is "completely His" (2Chronicles 16:9). Thus, a divided heart is the heart that is *not* completely His; the heart that allows other gods to have a place; the heart that trusts God at times, but not at other times; the heart that serves more than one Master (Matthew 6:24). As we will see in the following narratives, a divided heart comes in many different shapes and sizes.

Solomon: A heart divided by women: 1Kings 11

God had generously blessed Solomon in every conceivable way. Yet, the book of Ecclesiastes reveals that he took advantage of God's blessings to indulge himself with every worldly pleasure. Solomon was most consumed by his lust for beautiful women. He allowed these women to turn his heart away from God.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love" (1Kings 11:1,2).

He amassed a harem of 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. To please them, he filled Jerusalem with their gods, goddesses and idols that they had brought from their homelands. This led, in turn, to God's judgment and the "divided kingdom."

So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen" (1Kings 11:9-13).

This passage explains why Israel became divided between north ("Israel") and south ("Judah"). The divided kingdom was a judgment from God as a result of Solomon's divided heart.

The story of Solomon ends sadly. While he had previously enjoyed peace, towards the end he was troubled by many adversaries that *God raised up*: Hadad the Edomite (11:14-22); Rezon the Aramaean (11:23-25). Finally, Jeroboam, Solomon's own official in charge of the labor force, rebelled against him (11:26-40). Jeroboam would eventually become the king over the northern portion of Israel after Solomon's death.

The phrase "his heart was turned away" occurs 4 times in the description of Solomon's fall – 1Kings 11:2,3,4,9. Whenever our heart turns away from God, some portion of God's kingdom work in us and through us is torn away. A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom. What forces might be attempting to turn your heart away from pure devotion to God? Have you allowed God-given privileges to make you feel entitled in some way? Have you taken blessings given to you by God and allowed these blessings to become things that divide your heart, or move you away from God's commands? Have you stopped to consider what it will cost you if you allow these forces to turn your heart away from God?

Rehoboam: A heart divided by seasons: 2Chronicles 10-12

Rehoboam inherited the throne from his father Solomon. A nationwide assembly was called at Shechem, in the very center of the land of Israel. The people asked Rehoboam to lighten their workload, since they had labored hard under Solomon. Rehoboam

foolishly rejected the counsel of the elders (to grant this request) choosing instead to follow the harsher advice of his young friends.

The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, “Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!’ But you shall speak to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions’” (2Chr. 10:8-11).

When the people heard this harsh answer, they revolted from Rehoboam’s leadership and the divided kingdom became a reality.

“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!” So Israel departed to their tents. But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the forced labor, and all Israel stoned him to death. So King Rehoboam made haste to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (2Chronicles 10:16-19).

Jesus modeled servant leadership: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matt.20:28). He truly cared about people. The elders who advised Rehoboam understood this principle; but the younger men thought Rehoboam should “show the people who was boss” by leading with threats. Wisdom grows with age. Who do you go to for advice? If you lead others, how can you do a better job of being a “servant leader” to them?

Interestingly, Rehoboam made his wisest choices during the next 3 crisis years, resulting in stability in the new Southern Kingdom: 1. He accepted the counsel of God (through Shemaiah the prophet) against initiating a civil war (2Chr.11:1-4). 2. He fortified the southern kingdom with defenses (11:5-12). 3. He partnered with the Levites, priests and other godly people to strengthen the southern kingdom spiritually (11:13-17). 4. He distributed his sons as leaders of key cities throughout the south (11:18-23).

Most significant was his partnership with the godly people from north and south to strengthen the southern kingdom spiritually and morally. The text emphasizes this partnership:

“The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel stood with him from all their districts. For the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem . . . and those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord God of Israel came with them to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years” (2Chronicles 11:16-18).

Why does this section twice mention “three years” as the period of time that this partnership between Rehoboam and the godly leaders lasted? The sad answer follows:

“When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the LORD. And it came about in King Rehoboam’s fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem” (12:1-4).

Rehoboam’s spiritual fervor lasted for only 3 years, and by the 5th year God was bringing judgment down upon his apostate kingdom! Shishak of Egypt would have destroyed Judah completely, were it not for the leaders’ response to God’s rebuke through the prophet:

Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and he said to them, “Thus says the LORD, ‘You have forsaken Me, so I also have forsaken you to Shishak.’” So the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is righteous” (12:5,6).

Rehoboam’s “dependence upon the Lord” was seasonal. He leaned “into God” during crises; but then fell “away from God” when the crises were past. His heart was not *consistently* devoted to the Lord. Nevertheless, God responded to his repentant heart:

When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves so I will not destroy them, but I will grant them

some measure of deliverance, and My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by means of Shishak. But they will become his slaves so that they may learn the difference between My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries” (12:7,8).

The kingdom of Rehoboam became subject to the rule of Egypt from that point until the end of Rehoboam’s 17-year reign. Already, the glory of the Solomonic era was fast slipping away.

We are beginning to see a pattern: Solomon’s heart was divided between God and women > His kingdom was divided and given away to Jeroboam. Rehoboam’s heart was divided between leaning into God in a crisis and leaning away from God during times of ease > His kingdom was divided and given away to Shishak. A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom. Take time to ponder the story of Rehoboam. Do you tend to trust God more in times of trouble, and less in times of ease? Does it take a crisis to get you on your knees? What would it take for you to become the kind of person who trusts in the Lord consistently, no matter what season of life you are in?

Jeroboam: A heart divided by fear: 1Kings 11-14

As a judgment against Solomon, God appointed his servant Jeroboam to take over 10 tribes to form a separate northern kingdom (“Israel”). *Jeroboam was promised an enduring dynasty IF he would walk in God’s ways (11:38).* Solomon knew about God’s plan to give Jeroboam the northern 10 tribes, thus he sought to kill him (11:40). Jeroboam fled to Egypt where he remained in exile until the death of Solomon.

After Solomon died, Jeroboam returned to Israel. He was with the national assembly in Shechem when they asked Rehoboam to lighten their load of hard labor. When Rehoboam rejected their request, the people rejected the rule of the house of David, turning to Jeroboam as their new king.

“It came about when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David” (1Kings 12:20).

Sadly, Jeroboam’s first move was to follow his own heart instead of trusting in God’s promise to give him an enduring kingdom; *“he said in his heart” (“he thought to himself” 12:26,33).* Jeroboam feared that the 10 northern tribes would reunite with the south

when they went to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. His solution was to invent a new religion for the north, complete with golden calves and two conveniently located worship centers at both ends of the northern kingdom. Recall that when the Israelites left Egypt, the people demanded Aaron make them a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32:3-5). Now, some 500 years later, Jeroboam had just returned from Egypt where he was again exposed to golden calf worship. He reinstated the very religion God had rescued the Israelites from 500 years before!

“Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt” (1Kings 12:28).

His sin of leading Israel back into the idolatry of calf worship set the standard for evil. The sins of future kings were measured by *“the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat”* (see 1Kgs.13:34; 14:16; 15:26,30; 16:2; 2Kgs.3:3; 10:29; 13:2; 17:21).

God had specifically promised Jeroboam his own enduring kingdom IF he would walk in God’s ways (11:38). Clearly, Jeroboam did not believe God’s promise could be trusted; thus, he took matters into his own hands in the attempt to secure his kingdom. Jeroboam’s heart was divided between trust in God and fear leading to self-preservation. How does FEAR divide your heart, pulling you away from trusting God? How does fear cause you to take matters into your own hands, instead of trusting God for the way forward?

An unnamed prophet from the south was sent to the north to pronounce judgment upon Jeroboam’s new religion. The very altar that Jeroboam had set up for worship at Bethel was split in half at the word of the prophet! Yet, even after hearing this word from God and receiving a personal miracle of the healing of his shriveled-up hand, Jeroboam still would not repent of his idolatry.

“After this event Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he made priests of the high places from among all the people; any who would, he ordained, to be priests of the high places. And this event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from off the face of the earth” 13:33,34).

Note: Tucked within the story of Jeroboam is the story of this unnamed prophet sent to rebuke Jeroboam. At first, the prophet was very careful to faithfully follow God’s commands concerning

his activities while up in the northern kingdom. But then he was deceived by an older prophet who came to him with a “word from the Lord” (that contradicted God’s earlier instructions). The southern prophet fell for this lie and ended up dying as a result! This story was included because it pictures the fate of the entire northern kingdom. They were deceived and led away from devotion to Yahweh, choosing instead to follow Jeroboam into the worship of other gods. As the unnamed prophet died for following the voice of deception, so also the northern kingdom would eventually die for abandoning God’s Word and following deceptive voices.

Often, we are pulled away from God’s will by deceptive voices that seem to be giving us a “word from the Lord” that points in a different direction. The apostle John wrote: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1John 4:1). When we think we have heard something “from the Lord,” we need to measure this new message against what God has already revealed to us. God is not a God of confusion or contradiction. This is why it is so important to have godly counselors in your life who can help you measure everything by the voice of the Holy Spirit and the revealed Word of God. Are you “testing the spirits to see if they are from God”?

Ahijah the prophet, who had been the first to announce to Jeroboam that he would become king of the north, now pronounced the end of the house of Jeroboam, even going so far as to point ahead to the certainty of the END of the northern kingdom because of their fall into idolatry (1Kgs.14:15,16). The circumstance of Ahijah’s prophecy was the illness of one of Jeroboam’s sons. Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself and go south to seek from the prophet Ahijah word as to their son’s fate. Ahijah was not fooled by Jeroboam’s wife’s disguise, immediately pronouncing judgment upon the *entire* dynasty of Jeroboam.

“I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bound and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone” (14:10).

What an irony is contained here. Jeroboam *would not* trust the word of the Lord through Ahijah the prophet concerning God’s promise of a lasting dynasty if he would walk in God’s ways; yet,

Jeroboam sends his wife all the way to the south to hear the word of the Lord through Ahijah the prophet concerning the fate of his sick son! Jeroboam only sought God's voice when there were no other options, or when he was backed into a corner.

Discussion Questions:

This message has focused on the theme: *A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom.*

1. What impacted you most as you thought about these 3 leaders with "divided hearts?"
2. Have you personally experienced the truth: *A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom?*
3. Solomon: His heart was divided by another "god" (women). What "gods" have you allowed to steal away a part of your heart?
4. Rehoboam: His heart was divided by seasons (turning to God in trouble; turning away in prosperity). Have you seen your faith in God waver in different seasons of life? How?
5. Jeroboam: His heart was divided by fear (his fear caused him to doubt God's promises and take matters into his own hands). How has fear captured part of your heart, causing you to try to control situations rather than relying upon the Lord?
6. Are there other observations or applications that you drew out of this part of the Bible?

Note: There are further thought/discussion questions in each of the boxes in the commentary.