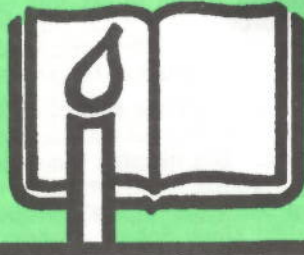


STUDIES IN THE BIBLE



The Divided Kingdom

Lesson 8

The death of Solomon ended the greatest period in the history of Israel, the **United Kingdom**. This was followed by the **Divided Kingdom** which lasted 388 years. At Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam ascended the throne. His subjects had long chafed under the heavy taxation of Solomon. Led by Jeroboam, a general of Solomon's, they asked Rehoboam to lighten their load. Rehoboam foolishly replied, "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke." (I Kings 12:14.) The people were so angry with this reply that ten of the twelve tribes revolted against Rehoboam and crowned Jeroboam as their king. Jeroboam's kingdom became known as the **northern kingdom** or Israel. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained with Rehoboam in the **southern kingdom** or Judah. (The little tribe of Benjamin was so small it was virtually swallowed up by the tribe of Judah.) II Kings and the last part of the books of I Kings and II Chronicles tell the complete story of the Divided Kingdom.

The Northern Kingdom Of Israel

The story of the northern kingdom is not a happy one. During its 253 years of history it had one bad ruler after another, not a single one of its 19 kings actually being "good". Nine dynasties or families of kings reigned during this time. Several kings were murdered and their places were taken by usurpers. Jeroboam was so afraid that the people would go back to Jerusalem in Judah to worship and desire Rehoboam for their king, that he set up two golden calves at Dan and Bethel for them to worship. So angered was God at his action that He sent Ahijah to him to predict the downfall of Jeroboam's house and the doom of Israel. The prophet declared, "The Lord shall smite Israel . . . and he shall root up Israel out of this good land . . . and shall scatter them beyond the river." (I Kings 14:15.)

After Jeroboam's death, idolatry became even more rampant than before, and under Ahab, the seventh king, worship of the idol god Baal was introduced. During its first eighty years the northern kingdom was almost continually at war with Judah. The ascension of Ahab to the throne sank Israel to its lowest depths. Ahab married a foreign woman, Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre. She brought along her idols and soon abolished the worship of Jehovah in Israel. It is doubtful that a more evil, unscrupulous woman is described in the entire Bible and Ahab was so spineless that he yielded to his wife's evil designs. God sent the



prophet Elijah to cry out against this idolatry. Elijah conducted a contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, and when they were proved false he had them slain. This intensified the determination of Jezebel to kill Elijah, but she never succeeded in her attempt.

Perhaps the best of all kings of Israel was Jehu who succeeded Ahab's son as king. With a ruthless determination he had Jezebel killed and Baal worship abolished. But his zeal ran out and he never did away with the golden calves set up by Jeroboam. Of most of the kings who followed Jehu it is said they "departed not from the sins of Jeroboam." Israel's political strength reached its greatest height since Solomon under Jeroboam II, but idolatry again grew worse. God carried out His promise made by Ahijah to punish and scatter Israel. In 722 B. C. the powerful Assyrian king carried the people of Israel into Assyria. They never returned. From this point the story of the Jews is that of the Kingdom of Judah.

The Southern Kingdom Of Judah

Judah was smaller and weaker than Israel. Yet, through its 388 years of history it remained much closer to God. Several kings were very good and on the whole the bad were not so evil as those of Israel. All were of the family of David. Judah began to decline under Rehoboam, but during the reigns of good kings Asa and Jehoshaphat a great revival swept the land. In the following years Judah borrowed the religion of Baal from Israel. It remained for King Hezekiah to completely root out idolatry. He and his great-grandson Josiah were the two best kings to rule Judah. But Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was as evil as Hezekiah was good. In his fifty-five year reign he introduced every form of idol worship he could think of and even burned his own children with fire as a religious rite. This caused God to promise through the prophets that Judah would be sorely punished for its idolatry. After Josiah became king he set out to bring the people back to God. When the lost book of the law was found in the temple, Josiah instituted such a religious revival as his people had never seen.

Following Josiah's death, Judah descended rapidly. All the remaining kings were bad and weak. Judah was soon made a "satellite" of Babylon, and when the kings dared to rebel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 606 B. C. carried most of the people into captivity as the Assyrians had done with Israel over 100 years before. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, governed a few that remained, but in 587 B. C. he too and most of the rest were also carried into Babylon. This punishment of God taught the Jews a lesson. Never again did they return to idolatry.

The Babylonian Captivity

The Jews remained in Babylon seventy years before any returned. Our Bible knowledge of the captivity is largely gained from the books of Daniel and Esther. While Daniel is a book of prophecy, it also contains much history and many fine stories such as the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions' den, and the handwriting on the wall. Esther tells us how a Jewish maiden became queen, and how she saved her people from almost certain destruction when they were about to be slain.

The Return

In 536 B. C. Zerubbabel led many of the Jews back home. He began a new temple to replace Solomon's which had been destroyed when Judah was carried into captivity. Ezra, the great priest and scribe, led another group back eighty years later and shortly afterwards Nehemiah returned with a third group to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The story of these returns is told in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. Not all the Jews returned nor was the Kingdom of Judah re-established after the return.

The book of Nehemiah ends the historical portion of the Old Testament, but from profane history we know that in the following 400 years before Christ the

Jews were ruled mostly by the Persians, Macedonians, and Romans except for a brief period of independence under the leadership of the Maccabees.

“Seek and Ye Shall Find”

In each blank write the name of the correct king of Israel or Judah:

- 1. Who was the first ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel?
- 2. What king of Judah burned his children with fire?
- 3. Who had the wicked Jezebel as queen?
- 4. What king was carried into Babylon as a captive?
- 5. What king was the son of Solomon?
- 6. In whose reign was found the lost book of the law?
- 7. Who killed Jezebel and abolished Baal worship in Israel?
- 8. Besides Josiah, who was the other great king of Judah?

Read the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18:17-40. Answer by true or false:

- 1. When Ahab saw Elijah he said, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”
- 2. The prophets of Baal numbered 275.
- 3. Elijah gave the people a choice between God and Baal.
- 4. The prophets of Baal cut themselves with knives until they drew blood.
- 5. Elijah built an altar with six stones.
- 6. Elijah commanded that four barrels of water be poured three times over the sacrifice
- 7. Fire from the Lord consumed Elijah’s sacrifice.

Read the story of Daniel in the lions’ den in Daniel 6. Answer questions by yes or no:

- 1. Did the presidents and princes persuade the king to make a decree forbidding worship to any man or god, except the king himself, for thirty days?
- 2. Did Daniel stop worshiping God when he heard of the decree?
- 3. Was the king glad that Daniel had disobeyed the law so that he could cast him into the lions’ den?
- 4. When the king came to the lions’ den in the morning had Daniel been eaten by the lions?
- 5. Were the accusers of Daniel cast into the den of lions?

Fill in blanks in the scripture quotations:

1. II Kings 21: 13,14 — “And I will stretch over the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a, wiping it, and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of mine, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies.”

2. II Kings 18:5 (speaking of Hezekiah) — “He trusted in the Lord God of; so that after him was none like him among all the of Judah, nor any that were before him.”

3. Nehemiah 6:3 (words of Nehemiah when asked to compromise while rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem) — “And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am a great work, so that I cannot down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”

4. Daniel 5:25 (the handwriting on the wall) — “And this is the writing that was written, MENE,, TEKEL.”

Student may write here any comment, question, or request.

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Name.....	Grade.....
Address.....	Date.....
City.....	By.....