

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-25 The Kingdom Splits in Two

Discontent was growing during the latter years of King Solomon's reign. To please his wives, he had introduced idolatry into the nation. He even built pagan shrines in sight of God's temple in Jerusalem! He imposed heavy taxes on the tribes to support his royal court. He also demanded that their young men and young women work in his palaces and cities. He was able to maintain national unity of the tribes, but upon his death the nation split in two.

Solomon's son Rehoboam scheduled his own coronation in the city of Shechem. Elders of the northern tribes met him there and made their requests. They wanted Rehoboam to decrease the taxes and forced labor imposed by Solomon for his building projects. They left, and for three days he talked with his father's advisors. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked them.

They answered, "If you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants" (2Chron 10:3-15).

But Rehoboam didn't listen to them. Instead, he consulted his young advisors. "How should I answer these people who say to me, 'Lighten the yoke your father put on us!'"

"You should tell them," they replied, "'My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'"

Have you ever experienced tensions between your generation and those who are older than you? Ponder for a moment what your culture teaches young people. What does this Bible story teach? Whose advice was godly?

Well, when the people returned, King Rehoboam answered harshly. He followed the bad advice of his young advisors. When the people heard the king's response, they decided not to follow him as king. They went home and made a man named Jeroboam their king. Jeroboam had been one of Solomon's officials. A prophet had told Jeroboam that God was angry with Solomon because of his idolatry. Therefore, God was going to divide the kingdom and leave only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in Rehoboam's control. Sadly, the 12 tribes of Israel were never again united.

Rehoboam raised an army to put down Jeroboam's rebellion. Shemaiah the prophet cautioned the king and his people, "Do not go up to fight against your brothers. Go home, for this is my doing, says the LORD." So they obeyed and went home, as Yahweh had ordered (1Kings 12:22-24).

God was judging the nation for the sins of Solomon and his leaders. God intended for Jeroboam to lead the northern nation, called 'Israel' or 'Ephraim,' in godly ways. But soon after he began to reign, Jeroboam did something that angered the LORD. He set up shrines for worship in Bethel, just north of Benjamin lands, and also far to the north in the city of Dan. In each shrine he placed a golden calf. He wanted the northern tribes to stay in the north to worship Yahweh, rather than crossing the border to worship in Jerusalem. This is why he set up these two shrines. But setting up golden calves was only a step away from encouraging idol worship.

God spoke through prophets to warn Jeroboam to change his ways. One prophet approached him as he was preparing to make a sacrifice at Bethel. The prophet cried out, “Yahweh says that this altar will one day be the place where pagan priests will be executed! As a sign from God, this altar will break apart.”

Jeroboam cried out, “Seize him!” But the hand he stretched toward the man suddenly shriveled up. The altar also broke apart. Then the king pled with the man of God, “Please intercede with Yahweh for me. Pray that my hand may be restored.” So the prophet prayed, and the king’s hand was healed (1Kings 13:1-6).

Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways. He continued to appoint priests from all sorts of people, rather than from the priestly tribe of Levi. He also set up pagan shrines here and there, in addition to the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. The name ‘Bethel’ means ‘house of God,’ but Jeroboam had made it a place of pagan worship.

The northern kingdom of Israel/Ephraim lasted for about 200 years, and had no righteous kings. The nature religions of the original Canaanite tribes continued to influence the northern and southern kingdoms. The people tried to combine worship of Yahweh and worship of Canaanite gods and goddesses. At this Yahweh was angry. He sent prophets again and again to warn the people to stop worshiping pagan gods, and to return to worship him alone. Two early prophets to the northern tribes were Elijah, whose name means ‘Yahweh is God,’ and Elisha, whose name means ‘God is salvation.’ For many years they announced God’s words and did God’s work in the northern kingdom.

The Bible teaches that greatness and power in God’s kingdom are not gained through pride, striving, or heavy-handed authority. Instead, Jesus said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mark 10:43).

This story is **important** because it recounts the sad necessity of the division of the Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms. It was sad, because the nation was no longer united. It was necessary, because God was judging the leaders and the people for their sins. He sent prophets to speak to them, but few paid attention.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God blessed Solomon with knowledge, wisdom, riches, fame, and pleasures, but held him accountable for his turning away from God. No one gets so high or so important that God’s laws and principles do not apply to them anymore.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What were the two main complaints of northern tribal leaders against Rehoboam? [Pause]
A. If you said, “People in the north were tired of Solomon’s high taxes and forced labor,” you are correct.
2. Why was it God’s will for the nation to be divided? [Pause]
A. If you said, “The division was God’s judgment on the sins of Solomon in his later years,” you are right.
3. How did God communicate his will to kings and people during the monarchy period? [Pause]
A. If you answered, “God sent prophets—sometimes men and sometimes women—to announce his good news or bad news,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Share the story of Solomon and his son Rehoboam with one of your close friends or fellow leaders. Consider what kind of conflicts may exist between people of your generation and the generation before you. Whose advice are you more likely to follow, your peers' or your elders'? Ask God to guide you through the godly counsel of your mentors and the Bible.

Memorize Proverbs 14:34: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." This certainly applied to Israel, and applies to people and nations today, as well.