

# Old Testament History

## The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 1

### Background:

#### Introduction:

The golden days of Israel were rapidly coming to an end. The nation that had once thrived under the leadership of kings Saul, David and Solomon was now teetering on the brink of economic collapse. Much of the problem was due to Solomon's extensive building programs throughout Israel, including building a temple in Jerusalem that could have easily been seen as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Completed in 960 BC, a year before his death, Solomon had managed to build a temple unlike any in the known world of his day. Thirty thousand laborers were sent to Lebanon in shifts to bring back cedar wood for the temple, in addition to cypress, cedar and olive wood. Seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stoneworkers labored seven years to build the magnificent structure. Bronze pillars twenty seven feet high adorned the entrance. Massive doors overlaid with handcrafted gold only added to the immense beauty of the grand temple. The interior walls were decorated with handcrafted figures of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, all of which was overlaid with finely crafted gold. The polished marble exterior was crowned with a cornice and freeze of gold that glistened in the sunlight and could be seen from miles around. The marble stone pavement of the courtyards were ringed by colonnades on all four sides, the most grand of which was simply called Solomon's porch.

However, soon after the death of Solomon the kingdom of Israel suffered an immense setback by the rise of two independent states – the southern kingdom of Judah (which included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), and the northern kingdom of Israel (made up of the remaining ten tribes). The cause for the rebellion that led to a divided kingdom was largely due to the crumbling economy and unbearable taxation. The people had simply reached the limit of their patience. Solomon's son, king Rehoboam (931-915 BC), disregarded the advice of the elders to reduce the tax burden. That was all Jeroboam (931-910 BC) needed to win the support of the northern tribes in declaring an independent state. Over the next 200 years Judah and Israel would be ruled by separate kings, worship at different locations, and were plagued by idolatry. Occasionally they would live side by side in peace. At other times they were at war against one another. However, having been weakened by this division, the peoples of Israel and Judah often formed alliances with each other as well as with their former enemies, such as the Philistines, Phoenicians, Syrians, and Egyptians, to protect themselves from the armies of the Assyrians, and later against the Babylonians.

During this dark period of history, God raised up prophets. Many of these prophets were contemporaries of one another – some doing their work among the northern kingdom of Israel while others appealed to those in the southern kingdom of Judah. Their purpose

was to urge the people and kings of both kingdoms to turn from their idolatry, lawlessness and rebellion against God, and return to obeying the Law of God and trusting in Him alone to deliver them from their enemies.

This divided kingdom continued until the northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyrian armies in 722 BC. Many of the survivors were carried away into Assyrian captivity and scattered throughout the empire. Approximately 113 years later, the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and quickly became the ruling empire throughout that part of the world. Finally, in 586 BC the southern kingdom Judah fell to the Babylonian armies and the city of Jerusalem and the great temple built by Solomon were both reduced to rubble. Many of those in Judah who managed to escape death were captured and scattered throughout the various regions of the Babylonian empire.

The major source for the history of this troubled period is found mostly in 1 and 2 Kings, which was believed to have been written around the time of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Additional records of this period of history are found in 2 Chronicles (chapters 10 through 36), and in the writings of the Old Testament prophets – beginning with Isaiah and Jeremiah, and ending with Zechariah and Malachi.

### Historical Notes:

During the early history of the divided kingdom, the Assyrian Empire was the greatest threat to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. Assyria was a major empire of the Ancient Near East that existed in various forms during a period of approximately nineteen centuries (c. 2600 BC to 605-609 BC). The early inhabitants of Assyria were



ancient tribesmen (Genesis 10:22) of the former Sumerian and Akkadian empires. The Assyrian capital was initially the city of Assur (Ashur), and later the city of Nineveh located on the upper Tigris River in ancient Mesopotamia. The Assyrians grew powerful enough in 1300 BC to conquer all Mesopotamia, and extended their empire as far southeast as ancient Babylon (including modern Bagdad), as far west as the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (southeastern Turkey), and as far southwest as the northern regions of Israel. For the next 700 years the highly skilled and technologically advanced armies of the Assyrians were the leading power in the ancient world.

The religion of the Assyrians, much like that of the Babylonians, emphasized worship of nature. They believed every object of nature was possessed by a spirit (polytheism). In addition to Ashur, the head of the Assyrian pantheon, other principal deities were Anu,

the god of the heavens and the king and father of lesser gods; Bel, god of the region inhabited by man, beasts, and birds; Ea, god of the waters; Sin, the moon-god; Shamash, the sun-god; Ramman, god of the storms; and Ishtar, the goddess of love, procreation and war. Lesser gods also were worshiped. In some cases, various cities had their own patron gods (such as the city of Ashur). The pagan idolatrous worship of the Assyrians was vehemently condemned by several prophets of the Old Testament (Isaiah 10:5; Ezekiel 16:28; Hosea 8.9).

All that exists of the ancient Assyrian empire are the many artifacts unearthed in the ruins of once great cities, including Assur and Nineveh.

## Outline:

- I. The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-14:31; 2 Chronicles 10:1-12:16)**
  - A. Background (1 Kings 11:31-32; 12:20-21; 14:21; 2 Chronicles 11:1; 12:13)
  - B. Cause of the Division (1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10:1 – 11:4)
  - C. Reign of Jeroboam in Israel (1 Kings 12:25-14:20; )
  - D. Reign of Rehoboam in Judah (1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 11:1-12:16)
- II. The Reigns of Two Kings in Judah (1 Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chronicles 13:1 – 16:14)**
  - A. Reign of Abijam (Abijah) (1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13:1 – 14:1)
  - B. Reign of Asa (1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14:2 – 16:14)
- III. The Reign of Five Kings in Israel (1 Kings 15:25-16:28)**
  - A. Reign of Nadab (1 Kings 15:25-31)
  - B. Reign of Baasha (1 Kings 15:32-16:7)
  - C. Reign of Elah (1 Kings 16:8-14)
  - D. Reign of Zimri (1 Kings 16:15-20)
  - E. Reign of Omri (1 Kings 16:21-28)

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## The Exposition:

- I. The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-14:31; 2 Chronicles 10:1-12:16)**
  - A. Background (1 Kings 11:31-32; 12:20-21; 14:21; 2 Chronicles 11:1; 12:13)**
    1. How many tribes made up the kingdom of Israel, also called the Northern Kingdom? (1 Kings 11:31)

2. How many tribes made up the kingdom of Judah, also called the Southern Kingdom? (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chronicles 11:1)
  
3. Who was the first king of Israel? (1 Kings 11:31; 12:20)
  
4. Who was the first king of Judah? Who was his father? (1 Kings 14:21; 2 Chronicles 12:13)
  
5. All the kings in Judah were the descendants of what king? (1 Kings 11:31-32; cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-17)

**B. Cause of the Division (1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10:1 – 11:4)**

1. What did Jeroboam and the congregation of Israel request of Rehoboam? (1 Kings 12:1-5; 2 Chronicles 10:1-5)
  
2. What advice did the old men give Rehoboam? (1 Kings 12:6-7; 2 Chronicles 11:6-7)
  
3. What did Rehoboam's young friends advise him to do? (1 Kings 12:8-11; 2 Chronicles 11:8-11)
  
4. What was Rehoboam's answer to Jeroboam and all the people, and what was the reaction? (1 Kings 12:12-17; 2 Chronicles 11:12-19)

5. What became of Rehoboam's tax collector? (1 Kings 12:18-19)
  
6. Explain why the tribes of Judah and Benjamin fought against Jeroboam? (1 Kings 12:20-21; 2 Chronicles 11:1)
  
7. What warning did the prophet Shemaiah give to Rehoboam? (1 Kings 12:22-24; 2 Chronicles 11:2-4)
  
8. What lessons can we learn from these events?

**C. Reign of Jeroboam in Israel (1 Kings 12:25-14:20)**

1. What purpose did the two altars at Dan and Bethel serve? (1 Kings 12:25-33; 13:1-3)
  
2. What did the man of God from Judah tell Jeroboam? (1 Kings 13:1-3)
  
3. What did Jeroboam offer the man of God? (1 Kings 13:4-10)
  
4. What was the lie told by the prophet from Bethel? (1 Kings 13:11-22)

5. Why was the young prophet killed by the lion? (1 Kings 13:23-32)
  
6. What was wrong with the priests Jeroboam consecrated? (1 Kings 13:33-34)
  
7. What message was given to Jeroboam's wife? (1 Kings 14:1-18)
  
8. Where are the rest of the acts of Jeroboam recorded? (1 Kings 14:19-20)
  
9. What lessons can we learn from the reign of Rehoboam?

**D. Reign of Rehoboam in Judah (1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 11:1-12:16)**

1. How is the evil committed by Judah described? Why? (1 Kings 14:21-22)
  
2. What did Rehoboam do to strengthen his kingdom? (2 Chronicles 11:1-13, 23)
  
3. Why did the Levites and those of other tribes migrate to Judah? (2 Chronicles 11:14-16)

4. How long did Judah walk in the way of David? (2 Chronicles 11:17)
  
5. How did the people of Judah provoke God? (1 Kings 14:22-24)
  
6. What did Shishak, the king of Egypt, do to Jerusalem? (1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chronicles 12:1-4)
  
7. What did the people of Judah and Rehoboam do to appease the wrath of God? (2 Chronicles 12:5-8)
  
8. Describe the relationship between Rehoboam and Jeroboam at this time. (1 Kings 14:30-31)
  
9. What are the lessons we learn from the reign of Rehoboam?

**II. The Reigns of Two Kings in Judah (1 Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chronicles 13:1 – 16:14)**

**A. Reign of Abijah (Abijam) in Judah (1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13:1 – 14:1)**

1. Describe the moral character of Abijah. (1 Kings 15:1-3)
  
2. What kindness did God show Abijah for David's sake? (1 Kings 15:4-5)

3. What was the relationship between Abijah and Jeroboam? (1 Kings 15:6-7; 2 Chronicles 13:1-3)
  
4. What warning did Abijah (Abijam) give Jeroboam? (2 Chronicles 13:4-8)
  
5. Who had Jeroboam cast out of Israel? (2 Chronicles 13:9-11)
  
6. What was the warning given to Israel about going to war against the Lord God? (2 Chronicles 13:12)
  
7. What did Jeroboam do in response to this warning? (2 Chronicles 13:13)
  
8. Why was Judah able to prevail over Israel? (2 Chronicles 13:14-19)
  
9. What are the lessons for us today?

**B. Reign of Asa in Judah (1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14:2 – 16:14)**

1. What are the acts for which Asa will be remembered? (1 Kings 15:9-15;

2. How long did Asa have peace? (2 Chronicles 14:5-6)
  
3. What steps did Asa take to strengthen his kingdom? (2 Chronicles 14:7-8)
  
4. How was Asa able to defeat the Ethiopians? (2 Chronicles 14:9-15)
  
5. What prompted Asa to make a treaty with Ben-Hadad of Damascus? (1 Kings 15:16-22; 2 Chronicles 16:1-6)
  
6. What was God's response to this treaty, and what happened to the prophet who confronted Asa? (2 Chronicles 16:7-10)
  
7. What message did Azariah give to Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin? (2 Chronicles 15:1-7)
  
8. What was Asa's response? (2 Chronicles 15:8)
  
9. What gathering occurred in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign, and what was the purpose of this gathering? (2 Chronicles 15:9-16)

10. What reforms did Asa make at this time? Where did he fail? (2 Chronicles 15:17-19)

11. How did Asa die? (2 Chronicles 16:11-14)

12. What lessons can we learn from these events?

### **III. The Reign of Five Kings in Israel (1 Kings 15:25-16:28)**

#### **A. Reign of Nadab in Israel (1 Kings 15:25-31)**

1. Describe the moral character of Nadab. (1 Kings 15:25-26)

2. How did Nadab influence the people of Israel? (1 Kings 15:26)

3. Why did Baasha kill Nadab? (1 Kings 15:27-28)

4. What did Baasha do to secure his reign as king? (1 Kings 15:29-30)

#### **B. Reign of Baasha in Israel (1 Kings 15:32-16:7)**

1. How long was the reign of Baasha and how is it described? (1 Kings 15:32-34)

2. What message did Jehu, the son of Hanani, give Baasha? (1 Kings 16:1-4)

2. What happened to Baasha, and why? (1 Kings 16:5-7)

**C. Reign of Elah in Israel (1 Kings 16:8-14)**

1. How did Zimri kill Elah? (1 Kings 16:8-10)

2. What was the first official act of Zimri? (1 Kings 16:11-13)

**D. Reign of Zimri in Israel (1 Kings 16:15-20)**

1. Why did the people of Israel make Omri commander of the army? (1 Kings 16:15-16)

2. Why did all Israel go to Gibbethon? (1 Kings 16:17-19)

3. How did Zimri die? (1 Kings 16:18)

4. How is the reign of Zimri described? (1 Kings 16:19)

**E. Reign of Omri in Israel (1 Kings 16:21-28)**

1. How was Israel divided in the days of Omri? (1 Kings 16:21-23)
2. Why did Omri buy the hill of Samaria and what did he build? (1 Kings 16:24)
3. How is the reign of Omri described, and why? (1 Kings 16:25-26)
4. What does the reigns of the previous five kings tell you about spiritual conditions in Israel?

**Application:**

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?

## A House Divided

### Historical Background of the Ancient Near East

The period known as the divided kingdom began in 931 BC and continued until the fall of Samaria in 722 BC under the Assyrians. After that, the southern kingdom of Judah existed alone. During the preceding years the Assyrians rose quickly to dominance in the Near East. Even though other nations and peoples were also important to the overall story, it is the history and events of Israel and Judah that is most important in the books of Kings and Chronicles. However, to fully understand the dynamics at play in the history of these two kingdoms, it is necessary to understand something of the nation's surrounding the people of God.

**Assyria:** Until the beginning of the Early Iron Age (1200 BC), Assyria (not to be confused with *Syria* or *Aramaea*) had remained fairly obscure following its early rise to power. However, under the rule of Shalmaneser I (1274-1245 BC), the Assyrians once again rose to become a dominant force in that region of the world. After conquering Babylon and other large territories around Assyria (ca. 1244-1208 BC), the Assyrian rulers were content to simply retain what they had, with little expansion. However, when one of their greatest leaders came to power, he immediately set out to expand the territories under Assyrian control. His name was Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 BC). As founder of the New Assyrian Empire, Tiglath-pileser expanded his control in all directions, with the exception of the southwest where the rising Aramaean states held his armies in check.

It was not until about 875 BC that the Assyrians were able to move beyond this stalemate and make serious incursions into Palestine. Shalmaneser III (859-825 BC) had many contacts with the biblical kings. But the real assault of Palestine, including the northern kingdom of Israel, was under the leadership of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC), also known as Pulu or Pul. He was able to break up the Aramaean alliance completely and carry off many prisoners. In fact, some of the Israelites from Galilee are numbered among his captives, according to both his record and the Old Testament. The actual attack on the capital city of the northern kingdom, Samaria, was made by Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC), who died shortly after conquering the city, although credit for the fall of the city of Samaria was claimed by his successor Sargon II (722-705 BC).

During this period, few attempted to challenge Assyria's supremacy, but by the end of the eighth century there were indications that their domination would soon end. Other nations, especially Media and Babylonia, were beginning to exert pressure on Assyria, and before another century would pass, the kingdom on the Tigris has passed from history. But Assyria's greatest importance from a biblical perspective was how God

raised up the nation as a rod in His hand to chasten Israel (Isaiah 10:5); this is why Assyria figures so prominently in the biblical narrative for this period.

**Egypt:** Egypt became an almost forgotten nation after the Eighteenth and Nineteenth dynasties, when Egypt had reached the pinnacle of prestige and power. During the Twentieth and Twenty-first dynasties Egypt had little or no contact with Palestine, or any other nation beyond its own immediate borders, except the Sinai Peninsula. However, during the Twenty-second dynasty, founded by Shishak (904-919 BC), Egypt began exercising its influence on that region of the Middle East. This famous Egyptian king led armies into Palestine as far north as Galilee, leaving behind steles and other markers in place after place and a full account of his activities on the walls of the Temple of Karnak in Thebes. However, the kings that followed Shishak were not as successful. The biblical record (2 Chronicles 14:8-11) tells how Asa king of Judah defeated the Egyptian armies that invaded Judah. This defeat caused the Egyptians to realize they were not as ready as they first believed to become a dominant ruling force in the region. It was not until the seventh century that Egypt would once again make a push into Canaan. But even this brief and ineffective incursion was largely accomplished with the permission of the Assyrians.

**Syria (Aramaea):** It is important to include in the history of this period a discussion of the Syrian (Aramaean) states that lay to the north of Israel. Syria (Aramaea) is not to be confused with the Assyrian Empire. The little kingdoms of Syria had come into existence largely through a migration of northern peoples into the region of Aram or Mesopotamia (not to be confused with the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers). These immigrants blended with the peoples already there, and by 1200 BC, became a formidable force. They remained generally independent of each other until the need arose to concentrate their forces to defend themselves. This was in the time of Tiglath-pileser I, who was unable to annex the Syrians. In fact, during the age after Tiglath-pileser, when Assyria receded somewhat, the Syrians took advantage and founded several settlements in the Tigris-Euphrates region to the east and as far as Cilicia in Asia Minor on the west. They also pressed south, so that by the time of Saul and David, there were several important states just north and east of Galilee, the most important being Hamath, Damascus, and Zobah.

With the revival of the Assyrian dominance in the region, and at the height of Solomon's expansion of Israel, these states were largely brought under the control of their neighbors. But once again, after the division of Israel, the Syrians became independent and, in the tenth and ninth centuries waged almost incessant war, especially with the northern kingdom of Israel. These conflicts are mentioned prominently in 1 Kings. However, following the conquests of Tiglath-pileser III near the end of the eighth century Syria disappeared from the world scene. It was not until the emergence of Syria hundreds of years later that the people there regained their autonomy. The important

contribution of Syria is not political but cultural. The Aramaic language and manner of life greatly influenced that part of the ancient world largely because of Syria's (Aramaea's) ideal location in the heart of the Fertile Crescent. By the time of Jesus the most dominant language spoken in all Palestine was Aramaic.

***Babylonia:*** The people of Babylonia remained an obscure footnote in the history of the world during most of the period commonly known as the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. However, almost unnoticed by the Assyrians, a rising threat began to develop in the extreme southern portion of the region, near the Persian Gulf. These people gradually extended their influence, though they lost almost everything along the way to the Assyrians. It was not until they formed an alliance with the Median kingdom to the north and east that these people began to rise to power at the end of the seventh century BC, and formed what would eventually become known to history as the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It would be under the rule of king Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) that the southern kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem with its grand temple would come to an abrupt end in 586 BC.

## The Assyrian Empire at its Height

