



# LifeLight

*"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4*

## 1 and 2 Kings

### LEADERS GUIDE

The faithful people around Elisha received God's blessings; those who rejected God's Word suffered because they worshiped Baal. This theme is already hinted at when Elisha watches God take Elijah up to heaven. The two of them had traveled to Jericho, which lay on the plains west of the Jordan River. From Jericho, they walked to the Jordan River and crossed to the other side, symbolically leaving the Promised Land. Elijah was taken up, but his cloak fell back down to the earth. Elisha picked it up, rolled it up, and struck the Jordan River with it. The waters of the Jordan parted to let Elisha reenter the Promised Land.

*Elijah Taken to Heaven*  
by Greg Copeland ©CPH.



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Cover illustration by CPH/Greg Copeland.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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## Introduction

### Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

### LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

*In-depth* means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

### LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

### LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

#### The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

#### The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

## The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

## The Small-Group Coordinator *(optional; the director may fill this role)*

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

## The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 55.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session;
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

## Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

## The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then

join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

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## Recommended Study Resources and Worship

*The Lutheran Study Bible*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxv–cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

*The Concordia Organist* is a 31-CD collection of pipe-organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.



# Promise and Disappointment

## 1 Kings 1–11

### *Preparing for the Session*

### Central Focus

Solomon is known for his wisdom, but true wisdom is the fear of the Lord. When Solomon stopped worshipping the true God, all his earthly wisdom proved to be of no use.

### Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. understand the difficulty in the transition of power after David's death;
2. learn both the promise of Solomon's reign and its unhappy ending; and
3. rejoice that God keeps His promises despite our sin.

**Note for the small-group leaders:** Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

### For the Lecture Leader

#### *Session Plan*

### Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, the history of Israel is a history of Your faithful promises. These Books of 1 and 2 Kings were written for our blessing and benefit; that through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in

Your Word. Open our minds that we may understand the Scriptures. Give us Your Holy Spirit that we may trust the promises You have given us through Christ Jesus, Your crucified and resurrected Son. Amen.

### Lecture Presentation

## 1 Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to the LifeLight Bible study of 1 and 2 Kings. This study may be different from others you have done, because the books we are studying are different than others in the Bible. These two books are historical; although they make important theological points, they do not reflect as obviously on theological themes as do some of the other books of the Bible, such as Paul's letters. Instead, the narrative in 1 and 2 Kings focuses on the actions of sinful human beings in the political life of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and on God's amazing ability to accomplish His purposes despite our human sin. If there is a single theme to keep in mind as you read these books, it is that God keeps His promises, even when we stand in His way.

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings are the second half of the history that begins with 1 Samuel. Interestingly, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book, as were 1 and 2 Samuel. However, they were written on scrolls, and a scroll could hold only a certain amount of writing and still function well. Samuel and Kings were long enough that each had to continue onto a second scroll, and when the books were translated into Greek, each scroll was considered a separate book. One need not read very carefully to see that 1 Samuel flows seamlessly into 2 Samuel, which likewise flows seamlessly into 1 Kings. The modern equivalent is a YouTube video series or a television miniseries. Neither 1 nor 2 Kings has a plot that is complete in itself; to understand the entire story, one needs to read the whole narrative from 1 Samuel 1 all the way through 2 Kings 25. Nevertheless, in this study, we will examine the second half of the story; that is, the Books of 1 and 2 Kings.

The histories in Samuel and Kings were constructed by one or more historians working with other written material. We do not know who the human author or authors of these two works are, but whoever wrote the

works clearly indicates the names of various sources that were used. Notes such as these help us to understand that the Scriptures, which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, also have an entirely human side to them. Just as Luke wrote his Gospel account after careful research, so the author or authors of Samuel and Kings wrote their works by using historical documents available to them. The Spirit did not simply put the author into a trance and convey otherwise unknown information in some kind of mystical experience (although we cannot rule out divine revelation of some information); instead, the Spirit used the author's specific skills and personality to compose the story of God's people so that we would benefit from seeing God fulfill His purposes despite human sin.

Much of the same story is told in the Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles as well. Whereas Samuel and Kings tell the entire story of God's people from the birth of the prophet Samuel to the exile of Judah into Babylon, Chronicles focuses on the lifetime of David and his descendants. Chronicles also includes significant material about the religious life of the people of God, especially the bylaws and worship orders for the temple that King David put together at God's command. On occasion, this study will refer to material in Chronicles but, by and large, we will let Kings stand on its own apart from Chronicles.

Finally, if you have not studied an Old Testament historical book before, you should be fairly warned that these are not sanitized Sunday School stories that conform to our notions about what is suitable material for discussion in civilized company. The stories we will read include political intrigue, sexual misconduct, and graphic violence. We should be careful not to judge God's Word against our own sensitivities or cast aspersions on these narratives because they are more violent than we like. At the same time, we may be able to reach a deeper understanding of the text by asking why the Holy Spirit would move the authors to include details that we would find unsettling or even offensive.

## 2 A Great King and a Promising Future

The narrative in 1 Kings begins at the very end of King David's life. The story of David's rise to power after Saul's death had been told in 2 Samuel, which also recounted the various rebellions that occurred while David was king. These included the attempt by David's son Absalom to take the throne of Israel and an uprising by people from the ten northern tribes, who attempted to throw off David's reign. The end of 2 Samuel sums

up David's accomplishments. When 1 Kings starts, King David is on his deathbed, being served by a young virgin named Abishag the Shunammite.

Several pieces of information are helpful for understanding the events of 1 Kings 1–3. First, the people of Israel had long experienced internal tension among the tribes. When the people had first entered the Promised Land, some of the tribes decided they wanted to settle east of the Jordan River, outside the area originally allotted to them by God. Because their settling east of the Jordan could have kept them from helping the other tribes conquer the Promised Land, some significant negotiations occurred to keep the twelve tribes working together. Later (Judges 8:1–3), Gideon had to deal with anger from the tribe of Ephraim after taking his tribe, Manasseh, into war against several surrounding nations. The judge Jephthah was in the same position years later. He led the tribe of Manasseh against the invading Ammonite forces, and the people of Ephraim came to him and complained. In this case (Judges 12:1–6), war broke out between the two Israelite tribes, and 42,000 soldiers from Ephraim were killed. The Book of Judges closes with an account of a bloody civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and the other tribes of Israel in which the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out.

By the time David was publicly anointed king, the tensions had developed something of a set pattern. (2 Samuel 2:1–4) David was first anointed king over Judah, and then (vv. 5–7) he invited the people of the other tribes to follow him. (Vv. 8–11) They, however, rejected his invitation and instead anointed Saul's son Ish-Bosheth as their king. (2 Samuel 3:1) The conflict resulted in a "long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." (2 Samuel 5) The war was finally decided in favor of David; after Ish-Bosheth was murdered, the tribes of Israel made their peace with David and pledged him their allegiance. However, the tensions between the northern tribes and the tribe of Judah never went away. In 2 Samuel 20, there is recorded the story of a man named Sheba, the son of Bichri, who tried to rally the people of the northern tribes against King David. His ploy failed, and it cost him his head.

A second important piece of information concerns David's sons. During the time that David was ruler over Judah, but not the other ten tribes, he had several sons by several wives. Six are mentioned in 2 Samuel 3: Amnon the son of Ahinoam (ah-HIN-oh-um) from Jezreel; Chileab (KILL-ee-ab) the son of Abigail (Nabal's

widow); Absalom the son of Maacah (daughter of the king of Geshur); Adonijah (ad-oh-NIE-jaw) the son of Haggith; Shephatiah (shef-ah-TIE-uh) the son of Abital; and Ithream (ITH-ree-um) son of Eglah. Because, at that time, the eldest son usually followed his father on the throne, we should expect that one of these men would become the king of Israel after David's death. However, as 1 Kings 1 makes clear, it was another son, Solomon, who finally took the throne.

We do not know all the reasons that David appointed Solomon to become king after him, but certain threads of the story are worth knowing. First, David's eldest son, Amnon, was killed by his third son, Absalom. Amnon had taken a liking to his half-sister Tamar, who was Absalom's full sister. Amnon schemed to have Tamar alone with him in his quarters, and then he raped her. Afterward, Tamar went and lived with her brother Absalom, who never forgave Amnon. Two years later, he threw a feast for the king's sons (that is, his brothers and half-brothers), and at the feast he had Amnon killed. Absalom then fled to his grandfather's house in a foreign country, where he stayed for three years. David, prompted by his lead general, finally called Absalom back to Jerusalem, but he would not talk to him. Absalom began to ingratiate himself with the people of Jerusalem, and after several more years, he seized power. In an act of utter defiance against his father, he pitched a tent on the roof of the palace and slept with his father's concubines in broad daylight. David fled Jerusalem with his forces and then turned to the task of putting down the rebellion. You may remember the story of how the rebellion ended: Absalom was riding through the forest when his long hair got tangled in a tree. David's general Joab found him there and ran him through with javelins.

That left Chileab and Adonijah (as well as their younger brothers Shephatiah and Ithream) to claim the throne after David's death. Chileab does not appear in the story after 2 Samuel 3. We do not know why he was not a contender for the throne, but we can surmise that he either died before he reached adulthood or was in some way unfit for the throne. Adonijah, on the other hand, claimed the throne as soon as his father's death was made known. As the oldest living, eligible son, he had a claim to the throne, according to the customs of the surrounding people. He was supported in his claim to the throne by Joab, who had been David's lead general, as well as an important priest named Abiathar (ah-bee-AH-thar). However, as you learned from the reading, King David named Solomon as the next king.

What is most interesting is that Solomon's mother is none other than Bathsheba, the woman who set up a bath in full view of the palace while her husband was away fighting war. Yes, David committed sin by inviting Bathsheba into his palace, but Bathsheba appears to have welcomed his affections rather than rejecting them. Reading between the lines, we can surmise that Bathsheba was well adapted to the scheming that goes on in a king's household. In fact, had Solomon been the first son of David to be born after David became king of all Israel (instead of just Judah), his claim to the throne might have been defended as well as Adonijah's. However, judging from 2 Samuel 5, Solomon was the fourth son born to David after the move to Jerusalem (assuming the names of David's sons in verse 14 are in birth order). Unless his three older brothers born at Jerusalem had died or were otherwise unfit, by human right Solomon had no claim to the throne. The fact that he took the throne points all the more to Bathsheba's cunning—at least, humanly speaking.

However, not every event in Israel can be explained by human reason alone. God has His own ways with His people, and Solomon's coronation as king is one example of God accomplishing His purposes despite—and sometimes through—our human sin. We don't know whether David ever made a promise that Solomon was to be king, but we do know that God loved Solomon. After the death of David and Bathsheba's first son, (2 Samuel 12:24–25) "David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the LORD loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD." Of no other son of David is it written that the Lord loved him—only of Solomon. Just as God had chosen David to reign in place of Saul while David was still a boy, God had also loved Solomon in a special way worth mentioning in the Scriptures. It would seem, then, that Solomon became king in Israel because God desired it—not because Bathsheba and Nathan were cunning enough, and not because Adonijah did anything wrong. Solomon had been chosen by God as the king, and so he took the throne after his father, David.

### 3 The Reign of Solomon

If King Solomon is known for anything, it is his wisdom, his wealth, and his temple. Chapters 3–4 of 1 Kings extol Solomon's wisdom and wealth, while chapters 5–8 describe the construction of the temple

and its dedication. What these chapters point to is the amazing promise that accompanied Solomon's reign. They paint a picture of Solomon as a son of David who was worthy to reign in David's place. He was wise; perhaps even wiser than David had been. He was faithful to the Lord, as David had been. He was wealthy because the Lord had blessed him with tribute from Israel's enemies. Times were good under Solomon; as 1 Kings 4:20–21 says, "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life."

This description of Solomon picks up on several themes and promises that appear earlier in the Scriptures. First, God had promised His people that they would find rest from their enemies. Just before they had entered the Promised Land some four hundred years earlier, the Lord had told them, (Deuteronomy 12:10–11) "When you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and when He gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make His name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the LORD." After the long, hard slog to inhabit the Promised Land, and after the chaotic period of the judges, life was finally settling down for the people of Israel. They had leaders who led them in faithfulness to their God. They had peace from their enemies. In a word, they were finally enjoying the wonderful peace that God had referred to in Deuteronomy. Solomon's reign looked as though it was ushering in the promised rest. After the death of such a great king as David, it would have been delightful to see God fulfill His promises through Solomon. Life was good.

Moreover, we know from 2 Samuel 7 that God had promised David a son who would build a house for God. You and I understand that prophecy as a reference to Jesus Christ, which it is. Nevertheless, the way the narrative flows in Samuel and Kings, the early life of Solomon points us back to that promise. David has a son on the throne, and that son is wise, and that son is building the temple that David longed to build. It is as if the promise God made to David is already beginning to be fulfilled. Or, to put the matter differently, if Solomon is already beginning to fulfill God's promise to

David, then his reign contains all the joyous promise of God's blessing that is expressed in 2 Samuel 7. The king is reigning, the enemies are subdued, and "every man [lived] under his vine and under his fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25). Life is good because God is good.

Unfortunately, human beings are not good, even when God is. Solomon's reign begins with amazing promise, but it ends with disappointment. If Solomon is famous for his wisdom, wealth, and temple, he may also be famous for his wives. All seven hundred of them! And let's not forget his three hundred concubines. (Yes, that is one thousand women that Solomon had to himself.) His wives got him into trouble. Solomon's first wife was the daughter of Pharaoh, an Egyptian princess. More than likely, the marriage between Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter was political in nature. Because Solomon ruled the most powerful nation along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and because his territory extended right up to the border of Egypt, it would make sense for him to marry Pharaoh's daughter and for Pharaoh to give his daughter to Solomon in marriage. Doing so would ensure Solomon that Egypt would not attack him from the southwest. He could concentrate his military forces on the small foreign nations that immediately surrounded Israel. Egypt, on the other hand, would have a firm ally in Israel, who would likely bear the brunt of any invasion from the northeast. The marriage gave each nation a safe border.

In any marriage, couples have to navigate a variety of differences in culture, family traditions, and sometimes even religion. Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was no different. Pharaoh's daughter probably brought with her the Egyptian religion. That might not have been an insurmountable obstacle, but (1 Kings 11:1–2) "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 people of Israel, 'You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.'" Solomon's love for his wives led him to build them the various idolatrous temples and high places that they wanted. He himself began to worship the false gods as well. Whatever Solomon's wisdom had been, and however faithful to the Lord he had been, both were finally eclipsed by his love for family. Rather than fearing, loving, and trusting God above all things, he loved his wives more than God.

## Conclusion

The Lord was not pleased with Solomon's idolatry: (1 Kings 11:9-10) "The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods." Solomon had no excuse, because he had the Word of God recorded in the Books of Moses and because God Himself had appeared to Solomon twice to seek his repentance. Solomon, however, remained impenitent. The Lord therefore told Solomon, (1 Kings 11:11-12) "I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son." God then sent the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam, one of Solomon's high-ranking servants, with the message that he would soon rule over ten of the tribes of Israel. Jeroboam had to flee Israel and hide in Egypt because Solomon tried to take his life.

Besides Jeroboam, God raised up other adversaries against Solomon as well. In the Old Testament, God raises up adversaries against the people of Israel when the Israelites are caught up in idolatry. Adversaries are always a sign of God's wrath against the people, just as

rest from their enemies is a sign of God's blessing on the people of Israel. We may not generalize this particular lesson to apply to us today. The promise about rest from enemies was made to the people of Israel concerning the time they would spend in the Promised Land. The promise was not made to any other nation (including the United States), nor was the promise made to God's people in other times and places. As Christians, we should expect to encounter opposition and persecution precisely when we are proclaiming the good news faithfully. However, in the days of the monarchy in ancient Israel, strong enemies were a sign of misplaced faith. Solomon's faith in idols had aroused God's anger, and so God raised up adversaries against him. What had begun as an immensely promising reign ended on quite a different note. Promise gave way to disappointment. Light gave way to darkness; though, as we will see in future sessions, the light had not gone out forever. Although they were sinful, God would preserve His people.

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## Concluding Activities

Speak a closing prayer, make any necessary announcements, and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

## The Dark Division

### 1 Kings 12:1–16:20

#### *Preparing for the Session*

#### Central Focus

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). The harsh words of Rehoboam had terrible consequences for the Israelites. Thankfully, the Lord always has a soft and gentle answer for those who humbly seek Him.

#### Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word, will

1. appreciate the implications of the division of the kingdom;
2. understand the social, economic, and political realities of the time; and
3. rejoice that God preserves His people despite our sin.

**Note for the small-group leaders:** Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

#### For the Lecture Leader

##### *Session Plan*

#### Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It’s especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

#### Prayer

God of all grace and compassion, who is ever abounding in love, look upon us with Your mercy. Show to us the same patience You showed to Your people in earlier times. Bear with us, for the sake of Jesus! Stir our hearts and minds through Your Word, that we may not fall away but, rather, that we remain faithful to You who has always remained faithful to us. Amen.

#### Lecture Presentation

### 1 Introduction

The installation of a new pastor is an occasion for joy and celebration. Whether the tenure of the previous pastor was marked by sinful conflict or joyful partnerships, whether it was marked by growth pains or the aches and pains of congregational aging, the installation of a new pastor opens the door for a new future. Questions abound. What will he be like? How good will his preaching be? Can he attract youth? Will he forget the older people? Can he make the church grow? Can he heal old wounds? Underneath those questions lie the hopes and dreams of God’s people in that place—the hope of finally having peace after years of fighting, the dream of having enough children to build a preschool or even a day school, the hope of finding new ways to share the good news of Jesus Christ with unbelievers, the dream of drawing inactive members back into contact with the Means of Grace in the fellowship of the congregation. With a new pastor comes the hope of a new, exciting future; that is why people get excited about installing a new pastor. But there also comes the possibility that human sin will shatter the hopes and dreams of the congregation; that is why many people greet the new pastor with just a bit of reservation.

The coronation of a new king held similar possibilities for the people of Israel. At the time of Solomon’s death, Israel had experienced nearly forty years of peace and prosperity under the wisest king ever to have lived. Many people could still remember great King David, during whose forty-year reign God had subdued the enemies of Israel and set the kingdom on sure footing.

For eighty years, the people had watched their kingdom grow from an insignificant nation often oppressed by their enemies to one of the most powerful kingdoms in the region. They had watched as their king's massive mining and construction operations, along with a significant trading business, raised their own standards of living. When Solomon died, the people would naturally have wondered, "Will Solomon's son Rehoboam keep the country headed in the right direction, or will things take a turn for the worse?"

At the same time, the oldest among the people might have remembered the long civil war between David and Saul's son Ish-Bosheth, a war that cost Israel many of its fighting men. Many more people would remember Absalom's rebellion, when King David actually had to flee his capital because his son had gathered a strong-enough force to take the throne for himself for a time. Even more people would have remembered the struggle for the throne between Solomon and Adonijah after David died. They would certainly have hoped for a king who was strong enough to guarantee a peaceful transition of power. Unfortunately, what Solomon's son Rehoboam had in bravado, he lacked in wisdom. He could—and did—talk of strength, but in the end he had neither the strength nor the wisdom to heal the old wounds that festered beneath the surface of the peace in Israel. In fact, he only rubbed salt in those wounds, and as a result, God's people were plunged into a deeper darkness than they had known for many years. The kingdom split in two, a division from which they would never recover.

In last week's reading, we saw that God was planning to tear part of the kingdom out of the hands of Solomon and his sons. Because of Solomon's idolatry, God raised up Jeroboam, a fellow Israelite from the tribe of Ephraim, as an adversary to Solomon. When Solomon tried to have Jeroboam killed, Jeroboam escaped to Egypt. He remained there until Solomon died. It appears that all of Israel was ready to receive Solomon's son Rehoboam as their king, but Jeroboam pressed the king to lighten the construction duties that Solomon had imposed on the people. In an act of utter foolishness, Rehoboam ignored the wise counsel of his father's advisors and followed the advice of the young men who had been raised in the king's court with him. He promised to make the load even heavier. (1 Kings 12:15) "So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that He might fulfill His word" about giving ten tribes to Jeroboam. The

ten northern tribes made Jeroboam their king, one of Rehoboam's officials was killed, and then the sabers rattled. Rehoboam gathered his forces to put down the rebellion. At the last minute, God intervened and told him to stand down. In the first wise move of his reign, he did.

## 2 Who Followed Whom?

To understand the remainder of 1 and 2 Kings, it is helpful to sort out who followed whom when the ten northern tribes made Jeroboam their king. The twelve tribes originally derived from the twelve sons of Jacob, whom God had renamed Israel. Those twelve sons were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher (Genesis 35:23–26). As you probably remember, Joseph was sold into slavery and finally turned up in Egypt. Years later, Joseph's brothers went to Egypt in order to purchase food because of a famine. The entire family subsequently moved down to Egypt, where they were eventually enslaved. After 430 years, God rescued them from slavery in Egypt and took them out into the wilderness of Sinai on the way to the Promised Land. According to Numbers 1, God commanded the people to travel through the wilderness organized according to their tribes. However, at this point, God reorganized the tribes a bit. The descendants of Levi were to march in the middle of the entire assembly, because their job was to care for the tabernacle (a sort of portable temple) and oversee the worship life of Israel. This left only eleven tribes, so the Lord raised Ephraim and Manasseh (the two sons of Joseph) to the status of full tribes. This division became the basis for the political organization of Israel when they conquered the land of Canaan. Unlike the other tribes, Levi received no specific territory; instead, the descendants of Levi were given towns scattered throughout Israel.

Levi's unique place was not simply a function of their role as caretakers of the tabernacle and leaders of Israel's worship. It also goes back to a prophecy Jacob (or Israel) made about his sons before he died. Genesis 49:5 and 7 reads, "Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. . . . Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." Jacob's curse arose from an incident that had happened many years earlier, in Genesis 34. A local prince, a native of the land, had raped their sister Dinah. However, the prince was taken with Dinah, so he and his father offered to pay the bride

price. Jacob's sons agreed, so long as all the men of the town would get circumcised. The men agreed, but (v. 25) "on the third day, when [the men] were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males." As a consequence of their deceitful brutality, neither Levi nor Simeon would have a fixed territory in the kingdom of Israel. Levi, as we have seen, received cities scattered among the Israelites. In fact, up until Joshua 13:33, the Bible refers to the "tribe of Levi" just as it refers to the "tribe of Judah" or the "tribe of Benjamin." However, after Joshua 13:33, the Bible stops referring to the "tribe of Levi" and speaks simply of "the Levites" or the "clans of the Levi" (except in a few prophetic verses). However, the Bible continues to use the phrase "tribe of" for the other tribes. Since the Levites had no inheritance in the land of Canaan, they no longer count as a "tribe" in the sense of a politically organized group with its own distinct identity within the larger nation of Israel. The tribe of Simeon, on the other hand, did receive cities that all lay in the same area, but when the territories for the various tribes were surveyed out in the Book of Joshua, Simeon received no territory per se. Instead, all of the cities received by Simeon lay within the territory of Judah. It seems that Simeon became politically integrated with Judah quite quickly, so that it did not form a separate tribe.

The account of the division of the kingdom in 1 Kings 12 indicates that ten tribes rebelled against Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and followed Jeroboam. That leaves two tribes, one of which is obviously Judah. In fact, 1 Kings 12:20 says, "There was none that followed the house of David but the tribe of Judah only." We would expect the other to be Simeon, since its cities lay within Judah. However, 1 Kings 12:21 indicates that the tribe of Benjamin was also loyal to Rehoboam. The tribe of Benjamin had its territory on the northern border of Judah and the southern border of the tribes that rebelled. For whatever reason, the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam, and they were even willing to fight for him to bring the northern ten tribes under his control. What is most ironic is that the tribes of Benjamin and Judah (from whom Rehoboam was descended) had once been at war themselves, when the son of Saul tried to keep David from taking the throne. From the time of Rehoboam on, Benjamin would have a unique role in the history of Israel: it would retain its status as a separate tribe, but it would be integrated into the tribe of Judah for political purposes.

The difficulty is that we now have three tribes in the south rather than two, and we have nine tribes in the north rather than ten. Probably the best explanation has two parts. First, because Simeon had become so politically integrated with Judah, the two were seen as simply one tribe. We have good evidence that Solomon had reorganized the administrative structure of the kingdom. In fact, 1 Kings 12:17 says that "Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah." That odd phrase suggests that the people of Simeon were under Rehoboam's rule by virtue of the fact that they lived in the territory of Judah. The second part of the best explanation is that the tribe of Manasseh was eventually counted as two. One part of the tribe lived east of the Jordan River in an area known as Gilead; the other part of the tribe lived west of the Jordan. Because the land area occupied by the tribe of Manasseh was so large and was divided by the Jordan River, future kings would view the two regions as distinct for administrative purposes. From the perspective of the author of Kings, who was writing after the events in question took place, separate political administrations could have translated into two separate tribes, which would give us the tenth tribe in the north.

### 3 Sunset in Israel

Once Jeroboam had been crowned king of Israel, he wasted no time in consolidating his power. His first move was to give his people an alternative religion so they would no longer have to worship in Jerusalem. His concern was not for their safety, but for their loyalty: (1 Kings 12:26–27) "Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.'" His response was to build two golden calves, one in the northern city of Dan and another in Bethel, which was situated at the southern end of his new kingdom, only ten and a half miles north of Jerusalem.

Golden calves are, of course, loaded with meaning. One appears in Exodus, where Moses' brother Aaron gave in when the people asked for an idol after Moses had been up on Mount Sinai for longer than they cared to wait. There, as here in Kings, the calf was worshiped as the gods "who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4). In other words, the god being worshiped at Dan and Bethel was probably still called by the name

“Yahweh” (YAH-way), the name God revealed to Moses in Exodus 6:3 (the King James Version translates the name there as “Jehovah,” but modern translations use the title “LORD” instead). This was still the God who had rescued the Israelites from slavery. The sin was not, therefore, worshiping foreign gods. It was, rather, worshiping the one true God in ways that God had forbidden. Three violations of God’s Law stand out in particular. First, once the temple had been built, God had dictated that the people were to worship Him there rather than anywhere else. By setting up shrines to compete with the temple in Jerusalem, Jeroboam was violating God’s command to worship in His temple alone. Second, God had clearly commanded that no graven images were to be made of Him. Erecting golden calves as a kind of visual representation of God therefore violated God’s command. Finally, through Moses and David, God had instituted very particular forms of worship for His people. He had appointed the sons of Aaron to serve as priests, and He had appointed the Levites to care for His temple. He had also appointed particular times of the year for celebrations. Jeroboam ignored God’s commands and created a festival “in the month that he had devised from his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33).

Jeroboam’s sin had at its root distrust of the very God who had given him leadership of the ten northern tribes. Having that power in his hands, he was not content to trust God to use him; he wanted to establish his own power and perhaps even his own dynasty. Indeed, when his son later fell ill, he persuaded his wife to disguise herself as an ordinary woman, take gifts to the prophet Ahijah, and inquire about his son’s likely fate. The news was grim: Ahijah saw through the wife’s disguise and announced not only that the son would die, but also that Jeroboam’s line would come to a gruesome end. Because Jeroboam had shown his lack of trust in God by erecting the golden calves and instituting his own religion, God was going to remove the kingdom from his family’s hands and give it to another.

#### 4 Lasting Results of the Division

The division of the ten northern tribes from the southern tribes had tremendous consequences for both nations for several hundred years. The Northern Kingdom took the name Israel, while the southern tribes that remained loyal to the line of David took on the name Judah (from which the word *Jew* would eventually be derived). The Northern Kingdom was by far the richer kingdom, with greater natural resources. The Southern Kingdom, by contrast, had fewer natural resources, a

more rural population base, and a correspondingly less prosperous economy. With their strength divided, both kingdoms would become more vulnerable to shifting geopolitical circumstances. They remained at odds with one another for most of the time that both existed; in fact, 1 Kings 15 tells us that Rehoboam and his son Abijam remained at war with Jeroboam during their reigns. More than likely, these were smaller military skirmishes over some part of the border between them. For instance, we know from other passages that various parts of the land given to Benjamin went back and forth between Israelite and Judahite control over the centuries. As time wore on, one kingdom or the other would ally itself with a foreign power in hopes of conquering the other. In the end, neither the Northern Kingdom of Israel nor the Southern Kingdom of Judah was able to reunite the twelve tribes of Israel.

#### 5 Sunset in Judah

Only five years into the reign of Rehoboam, Jerusalem was sacked by none other than the Egyptians. Whatever friendliness had existed between Egypt and Judah at the beginning of Solomon’s reign, when he had married the daughter of Pharaoh, had apparently faded by this time. Shishak (or Sheshonk), the Egyptian king who attacked Judah, had been the commander-in-chief of Egypt’s armies under Pharaoh Psusennes II. Shishak was well-connected; his son was actually married to Pharaoh’s daughter. When Psusennes died without a male heir, Shishak took the throne and established a new dynasty. He had aspirations to increase Egypt’s power and regain political control of Palestine (the territory along the Mediterranean coast that included the kingdoms of Judah and Israel). Apparently, Solomon’s power prevented him from expanding Egypt’s influence, which might explain why Shishak harbored enemies of Solomon, such as Jeroboam. However, Solomon’s death and the ensuing division of the united kingdom gave Shishak the power vacuum he needed. Some sources suggest that he seized on a minor incident as an excuse to march his armies into Palestine. Archeological records from the time list 154 cities that he destroyed. During the campaign, he even pillaged the temple in Jerusalem, robbing it of all the costly golden implements, including golden shields. Interestingly, ancient inscriptions indicate that Shishak’s son Osorkon I made huge contributions of gold and silver to Egyptian temples. Some scholars believe those contributions are the very plunder that Shishak brought back from the temple in Jerusalem.

Egypt's invasion would naturally have been a tremendous setback for the people of Judah. Within five years of Solomon's death, they could no longer enjoy the peace and security they had once known. The armies that had once kept them safe, and that had even exacted tribute from surrounding nations, were now in tatters. Their military had been reduced by half and more because of the division of the kingdom, and now their forces had to patrol two borders rather than just one. They were no match for the Egyptian forces. Whatever financial gain the people of Judah might have enjoyed from all of Solomon's trade was now controlled by the Northern Kingdom. Finally, the wealth that had been accumulated during Solomon's reign had been shipped off to Egypt. The sun had set on Judah's prosperity and peace.

However, the Scriptures are clear that this sunset was as much God's judgment against them as the impulses of international politics. Rehoboam followed in the footsteps of his father, Solomon, and even went beyond him in following the gods of the surrounding nations. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah the Ammonite, one of the many women who seduced Solomon into worshipping foreign gods. Whether under her influence or not, Rehoboam did nothing to keep the people from abandoning God. (1 Kings 14:23–24) "They also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land." The worship of these foreign gods provoked God to jealousy, and the Egyptian invasion was His response. Unfortu-

nately, Rehoboam did not repent of his idolatry or lead his people away from idolatry during his seventeen-year reign. In this sense, he was worse than Jeroboam. Jeroboam at least claimed to worship the God who had brought the people of Israel up out of slavery in Egypt, but Rehoboam permitted his subjects to do "according to all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel" (1 Kings 14:24).

## Conclusion

Thankfully, God's people did not totally abandon Him. Rehoboam's son Abijam reigned in Jerusalem for three years but followed in his father's footsteps. Abijam's son Asa, however, was cut from different cloth. He was a faithful worshiper of the one true God, and he used his position both to stamp out the false religions in Judah and to foster worship of the true God. He got rid of most of the male cult prostitutes, he removed all the idols previous kings had erected, and he even removed his mother from the position of queen mother because of her apostasy. The Book of 2 Chronicles gives us even more information, but the upshot is the same: except at the very end of his life, Asa was a strong king who led his people in the ways of the Lord God. As the darkness fell over both Israel and Judah, God used Asa to keep a glimmer of hope shining for His faithful followers.

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## Concluding Activities

Speak a closing prayer, make any necessary announcements, and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.