

UNIT 1: HISTORY OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

Lesson 1

September 6, 2026

Kingdom of Israel Divided:

Arrogance, injustice, and lust for power cause division.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Today's narrative marks a pivotal turning point in Israel's history. In Chapter 11, Solomon's disobedience – especially his idolatry caused by marrying pagan women – resulted in God's judgment that the kingdom would be divided after his reign. Chapter 12 fulfilled this prophecy as Rehoboam, Solomon's son, alienated the people with his harsh leadership, causing the ten northern tribes under Jeroboam to secede and form the Northern Kingdom. This division ushered in political and spiritual turmoil for Israel and Judah. These chapters show the importance of covenant faithfulness and the consequences of forsaking God.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During Solomon's reign, despite his renowned wisdom and devotion to God, he permitted the worship of pagan gods in Israel – a choice that carried terrible consequences. Swayed by his many foreign wives, Solomon permitted the construction of altars and high places for worship of deities such as Ashtoreth of the Zidonians, Chemosh of the Moabites, and Molech of the Ammonites. Idolatry violated Israel's covenant with God, leading to a gradual spiritual decline. This disobedience not only displeased God but also laid a dangerous example for future rulers, ultimately contributing to the kingdom's division and ongoing idolatry in Israel and Judah.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. WHY THE KINGDOM WAS DIVIDED: 1 Kings 11:1-13.

- A. Solomon's Disobedience to God's Commandments, (1-8)
- B. God's judgment and Promise, (9-13)

2. KING REHOBOAM'S FOLLY: 1 Kings 11:42 through 12:14.

- A. Rehoboam's Unwise Counsel, (11:42 – 12:11)
- B. The Kingdom Divided, (12:12-14)

3. KING REHOBOAM'S LOSS: 1 Kings 12:16-24.

- A. Division of the kingdom, (12:16-20)
- B. Divine Intervention to Prevent Civil War, (21-24)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. WHY THE KINGDOM WAS DIVIDED: 1 Kings 11:1-13.

A. Solomon's Disobedience to God's Commandments, 1 Kings 11:1-8.

King Solomon, renowned for his unparalleled wisdom and immense wealth, experienced a spiritual decline in his later years as he strayed from obeying God's commandments. Despite explicit warnings against intermarriage with foreign women who practiced pagan worship, Solomon formed alliances and took wives from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and the Hittite people. These relationships eventually led him away from his wholehearted devotion to the Lord. His affection for these women caused him to compromise his faith, tolerating practices (vv. 4-5). This departure from God's instructions marked a significant turning point in Solomon's reign, exposing the consequences of prioritizing personal desires over spiritual obedience. It is for good reason, therefore, that the Bible counsels Christians not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

In his act of disobedience, Solomon constructed "high place[s]" for the worship of foreign gods, including Chemosh, the deity of Moab, and Molech, the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:7). These altars were erected on the hills near Jerusalem, directly leading the people of Israel into idolatry and other sins. This was a blatant disregard for the laws God had established (v. 9). This failure to remain steadfast in his devotion to God not only marred Solomon's legacy but also set the stage for spiritual decline within Israel. Despite being endowed with wisdom, Solomon allowed his heart to be swayed by worldly passions, ultimately straying from God's righteous path.

B. God's Judgment and Promise, 1 Kings 11:9-13.

The Lord's anger was kindled against Solomon because he had turned his heart away from Him. God refuses to take second place to anything or anyone. Despite God's two appearances to Solomon and His explicit command not to follow other gods, Solomon disobeyed by indulging in idolatry (vv. 9-10). This conduct prompted God to proclaim judgment, stating that the kingdom would be torn away from Solomon (v. 11). Yet out of regard to David, Solomon's father, God chose not to enact this judgment during Solomon's lifetime. Instead, He decreed that the kingdom would be divided during the reign of Solomon's son (v. 12).

In addition, God declared He would not strip Solomon's lineage of the entire kingdom. For David's sake and out of reverence for Jerusalem, a city God had chosen, He decided to allow one tribe to remain under the governance of Solomon's descendants (v. 13). This action demonstrated a balance between God's justice, as He addressed Solomon's unfaithfulness, and His mercy, as He honored His covenant with David. This pronouncement became a critical turning point, foreshadowing the division of Israel's united monarchy, a significant moment in the nation's history and destiny. The event reminds us of God's steadfast justice and faithfulness to His promises despite our shortcomings.

King Solomon's story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of unwavering obedience to God. Despite his great achievements, Solomon's spiritual drift into idolatry greatly displeased God and brought severe consequences upon Israel. Solomon's life demonstrated

how compromising our faithfulness to God can lead to weakened devotion and spiritual decline. True obedience to God not only aligns us with His perfect plan but also brings genuine joy, peace, and a sense of purpose. Solomon's example teaches us that no amount of personal success or worldly accomplishments can replace a heart wholly devoted to God. By remaining faithful and steadfast in our devotion, we honor Him, receive His blessings, and avoid the painful costs of disobedience. Let us trust in His promises, seek His guidance daily, and stay committed to walking in His way with love and humility.

2. KING REHOBAM'S FOLLY: 1 Kings 11:42 through 12:14.

A. Rehoboam's Unwise Counsel, 1 Kings 11:42 through 12:11.

After the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne, inheriting the leadership of Israel. Almost immediately, Rehoboam faced a critical decision that would define the future of his reign. The Israelites, weary from the burdensome labor and heavy taxation imposed during Solomon's rule, sought relief. They called upon Jeroboam, who had previously fled to Egypt during Solomon's reign (12:2-3), to present their concerns. Jeroboam and the Israelites approached Rehoboam with a request to ease the harsh labor and high taxes imposed upon them. This moment presented Rehoboam with an opportunity to exhibit wisdom and compassion as a ruler. Initially, he appeared to handle the situation thoughtfully, requesting three days to deliberate on their appeal and seek counsel before making a decision (v. 5).

The older men who had served under Solomon offered Rehoboam wise counsel, advising him to heed the people's request and lighten their burdens. They rightly explained that such an approach would foster goodwill and earn the loyalty of the people, creating a stable and unified kingdom, (v. 7). However, Rehoboam rejected their advice and insisted turned to the younger men he had grown up with (v. 8). These younger advisors, lacking the wisdom and experience of the older men, said Rehoboam should increase the people's burdens to assert his authority and demonstrate his strength (vv. 10-11). Their recommendation reflected an immature and shortsighted perspective, prioritizing power over compassion. This decision led to division and ultimately disastrous consequences for Rehoboam's reign.

B. The Kingdom Divided, 1 Kings 12:12-14.

In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites approached the prophet Samuel, demanding that he appoint a king to rule over them because they desired to be like the other nations. This request displeased Samuel, but God instructed him heed their request while also warning them of the consequences of their choice. Samuel told the people that a king would impose significant burdens on them. He foretold that a king would conscript their sons into military service, and task their daughters with various forms of labor, and claim the finest portions of their fields, vineyards, and olive groves for his own purposes. Additionally, the king would take their best servants, livestock, and a portion of their flocks, effectively making them his servants. Samuel prophesied that when they eventually cried out for relief from the oppression of the king they had chosen, "the Lord will not hear you" (v. 18). Despite these warnings, the Israelites remained

determined in their demand for a king. Their insistence ultimately led to the very difficulties and hardships Samual had predicted.

Solomon established a powerful and prosperous kingdom, but his reign placed significant burdens on the people through heavy taxation and labor demands, leading to widespread discontent. When the people approached Rehoboam seeking relief from the oppressive yoke imposed by his father, he responded harshly. He ignored the prudent counsel of the elder advisors, who recommended easing the people's burdens to foster loyalty and unity. Rehoboam instead chose to heed the advice of his younger peers, declaring, "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastises you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:14). He intended to intensify their suffering rather than alleviate it. This decision further alienated the northern tribes, who were already discontented with the excessive labor and taxation under Solomon's rule. Rehoboam's refusal to address their grievances ultimately led to the division of the kingdom, as the northern tribes rejected his authority and formed a separate kingdom.

Rehoboam's story is a classic example of how things can go wrong when we ignore the advice of those with experience in favor of seeking popularity. Faced with a crucial decision, Rehoboam disregarded the elder's wisdom, opting instead for the aggressive tactics his childhood friends suggested. This choice backfired. By putting his ego above empathy, he alienated his people, leading to a split in the kingdom and generations of chaos. True leadership isn't about showing off power; it's about listening, understanding, and prioritizing others – traits Rehoboam lacked. His mistake serves as a timeless lesson, illustrating that poor decisions and unchecked pride can destroy unity, leaving a divisive legacy that will impact future generations.

3. KING REHOBAM'S LOSS: 1 Kings 12:16-24.

A. Division of the Kingdom, 1 Kings 12:16-20.

Dissatisfied with Rehoboam's refusal to ease their labor and taxes, the tribes renounced their allegiance, proclaiming, "What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse" (v. 6). This led the ten tribes to separate and establish the Northern Kingdom (referred to as Israel) under Jeroboam. Only Judah and Benjamin stayed loyal to Rehoboam, forming the Southern Kingdom, which became known as Judah. This split carried not only political consequences but also spiritual and cultural significance, resulting in a deep and enduring fracture in the unity of God's people.

The division of the kingdom of Israel was a direct result of Rehoboam's inability to heed wise counsel and Jeroboam's rise as the leader of the northern tribes. This momentous event was driven by the people's resistance to oppressive policies under Solomon and their desire for a ruler who prioritized their well-being. It illustrates the crucial role of wisdom, humility, and sound decision-making in leadership in sustaining unity and harmony within a nation. This division not only altered the course of Israel's history but also gave rise to many conflicts and significant religious differences between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. It stands as a

profound lesson on how poor leadership choices and arrogance can have far-reaching and lasting consequences for any society or nation.

B. Divine Intervention to Prevent Civil War, 1 Kings 12:21-24.

Rehoboam, the king of Judah, gathered an army of 180,000 warriors to fight against the house of Israel and restore a united kingdom under his rule. However, God sent a message through the prophet Shemaiah, instructing Rehoboam and the people not to go to war against their fellow Israelites. The directive emphasized that this division was somehow part of God's plan (v. 24). Rehoboam and his forces heeded the word of the Lord and refrained from attacking, thus averting a potentially devastating civil war.

This moment reveals the profound sovereignty of God and His unparalleled ability to coordinate human affairs to align with His divine purpose. By intervening through the prophet Shemaiah, God not only prevented unnecessary bloodshed but also showcased His authority over the trajectory of human events. The willingness of Rehoboam and the people to yield to God's command reflects the critical importance of obedience and trust in divine wisdom, particularly during periods of political tension and personal ambition. This decisive act of divine intervention preserved peace and provided an opportunity for both kingdoms to progress within the boundaries of God's overarching plan for His people, again demonstrating His unwavering commitment to their ultimate good and His eternal purposes.

The division of Israel after Rehoboam's rejection of the people's pleas for relief offers a valuable lesson about the importance of unity. When the kingdom split in two, it wasn't just a political and cultural separation – it also fractured the spiritual connection among God's people. This story highlights the importance of kind, thoughtful, and wise leadership while cautioning against the perils of pride and poor decision-making. Yet, even amid human failure, God's sovereignty prevailed. Through the prophet Shemaiah, God intervened to prevent a civil war, showing that His plans are always greater than human desires. This serves as a reminder for the church to prioritize unity, practice humility, and trust in God's guidance to work together for His greater purpose.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

A key (perhaps "the" key) to discipleship is learning to work together in love and unity with the people of God. We must never allow pride to preempt good decisions that can prevent divisions.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

As a local church raises up and trains leadership, it is important to hear the voice of multiple generations. Good decisions, however, should not be based only on personal friendships.

The United Kingdom of Israel (1050-930 BC)

As told in the Old Testament, the twelve tribes of ancient Israel, throughout most of their history, were not a united nation. They were more like twelve separate nations, who at times were allied with one another, and at other times were enemies or indifferent toward one another.

During the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, ancient Israel is referred to as “the united kingdom” because, during this time – with the exception of seven and a half years between Saul and David (2 Samuel 5:4-5) – the twelve tribes of Israel were united as one nation under one government.

The last two judges of Israel (Eli and Samuel) are not mentioned in the Book of Judges. Nevertheless, Eli, the high priest of Israel, was also a judge of Israel for 40 years and died when he was 98 (1 Samuel 4:15, 18). Then Samuel, who ministered as a prophet, priest, and judge, “judged Israel all the days of his life” (7:15), but the Bible does not tell how long he lived (25:1).

Samuel, ministering as priest for Israel, anointed Saul (11:14-15), and David (16:1, 13) to be the first kings of the united nation of Israel. Thus did Samuel, at God’s command (8:19-22), officially establish monarchy (rule by kings) as the official government of Israel.

After the time of the judges (1370-1050 BC), and before the time of the kings of Judah and Israel (930-586 BC), the united nation of Israel was governed by three kings: Saul (1 Samuel 13:21), David (1 Kings 2:10-11), and Solomon (1 Kings 11:42-43). Each reigned 40 years (1050-930 BC).

The twelve tribes of ancient Israel were united as one nation under the leadership of Moses and Joshua (1445-1370 BC). They were also united during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon (1050-930 BC). But they were not united during the time of the judges (1370-1050 BC), and they were not united during the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel (930-586). The twelve tribes of Israel remained a fractured and scattered nation after 586 BC, although many Jews came from exile and captivity to live in Judea and Jerusalem.

WORKSHEET

Warning Ignored

Roger Boisjoly was an engineer who worked for a company under contract with NASA. In 1986, Boisjoly tried to stop the launch of the Challenger space shuttle. He warned that the elastic seals in the booster rockets would not function in cold weather. Yet, the consensus of everyone at NASA was that the seals were fine. Ignoring the good advice of this one man resulted in one of the most tragic accidents in American history – the explosive destruction of the Challenger.

1. How did King Solomon personify the danger warned about in 2 Corinthians 6:14?
2. Why did Rehoboam choose to ignore the wise counsel of his father's advisors (1 Kings 12:6-13)?
3. Recall a time when you refused to heed wise counsel. What were the consequences?
4. As Christians, how can we distinguish wise counsel from bad advice?