

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

(925 – 586 BC)

(1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 10 - 36; Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-39, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Habakkuk, Isaiah 40-66)

Unfortunately, the once-united kingdom of Israel split into two. How did this happen? It all started with Solomon. On the surface, his kingdom appeared to be very prosperous. Unlike David, he did not engage in battle to enlarge his territory but used trade and marriages to wives from other nations to increase his power. His accumulated wealth contributed to his fame. Even the Queen of Sheba paid him a visit and was overwhelmed by his wealth and wisdom.

For tax purposes, Solomon divided his land into different administrative regions, each with its own governor. Sad to say, his wisdom did not prevent him from making basic mistakes. The people became embittered because of all the hard labor Solomon enforced and the heavy taxes he imposed on them to generate money for his building projects. He even began worshipping the foreign gods that his wives worshiped. The Bible states that because of this, “The Lord was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice” (1 Kings 11:9, *NLT*).

The Kingdom Is Divided (925 BC)

After Solomon’s death, a delegation from the people went to visit his son Rehoboam to ask him whether he was prepared to relieve their burden. After discussing it with his advisors, he answered, “My father laid heavy burdens on you, but I’m going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!” (1 Kings 12:14, *NLT*).

The southern tribes, whom Solomon had treated better, remained loyal to Rehoboam. However, Rehoboam’s threats became too much for the northern tribes, and they broke away in 925 BC to form an independent kingdom under the reign of Jeroboam, an official in Solomon’s court. The Northern Kingdom retained the name “Israel,” while

the Southern Kingdom became known as “Judah.” Israel had more territory and wealth, but it was situated on an important trade route and was therefore exposed to attacks from other nations.

In short, Solomon’s disobedience caused the division of the kingdom. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) consisted of 10 tribes and had 19 kings before they were taken into exile by Assyria. All 19 kings committed evil. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) consisted of 2 tribes and had 20 kings before they were taken into exile by Babylon. Eight of the 20 kings were good, while 12 were bad.

The End of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC)

The Assyrians lived in the region between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers (modern-day Iraq) during most of the Old Testament period. The Assyrian kingdom came into being in 900 BC and soon blossomed into a mighty empire. The Assyrians were cruel and relentless in war. In 722 BC they invaded Israel, which had slowly been declining politically and socially, and conquered the capital city of Samaria.

The reason why God allowed this to happen is set out in detail in 2 Kings 17: they continued to sin against God and ignored the warnings of the prophets. After the Assyrians conquered them, the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were taken into exile, never to return. After the Israelites were exiled, the Assyrians sent foreigners from different parts of the kingdom to inhabit the land (2 Kings 17:24), a practice that was meant to prevent uprisings in the conquered territories. The foreigners married the few Israelites who were not displaced, and this mixed race of Israelites and foreigners became known as the Samaritans. In other words, the Israelites were whisked off not because God was powerless but because they were stubborn.

The End of the Southern Kingdom (586 BC)

The Assyrian kingdom collapsed suddenly and unexpectedly in 622 BC when Media and Babylon (modern-day southern Iraq) conquered Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Babylon then became the new world power. More than a century after the fall of Israel, Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, acted foolishly and rose up against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, struck back forcefully against Jerusalem in 598 BC.

Jehoiakim’s 18-year-old son, Jehoiachin, succeeded his father. He, too, was unable

to offer resistance to Nebuchadnezzar and eventually had to surrender. After he and his supporters were taken to Babylon, the Babylonians appointed Zedekiah to reign in Judah. Zedekiah, Judah's last king, was under the impression that Jerusalem could never be destroyed and dared to revolt against the king of Babylon. Then the unthinkable happened: Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, was invaded and destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC.

Nobody ever expected such a tragedy to happen. Jerusalem was the city God Himself had chosen. The Temple was in the city. But even this special status could not save Jerusalem. The beautiful city, with its Temple, was completely destroyed. The people's persistent sins, despite all the warnings by the prophets, had caused the Lord to allow Jerusalem and the Temple to be destroyed (2 Kings 24:8–25:1). God's people were then taken to Babylon as exiles. In the next stop, we will see what happened during their time in exile.