



LEVEL 6
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LESSON 5

Imperial Academy Bible Lessons



The Divided Kingdom

The Divided Kingdom

Solomon reigned as king of Israel for 40 years. Because he submitted to God, the people of Israel experienced unmatched peace and prosperity. This is sometimes called Israel's "golden age." In Lesson 4, we learned that the rulers of other nations saw Israel as a model nation.

Solomon organized many projects: mines, fortifications, irrigation, parks, roads, public buildings and more. In order to pay for them, he taxed the people heavily. This became a burden on the people.

Israel reached its peak during the life of Solomon. After his death, it was never the same.

THE TURNING POINT

After mourning the death of Solomon, Israel gathered in Shechem, a city just north of Jerusalem, for the coronation of his son, Rehoboam, continuing the dynasty of David. But this was much less of a celebration than David's or Solomon's coronations.

Following his anointing, Rehoboam met with a committee of men representing most of the tribes of Israel. Their leader was Jeroboam, a well-respected officer in Solomon's court. In the previous lesson, we learned that God told Jeroboam he would

eventually lead 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel (1 Kings 11:26-40). This prophecy was about to become reality.

"Your father made our burden heavy, through taxation and labor," Jeroboam said. "If you make our burden lighter, we will serve you" (1 Kings 12:4). Taxation was a significant problem, but this was a bold demand and a veiled threat.

This was a crucial moment in the history of the nation. King Rehoboam told the committee to give him three days to make a decision. Rehoboam first wanted to ask others for counsel.

God inspired King Solomon to write that "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14). He also had Rehoboam's decision-making process recorded to show how important it is to talk to the *right* counselors.

Rehoboam went first to the older men who had counseled his father throughout his reign. "A wise king is a servant to the people," they told him. "If you lighten their load and treat them fairly, then they will gladly serve you forever" (1 Kings 12:7). This was good counsel from the wiser, more experienced men of the court. Rehoboam had an opportunity to do the right thing. Jesus Christ taught that

the person God gives the greatest authority is the one who is the greatest servant of those he leads (Matthew 20:26-27). God commands His kings to exercise balanced, fair authority under Him for the benefit of the people. Sometimes that means denying their requests, but sometimes that means listening and changing.

But Rehoboam decided to get another opinion. This time, he went to his friends (1 Kings 12:8). These younger men lacked the experience and wisdom of the older men and had different motivations. They gave the young king their own idea, which was the answer he wanted to hear.

“How dare the people insult you by making this request,” they chided. “Now is the time to establish your strength. Tell the people: *If you thought my father was strong, I will show you that I’m even stronger*” (verses 10-11). King Rehoboam called the committee back to him on the third day.

“My father made your taxes heavy,” he stated. “I will make them heavier! My father punished you with whips. I will punish you with scorpions!” (verses 12-14). Rehoboam had neglected not only the counsel of the wiser elders but of the wisest Counselor of all, God! He could have turned to God in prayer, seeking His perfect, righteous, balanced counsel. God tells us to reason with Him (Isaiah 1:18). The biblical account does not give any indication that Rehoboam sought God on this matter even one time. That too was a terrible mistake.

Do you listen to your parents, or do you often “take counsel” from your friends? Do you find yourself agreeing with and rallying to the opinions and thoughts of young people

broadcasting their “counsel” on the Internet and everywhere else they can get publicity? Or do you listen to the wise counselors God has given you? God does not inspire popular celebrities to give you good advice on your decisions and your life. But He does inspire the decisions and counsel of your parents. Learn the lesson God is showing you from the life of Rehoboam, and from your own everyday life. Don’t just take counsel, take the *best* counsel.

THE NATION DIVIDES

Following Rehoboam’s decree to the people, murmurings spread throughout the crowd. They were displeased with his decision. The nation was facing a crisis. Jeroboam saw it as an opportunity.

Just as God had prophesied in the days of Solomon, Jeroboam rallied 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel behind him. He led them to rebel



Rehoboam's advisers disagree on how the king should govern.

against and secede from the united kingdom that they had been part of for their entire lives.

Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:16-17). By Judah remaining under Rehoboam, God maintained His covenant to David that one of his descendants would always reign over Judah.

Rehoboam tried to keep the nation under his control and sent Adoram to the 10 tribes to collect tax payments. The people stoned Adoram, a powerful and deadly signal that they rejected him and rejected Rehoboam as king.

Rehoboam recognized that the 10 tribes were now in full rebellion. Fearing he might suffer the same fate as Adoram, the king fled the city of Shechem for Jerusalem, in Judah.

Rehoboam gathered an army of 180,000 men from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to fight a civil war and stamp out the rebellion of the other 10 tribes.

However, God had a different plan. He had prophesied that He would rip away most of the kingdom from Solomon's son because of sin. He had prophesied that Jeroboam would be the one to take control and would have the opportunity to lead righteously. (Read the story in 1 Kings 11.) So God sent the Prophet Shemaiah to Rehoboam.

“Do not take your armies to fight the northern tribes,” God commanded him. “Send your men home to their families. I have chosen to split my nation” (1 Kings 12:24). Although King Rehoboam had not sought God's counsel when it was most needed, he still feared and respected God. Therefore, he obeyed God and disbanded his armies.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

God ordained that Jeroboam would rule over the new northern kingdom of the 10 tribes of Israel (1 Kings 11:37). This became known as the kingdom of Israel, while the tribes of Judah and Benjamin became known as the kingdom of Judah. God had made abundant promises to Jeroboam, just as He had to King David, if he would do what Solomon and his son had failed to do: obey God's law (verse 38). Like He does with every person, including you, God gave Jeroboam every opportunity for success. Now it was up to Jeroboam to decide.

But now that he had power, King Jeroboam turned his back on obeying God's law. His attitude toward David's throne was wrong, even hostile (read 1 Kings 12). David had been a man after God's own heart. He had shown Israel how to follow God. God established an everlasting covenant with him. But Jeroboam rejected that rare and amazing example God established in David. He led his new nation of Israel not only against that example but against the true worship of God that it represented.

The Israelites had been keeping God's holy days. Every year they would go to the temple that Solomon had built in Jerusalem to keep God's commanded festivals. Jeroboam should have realized that worshiping the true God was far beyond anything he could interfere with. But he interfered with it. In terrible faithlessness and disobedience toward God, he calculated that he could empower himself by cutting off the people from Jerusalem, the house of David and the true worship of the true God. Relying on his own reasoning, Jeroboam counterfeited the holy days and



King Jeroboam and King Rehoboam

established new locations of worship. He had completely turned the people away from not only David's throne but David's God, the same God who had established him as king.

King Jeroboam set up golden calves in the towns of Bethel and Dan. He then sent messengers throughout the kingdom of Israel, proclaiming this message from the new king: "For many years you have been burdened by traveling long distances to Jerusalem. I have established one place of worship in the north and one place of worship in the south. I have erected golden calves, images of the gods that brought you from Egypt. Worship before them!" Rather than obeying God, rejecting the idolatrous golden calf, and doing what was right, the people turned away from God and began worshiping Jeroboam's satanically inspired counterfeits.

But even this egregious sin was not enough for Jeroboam.

God had established that the priests of Israel must come from the tribe of Levi. The priests educated and led the people in worshiping the true God. King Jeroboam feared that they would remain loyal to the line of David and the worship of the true God and would teach the people to do the same. So he declared that the priests would now be from among the "lowest of the people" (1 Kings 12:31). These were people who now owed him their positions. They were people he could control. And he himself would be the high priest.

This was a disastrous start for the kingdom of Israel. And for the duration of its 200-year history, it continued to reject the worship of God and the throne of David, and *not even one* of its kings was righteous. The sins of its leaders and of its people caused their individual lives to be miserable, their nation to be weakened, and finally the destruction and enslavement of the entire nation.

When Jesus Christ returns, He will establish peace and freedom around the world. How? Through destruction of false religion, the true worship of the true God, a true priesthood teaching and enforcing God's law, proper observance of God's holy days, and authoritative enforcement of God's government (read Zechariah 14:16-19).

GOD CORRECTS DISOBEDIENCE

King Jeroboam was burning incense as he led a pagan worship service in Bethel when a loud voice broke the silence.

"I have come from the kingdom of Judah with a message from God!" a man said firmly. The king and crowd stood in astonishment, as the man continued. "God says that a child

of the house of David will be born, and his name will be Josiah,” he prophesied. “He will come to this altar. But instead of burning incense upon it, he will burn the bones of these false priests!” (1 Kings 13:1-2).

This prophet was speaking about an event that would come to pass about 300 years later, after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. (Read about the amazing fulfillment of this prophet’s words in 2 Kings 23:15-17.)

The prophet then gave the kingdom of Israel and Jeroboam a sign that God would fulfill this prophecy: The altar would split, and the ashes would pour onto the floor (1 Kings 13:3).

Enraged, Jeroboam reached out to signal his guards to seize the man. But something was wrong. As he tried to let his arm down, it remained stuck in place. His hand began to stiffen and to grow increasingly wrinkled.

As Jeroboam fearfully looked at his hand, a loud crack filled the temple as the altar split apart, pouring ashes onto the floor. The king, his priests and the worshipers gasped.

Trembling in the face of such forceful power, Jeroboam begged the prophet to pray for God to restore his hand. The prophet fulfilled the king’s request, and God answered the prayer (verses 3-6). Even after Jeroboam had committed such great sins, God was merciful and wanted him to repent.

“I need to know more about what God has said,” Jeroboam told the prophet. “Eat with me at my own table and we can discuss this and come to some kind of an agreement.”

“I would not eat with you or drink water in this place, even if you offer me half the kingdom of Israel!” the prophet sternly replied. God had given him clear instructions

to avoid eating or drinking in Bethel and to take a different route home (verses 7-9). And God’s power to punish for disobedience had just shocked the crowd.

Having fulfilled what God had commissioned him to do, the prophet left the temple and began his long journey back to Judah. After a while, he stopped to rest and sat under an oak tree. Soon he heard the sound of hooves and saw an old man approaching on a donkey.

“Are you the prophet from Judah who spoke the message to King Jeroboam at the altar?” the old man asked.

“I am,” the younger man replied.

“You said the altar would crack in half, and it did,” said the old man. “I must know more about this prophecy. Come, eat, and we will discuss what God has said.”

“God has commanded me not to do so,” the man answered. “I must continue my journey.”

“Ah, but I am a prophet too,” the old man said. “God told me through an angel that I must find the prophet from Judah and feed you.”

The young prophet was confused. God had given him clear instructions. Why was this prophet telling him something different?

Clearly, he was lying!

The older man was a prophet from Bethel, part of a false religion. He wanted to get more information from this prophet of Judah, and even though he was a religious leader, he was willing to deceive him in order to get what he wanted.

A little uncertain and more than a little weary and hungry, the young prophet relented and followed the prophet of Bethel to his home, believing him more than he believed the clear, explicit instructions God

had given him personally. Perhaps he also believed that if it was wrong to go with him, God would understand and would not punish him for it.

The men ate and discussed the miraculous splitting of the altar, Jeroboam's withered hand, God's power, and what the future held for the kingdom of Israel. But then the old man began speaking in a loud voice. God was causing him to speak to the young prophet of Judah. Write down what he said to him as recorded in verses 21-22: _____

The young prophet began to fear. He finished eating and drinking, then hurriedly saddled his donkey and headed back down the road he had returned on, out of Bethel and bound for Judah once again. He had boldly delivered a message to the king of Israel about disobedience, and now he himself had been disobedient! Then he heard a fearsome, paralyzing roar. The last thing he saw was something big leaping toward him.

A lion killed the man from Judah instantly.

But the lion didn't kill the donkey nor eat the dead prophet. It remained next to both, a clear sign that this was punishment from God. The deceitful prophet was sad to learn what had happened and had to bear the guilt of what he had done for the rest of his life.

Those God uses, including prophets, leaders and every single one of us, must be

faithful and obedient to God in every detail. They must know when God is speaking to them and never let anything get in the way of obeying Him!

When King Jeroboam learned what happened, he should have realized all the more that he was not just dealing with a bold prophet, he was dealing with God! Yet he didn't learn from this and continued his wickedness.

"After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth" (verses 33-34).



The altar splits as a sign that God would fulfill His prophecy.

Read what God adds to this in 1 Kings 14:7-16. God had given Jeroboam a throne and an opportunity to lead the people of Israel away from wickedness. Yet he led them further into sin—then further still! God again spoke to Jeroboam, and notice whom He contrasted him against:

“You have not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in my eyes” (verse 8). Jeroboam’s great sin was turning from the throne of David and the God of David!

One of King Jeroboam’s sons, Abijah, died of a sickness. Jeroboam’s son and successor Nadab ruled for only two years before a conspirator named Baasha murdered him (1 Kings 15:25-27). Baasha killed Jeroboam’s entire family, and “left not to Jeroboam any that breathed” (verse 29). God’s prophecy against the house of Jeroboam came to pass. His dynasty had been destroyed.

The new kingdom of Israel had not been ruled by a righteous king. It never would be.

THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

Wickedness was also surging back in the young prophet’s nation of Judah. The kingdom still had a descendant of David on its throne, King Rehoboam, but he had not only failed to heed wise counsel and been forced to watch 10 of the 12 tribes tear away, but he also was failing to confront false religion in the nation, pursuing instead his own ideas and interests (1 Kings 14:21-24; 2 Chronicles 11:18-23). This caused the nation to suffer.

The split between Israel and Judah also caused yet another problem. Judah had none of the military assets that the kingdom

of Israel had taken with it, and some of the resources it did have were devoted to the border with Israel. But worse than that, by far, was the fact that the people of the nation were committing sins and practicing false religion. They did not have God’s protection!

In the fifth year of Rehoboam’s reign, military officers warned him that Egyptian forces were approaching with 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen and too many foot soldiers to count.

The Egyptian invasion swept across the land, conquering city after city. A massive formation moved toward Jerusalem. At its head was Pharaoh Shishak.

Years prior, Shishak had protected Jeroboam when King Solomon gave him a death sentence (1 Kings 11:40). Now he stood at the head of the Egyptian army facing Jerusalem.

The people of Judah who hadn’t been killed or conquered by Egyptian forces fled to Jerusalem and its fortified walls. The Prophet Shemaiah was among them. He was the man who had delivered God’s message to Rehoboam not to go to war with the 10 tribes as they seceded.

Shemaiah told the king and princes of Judah that the Egyptian horde would indeed overrun Jerusalem. It was punishment for the sins of the nation.

King Rehoboam and the other leaders recognized that they indeed had sinned. They repented, and God was merciful. Because they repented, He changed the fate of the nation. Rather than Shishak destroying the kingdom, he would force it to pay him tribute. The people of Judah

would learn from this hardship how much better it is to serve the true God rather than indulge in sin.

Shishak went through the city and ordered his troops to take every treasure and precious material. They took the famous ivory throne Solomon had used and other valuable treasures. They even raided the temple. The people of Judah were left alive, but they had to bear a great shame. Soon after losing the 10 tribes, they lost an enormous amount of wealth, including the best symbols of the glory the nation had enjoyed when it was united under Solomon.

Rehoboam died 12 years after the Egyptian invasion. His son Abijam ascended to the throne, inheriting a kingdom that was very different from the one his father inherited. He stood up for God and the house of David when Judah warred with Israel, but he ultimately followed after his father's many sins. God ended his life after only two years (1 Kings 15:1-8), another warning to the nation of where sin leads.

KING ASA

The next king of Judah learned from the poor examples of those who had reigned before him. Abijam's son Asa took the throne and used his power to oppose those who committed idolatry. Many, both weak and powerful, believed deeply in their gods and resisted the king, but he stamped out idolatry as much as he could and strove to turn the people to God's law.

Because of his efforts, Judah enjoyed peace for 10 years. During this period, Asa strengthened Judah's borders and army. Then God allowed his faith to be tested.



Shishak takes the treasures of Jerusalem.

The Ethiopian Army sent a force of 1 million men to attack the kingdom of Judah. Even after Asa had increased his number of soldiers to 300,000, they were outnumbered more than 3 to 1. The king knew that winning this conflict would take God's intervention.

“And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with you to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on you, and in your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let no man prevail against you” (2 Chronicles 14:11).

God answered this heartfelt prayer from King Asa. The Bible records that God smote the massive Ethiopian army Himself (verse 12). The people of Judah witnessed God's miraculous power to save those who obey and believe Him!

After their stunning victory, God sent the Prophet Azariah to Asa with a message. Read

Baasha still refused to repent. He continued in sin and died shortly after Jehu's warning.

Baasha's son, Elah, became the next king. But after two years, Jehu's prophecy came to pass. Baasha had ascended to power through a murderous conspiracy that "left not to Jeroboam any that breathed." Now another conspirator, Zimri, killed Elah and his entire household (verses 9-13). Another sinful king's dynasty was killed by yet another sinful king.

Zimri established himself as king. But after only seven days, the captain Omri led the army against Zimri. Inside his palace, Zimri knew death was inevitable. Enraged, he set the palace on fire and died in the flames (verse 18).

Omri then became king, and for 12 years, he "wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him" (verse 25). Verse 26 emphasizes that he, like every king of the kingdom of Israel before him, committed the same sins as the original king, Jeroboam. Because of this, the entire nation endured constant instability and suffering.

Jeroboam's great sin was turning the nation away from the throne of David (1 Kings 12:19). King David believed, obeyed, feared and loved God. He understood true repentance. He turned his nation toward God. God said that he was "a man after mine own heart."

But few of the kings of Judah and none of the kings of Israel learned from that precious example—or from the terrible example of Jeroboam and the other sinful kings.

This history of the early kings of Israel teaches important lessons.

First: Always learn from history. If these

kings had remembered and respected their nation's very own history, they would have recognized that obedience, like that of King David, results in blessings, and disobedience, like that of Jeroboam and most of the other kings, results in destruction. They would have recognized that God is quick to extend mercy to those who repent, even to the point of granting an *eternal* dynasty, as He did with King David.

Second: Realize the importance of David's throne. God inspired the biblical writers to emphasize not just evil, but the specific evil *example* of Jeroboam—and to emphasize not just righteousness, but the specific righteous *example* of King David. Exalting the example that God exalts spares thousands of lives, including yours, from misery and brings peace, abundance and growth.

Third: Heed God's warning. God sent prophet after prophet to warn sinning kings and sinning people to repent. They rejected God's warning, and they suffered the consequences. You make mistakes. King David made mistakes. But be like that righteous king and heed God's warning.

In our next lesson, we will look at one of Israel's most evil kings and one of the Bible's greatest prophets.

Divided Kingdom Word Search

P I L A K P V E V A V Q W C E L S B
R E H O B O A M S X B J E K E U U U
V Z H B B U J A L F D H E L X G Y U
A Q Z A J E Y T A X E S J U D A H S
O B V C I K N V I Q Q R C H S F F P
M M I Z C A R J U N A J A Y D Q J T
K A F J W O M T A T M I I Y K E L E
S U R G A P M E L M R A B T R R B H
G O N O O H C A H A I E O U N G C P
B A L K D A M Y Z S Y N S B V B J O
G V I O E A T A G K H A C J O U B R
N K L Q M S T F A F L K X I S R F P
I G L R A O T K B E T H E L H T E H
K K R N L R N J M E G Y P T E H X J
V W Y K I K A H S I H S E G C R I D
E D N B N O M A R F X L W B H O K X
U U E B E N Y S M X Q K E M E N K E
K S N H Y Q V K P A D A G V M E B F

ABIJAH
ADORAM
ALTAR
ASA
AZARIAH
BENJAMIN

BETHEL
DYNASTY
EGYPT
JEROBOAM
JERUSALEM
JUDAH

KING
PROPHET
REHOBOAM
SHECHEM
SHEMAIAH
SHISHAK

SOLOMON
TAXES
TRIBES
THRONE