



THE KINGDOM DIVIDED—ISRAEL & JUDAH

Reading: 1 Kings 11 & 12

Solomon Builds The Temple In Jerusalem

King David reigned for forty years. His capital was Jerusalem, yet the Tabernacle was at Gibeon and there the priesthood officiated, offered sacrifices and led Israel in worship to God.

As we saw in the last study it had been David's desire to build a House for God that He might dwell in the midst of Israel. However, God had refused David's request, saying instead that He would build him a house (2 Samuel 7:11-16). He promised to give him a son who would ultimately reign on the throne of David for ever and build a house of worship for all nations of the world. This prophecy pointed to the future work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, God did tell David that Solomon his son, who was to reign after him, would build a Temple, or House, at Jerusalem where Israel would come to worship God. The site is still a landmark well known to those who have seen photos of Jerusalem. It is that elevated, level area on the eastern side of Jerusalem facing the Mount of Olives.

Today the "Dome of the Rock", a Muslim holy place, stands there, and is the third most holy site in the Islam faith. Muslims believe that Mohammed, their prophet, visited this site. It is also the ancient Temple site, holy to the Jews, and we can appreciate therefore why there is such contention and bitterness between Arabs and Jews over this small section of land. Added to this, the major Christian faiths believe that they have some ownership of the city because of their "holy sites" associated with the life of Jesus.

With such diverse and antagonistic religious convictions all claiming Divine right to Jerusalem, it helps us to understand why it has become such a contentious issue politically. This is exactly what God foretold would happen—Jerusalem would be "*a burdensome stone for all people*" (Zechariah 12:1-3).

God told David that Solomon was to build the Temple at Jerusalem, so in the latter years of his life David gave Solomon a solemn charge: "*The Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it*" (1 Chronicles 28 & 29). After David's death Solomon commenced this great and glorious task. The Temple, though not large, was magnificent. The details are to be found in 2 Chronicles 2-7. The Temple in Jerusalem, together with the priesthood which attended there, became the centre of worship and instruction for the nation in their service to God.

The Kingdom is Divided (1 Kings 11-12)

In the latter years of his life, Solomon turned aside from wholly following God. He married foreign wives and accommodated their pagan worship by building temples for them in Israel. The sad details of his decline are found in 1 Kings 11. Because of his sin God sent a prophet to tell him that after his death the kingdom would be divided. Two tribes would be loyal to the house of David, whilst the other ten would establish their own kingdom.

After Solomon's death his son Rehoboam came to the throne. He threatened to increase the burdensome taxes that were already laid upon the nation and this foolish act caused a revolt of the northern ten tribes, led by Jeroboam (1 Kings 12).

From this time on, the nation was divided into two kingdoms:

The Kingdom of Judah. This consisted of the **two tribes** of Judah and Benjamin, and had its capital in **Jerusalem**. The kings who reigned over Judah were a continuous line from David. The worship of God continued in the Temple in Jerusalem and was officiated by the Priests and Levites as appointed by God.

The Kingdom of Israel. The other **ten tribes** first united under Jeroboam. Their chief city was **Samaria**. There was no one dynasty of kings ruling in the north and therefore there were often power struggles and assassinations, as each contender asserted his right to the throne. Not one of these kings was faithful.



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Lesson 15

The history of both kingdoms is recorded in the book of Kings, and 2 Chronicles also covers the exploits of the kings of Judah.

The End of the Kingdom of Israel

The kingdom of Israel in the north was built upon an apostate (= falling away from the true) religion centred in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26-33). This, together with the political greed for power, was the cause of hardship and suffering for the people.

God, however, did not forsake them, though they had turned their back on His commandments. In His mercy He sent prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, who pleaded with them to return to His ways, but very few heeded their call. Some of the books of the prophets, in particular Hosea and Amos, are a record of God's message to this northern kingdom.

Finally, God brought the mighty power of Assyria against them. They were overthrown in BC 720 and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire (see 2 Kings 17).

The Assyrians then brought people from other conquered countries and settled them in Israel. These people brought with them their false worship and with it also blended the true worship of Israel's God: "*They feared the Lord, and served their own gods*" (2 Kings 17:33). This confused false worship continued down to the days of Jesus. These people became known as the Samaritans (see John 4).

The Kingdom of Judah

Although the two tribes in the south maintained the Temple worship at Jerusalem, and though their kings were descendants of David, they too finally perverted the true worship of God and turned to idolatry. Many of the kings who ruled were not God-fearing men and only a few had the faith of David their forefather. Sometimes even the high priest himself refused to conform to God's prescribed form of worship.

God sent prophets to warn them that unless they heeded His words, He would send the Babylonians to destroy both the Temple and the city and take them far off into captivity. His warnings were largely ignored and the kingdom was overthrown by Babylon, only 130 years after Israel in the north had been overthrown by the Assyrians.

Jeremiah's Remarkable "70 Year" Prophecy

Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem during these last years of the kingdom of Judah and he constantly pleaded with his people to acknowledge their sins and return to God's ways. Failure to take his message seriously would result in God sending Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, against them. He would destroy their kingdom and Judah would be taken captive to Babylon for 70 years, after which time they would again return to their city (Jeremiah 25:8-12; 29:10-14).

The first invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar and the transportation of captives to Babylon took place in BC 606. It was in BC 536, exactly 70 years later, that Cyrus, king of the Medo-Persian Empire which succeeded Babylon, made a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:19-23).

In BC 586 Nebuchadnezzar made his final assault on Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, broke down the walls of the city, and took many more captive to Babylon. In BC 516, 70 years later, the Jews rebuilt the Temple again in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:15).

Thus this prophecy was remarkably fulfilled as history has proven.

God's Prophecy to Judah's Last King (Ezekiel 21:25-27)

The last king to reign on the throne of David in Jerusalem was Zedekiah. He was a wicked king, whom Ezekiel called "*a profane wicked prince*" (v25). He stubbornly refused to listen to the prophets' warnings, and was taken captive in BC 586 when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem.

Verse 26

"Remove the diadem, and take off the crown" Dramatically Zedekiah is told that his reign will come to a sudden and complete end.



Verse 27

“I will overturn, overturn, overturn it” The prophet emphasises the total ruin of the kingdom through this threefold repetition of *“overturn”*.

“Until he come whose right it is” There will not be a king on the throne of David again until Jesus Christ comes to take up that rightful position that God has promised him (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Luke 1:31-33).

“I will give it him” Here is God’s guarantee that He will perform this (cp Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32; Acts 3:20).

The Restored Kingdom Under Christ’s Rule

Jeremiah, living at the same time as Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, also spoke of the coming of Jesus Christ to reign on the throne of David over the restored Kingdom of Israel (Jeremiah 23:5-8, 33:15-16).

For these promises to be fulfilled it is necessary for Israel to be regathered and re-educated in the truth concerning the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah and King (Jeremiah 30:10-11; 46:27-28; Ezekiel 11:17-20; 37:21-28).

Prophecies Regarding the Regathering of Israel

To the Bible student God’s prophecies regarding Israel are an amazing guarantee that we can trust the Bible. God Himself has said that Israel is His witness in the earth: *“Ye are my witnesses,”* saith Yahweh, *“that I am God”* (Isaiah 43:1, 10-13).

Briefly consider some of these prophecies:

- Before they had entered the land of Israel, while they were still in the wilderness, Moses foretold their scattering among the nations because of disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:63-68). How accurately this prophecy has been fulfilled is clearly set out in the history of the Jews from AD 70 down to this present time.
- Moses also foretold their ultimate regathering from among the nations (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).
- The prophet Jeremiah clearly described this scattering and regathering (Jeremiah 30:10-11; 31:10).
- Jesus likewise foretold the scattering of the Jews as a consequence of the dreadful events of AD 70. Since that time Jerusalem has been under Gentile domination and the Jews scattered into every country of the world. It has only been in the last one hundred years or so that the Jews have begun to return to the land of their fathers. Jerusalem itself was finally retaken by the Jews in 1967 after nearly 2000 years of dispersion.
- Zechariah the prophet foretold that the Jews would return to their land and have control of Jerusalem before Jesus Christ returns (Zechariah 12:1-11).
- He foretold that Jerusalem would be in the hands of the Jews, but that it would be the source of international tension and all nations would converge on the Middle East for war prior to Jesus Christ revealing himself to the Jews (Zechariah 12:2-3, 9-10; 14:1-4).
- Ezekiel the prophet tells of this great war in the Middle East in *“the latter days”*, when the Jews will be resettled in the land of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8, 12). We witnessed the establishment of the nation of Israel in the land in 1948.
- Israel will return to the land in unbelief of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. They will only acknowledge this fact after he has been revealed to them and they see the wounds in his hands (Zechariah 12:10, 13:6).
- The apostle Paul speaks of the time when the Jewish people will have their blindness removed and they will then realise that Jesus is their Messiah (Romans 11:25-27; cp Isaiah 59:20-21).



Summary Points

1. Because Solomon forsook the ways of God the Kingdom was divided after his death (**1 Kings 11:11-13**). Rehoboam, his son, reigned over two tribes from Jerusalem, and Jeroboam ruled over the ten remaining tribes in the north.
2. The southern two tribes were known as the **Kingdom of Judah** and the northern ten tribes as the **Kingdom of Israel**.
3. The division occurred around BC 970 and the Northern Kingdom continued until about BC 720 when it was taken captive by Assyria and scattered (**2 Kings 17:6, 18, 23**).
4. The Southern Kingdom continued until BC 586 when Jerusalem and the Temple were finally destroyed and Judah taken captive to Babylon (**2 Chronicles 36:17-20**).
5. They remained in Babylon for 70 years as Jeremiah had foretold, and then they returned to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem (**2 Chronicles 36:21-23**).
6. God told Zedekiah, the last King, that there would be no king to reign on the throne of David until Jesus Christ should come to re-establish the Kingdom and sit upon that throne (**Ezekiel 21:25-27**).

Lesson 15 - Questions

1. Which son of David ruled over Israel after he died?
2. What did he build as the focus for Israel's worship?
3. The Kingdom was divided after Solomon. What were the names of the two divisions and how many tribes were in each?
4. When was the northern kingdom completely overthrown and by whom?
5. Which power overthrew Judah and took them into captivity?
6. What was God's message to the last king of Judah, and who alone has the right to sit upon the throne of David?
7. Jeremiah foretold how long Judah would be in captivity in Babylon. How long was it?
8. God, through His prophets, gave some amazing prophecies regarding the regathering of Israel. Give three examples of these prophecies, explaining how they have been fulfilled so far.