

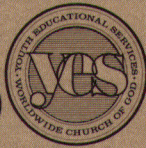
YOUTH



LEVEL 6

BIBLE

LESSONS



LESSON 6



Israel Becomes Two Nations

ISRAEL BECOMES TWO NATIONS

When Solomon's rule over Israel ended at his death, his son Rehoboam became the new king. He traveled to Shechem to be proclaimed king officially, although he had actually been Israel's new ruler from the time of his father's death.

During Solomon's reign, the people of Israel had paid heavy taxes. Hoping that Rehoboam would reduce their taxes, the people asked Jeroboam to be their spokesman to the new king (I Kings 12:1-3).

You may recall from the previous lesson that years earlier, God told Jeroboam that He would give him rulership over ten of the tribes of Israel. Jeroboam did not know how or when this would occur, but he was glad to talk with Rehoboam on behalf of the people.

When Rehoboam arrived in Shechem for the coronation, Jeroboam and the people pleaded with him. "Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy

father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee" (I Kings 12:4).

REHOBOAM'S FOOLISH DECISION

Rehoboam gave some thought to the people's request. He knew he should ask for counsel.

Everyone needs wise counsel before making important decisions. Without proper guidance and direction, a person can get into serious trouble, especially a king who is responsible for the lives of many people.

"Depart yet for three days, then come again to me," Rehoboam told the people. So the people left, hoping their lives would soon be better.

Rehoboam first asked the older wise men for their advice. These same wise men had counseled Solomon for many years. They knew that a true leader must *serve* his people. "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day," they told Rehoboam, "and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever" (I Kings 12:7).

In the New Testament, what did Jesus Christ say about how a ruler should conduct himself? Was His

ABOUT OUR COVER . . .

A map depicting the political divisions between Judah and Israel during the time of Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

Map by Ramona Karels

teaching similar to what the older wise men advised? To find out, read Matthew 20:20-27 and Mark 10:35-45. Then summarize the verses on the lines below.

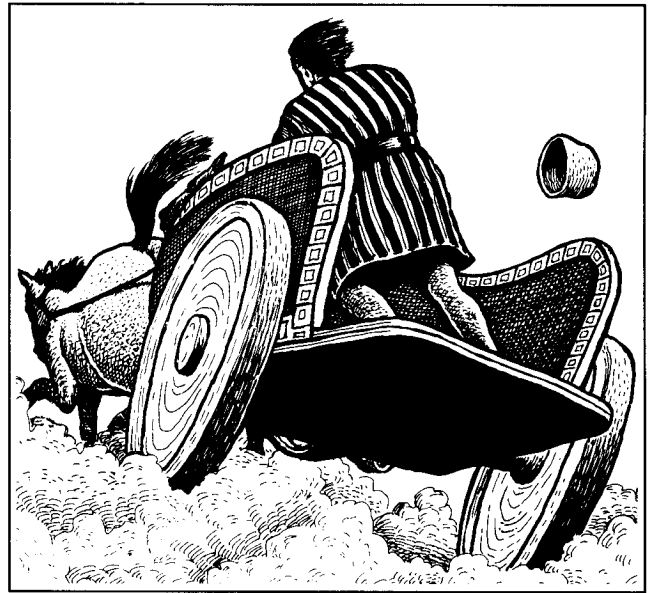
Rehoboam wasn't satisfied with the advice of the older men. He then asked the younger men whom he had grown up with for their advice. They advised him to increase the people's taxes. Although their counsel was unwise, Rehoboam decided to follow their advice. Do you like the advice of your friends, better than that of your parents?

When the people came back to him after three days, Rehoboam said, "My father gave you a heavy burden, but I'll make it worse. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions!"

Rehoboam wanted to *get* for himself, not *give* to the people. As a result, every tribe of Israel except Judah (plus part of Levi and Benjamin, the small tribe whose territory adjoined that of Judah) rebelled against Rehoboam.

Rehoboam sent his servant Adoram, the chief collector of the taxes, to speak to representatives of the ten tribes. But the people killed Adoram, making it very clear they wanted no part with Rehoboam. Fearing for his life, Rehoboam quickly fled in his chariot back to Jerusalem.

When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he immediately began assembling



Rehoboam quickly fled back to Jerusalem in his chariot.

soldiers. He intended to force the rebellious ten tribes of Israel to obey him.

God sent the prophet Shemaiah to Rehoboam to warn him not to fight against the ten tribes. He told Rehoboam, "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me" (I Kings 12:24).

TWO SEPARATE NATIONS

The ten rebellious tribes asked Jeroboam to be their new king. God used this rebellion against Rehoboam to fulfill His will, so that a large part of the children of Israel would be taken from the rule of Solomon's family (I Kings 11:11-13). Because of Solomon's disobedience and rebellion, God said years earlier to Jeroboam in I Kings 11:31, "I will rend [tear] the _____ out of the hand of _____, and will give _____ to _____."

The northern ten tribes that split away and formed a separate nation were from then on called by the title "Israel" or "House of Israel." The one tribe of Judah (with later additions from Benjamin and Levi) that remained under Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was called "Judah" or the "House of Judah."

Because of His promise to David, God left one tribe, Judah (plus part of Levi and Benjamin), under the sons of Solomon, in Jerusalem, so that a son of David might continue to sit on the throne of David over the children of Israel.

God had promised David, unconditionally, that the time would never come when he would not have a son or a descendant sitting on the throne ruling over the children of Israel.

REHOBOAM RULES JUDAH

Because of the revolt of the northern ten tribes, Rehoboam ruled a much smaller kingdom than he had hoped. He reigned over the House of Judah from its capital city, Jerusalem. Rehoboam decided to build up his defenses against the House of Israel and surrounding nations. He fortified many of the cities in Judah, putting captains over them and providing shields and spears for warfare. He did not trust in God for protection.

During Rehoboam's rule, he and the people displeased God. Judah committed many of the same sins that were committed by nations God had destroyed. The people of Judah even sinned as did those in the cities of

Sodom and Gomorrah during Abraham's time (I Kings 14:22-24). Turn to Genesis 19:24-25 to see how God dealt with the people in these cities. This shows how displeased God must have been with the people of Judah who were committing some of the very same sins.

Judah's sins brought much trouble on the nation. During Rehoboam's reign there was continual war between the House of Judah and the House of Israel.

When God is pleased with a nation's conduct, there is peace. But when nations break God's laws, there can be no peace. To have peace, people must live the way of peace, which is obedience to God.

During the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, the king of Egypt invaded the kingdom of Judah. God allowed this attack because the people of



Shishak, king of Egypt, greedily gathered the treasures from the king's palace and the Temple.

Judah had transgressed His laws (II Chronicles 12:2).

As Shishak advanced toward Jerusalem, Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah became worried. God sent Shemaiah the prophet to warn Rehoboam that Shishak would soon invade Jerusalem.

“Because you have forsaken me, I have left you in the hand of Shishak,” the prophet said, relaying God’s message to the king (II Chronicles 12:5).

Rehoboam realized that he and the nation had not been keeping God’s commandments. He was afraid God would let Shishak completely destroy the nation. So the king and leaders humbled themselves before God.

When God saw their humble attitudes, He was merciful. “They have _____ themselves; therefore I will not _____ them, but I will grant them some _____” (II Chronicles 12:7).

God decided Shishak should not destroy Judah, but only conquer it. When Shishak reached Jerusalem, he made the people of Judah his servants. Shishak greedily gathered the treasures of the king. He then pillaged God’s Temple and took its great treasures away to Egypt.

Jerusalem was so stripped of gold that brass became a precious metal. Rehoboam made shields of brass for his personal guard who once carried gold shields (II Chronicles 12:9-11).

ABIJAM, THE NEXT KING OF JUDAH

After ruling for seventeen years, Rehoboam died and his son Abijam

became king over Judah. Abijam was no better at ruling according to God’s laws than his father. Abijam ruled only three years in Jerusalem.

Abijam sinned just as his father had, but because of God’s promise to David, God allowed him to reign in Jerusalem as is shown in I Kings 15:4. “Nevertheless for David’s sake did the LORD his God give him a _____ in _____, to set up his _____ after him, and to _____ Jerusalem.” God’s promise to David was irrevocable—God does not and cannot lie! An heir to David’s throne had to always exist.

Not long after Abijam became king of Judah, there was a great battle between Israel and Judah. It was fought near the mountains of Ephraim in Israel. Although Abijam had only 400,000 troops and Jeroboam had 800,000 soldiers, Abijam’s troops won the battle. God allowed this victory and the death of 500,000 Israelites because the people of Israel had turned to idolatry and rebellion against Him. Israel under Jeroboam sinned even worse than did Judah.

The battles between Judah and Israel continued throughout Abijam’s reign. At his death, his son Asa became king.

JUDAH PROSPERS UNDER ASA

Asa had learned from seeing the trouble that his father’s sins brought upon Judah that a king must serve God. During the early part of his reign, Asa set the example by doing what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God (II Chronicles 14:2).

It must have been refreshing for the people of Judah to have a king who trusted and obeyed God. Read II Chronicles 14:3-5 and make a list of the things that Asa did that pleased God.

Notice how Asa removed the idols from the land. He even removed his grandmother from the royal court, because she was an idol-worshipper. Asa destroyed her idol and burned the grove of trees where she worshipped.

Asa also commanded the people to seek God, and to keep His commandments (verse 4). Because they sought the Lord their God, He protected the nation of Judah from enemy nations. God was watching over the people and they prospered (verse 7).

Seeing the wealth and prosperity of the nation, the Ethiopians decided to invade Judah. They were led by a man named Zerah who commanded over one

million troops. Asa realized such a vast army could easily overcome Judah's smaller army if it did not have God's protection. Judah's situation certainly appeared to be grim, but Asa knew that God is the Deliverer.

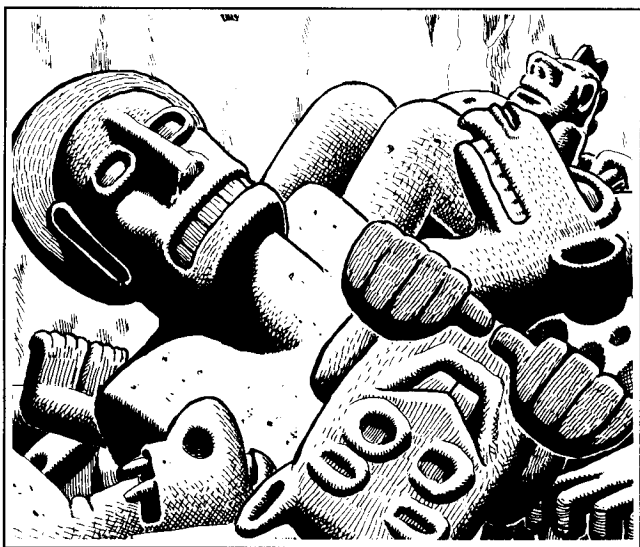
Asa cried out to God for protection. His earnest prayer brought God's help and deliverance. Read Asa's prayer in II Chronicles 14:11. "It is nothing with _____ to _____, whether with _____, or with them that have no _____: help us, O LORD our God; for we _____ on thee, and in thy _____ we go _____ this _____. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man _____ against _____."

In this eventful battle, God smote the Ethiopians. Zerah's invading army fled as Asa and the people pursued the survivors. The defeated army left much spoil which was collected by Asa and his soldiers after the battle was over. There was an abundance of treasure including large herds of sheep, cattle and camels (II Chronicles 14:12-15).

The victory God gave Judah against enormous odds shows how God can make a difficult situation work out for the good of those who trust Him. Instead of being defeated by the Ethiopians, the nation of Judah acquired great wealth.

ASA'S FAITH WEAKENS

In the third year of Asa's reign, a wicked man named Baasha became king over Israel. Asa was fearful that the nation of Israel would invade Judah.



King Asa commanded that all idols be destroyed.

Baasha did invade the northern part of Judah and seized the small town of Ramah, near Jerusalem. He moved in troops, supplies and building materials, intending to turn the city into a strong fortress. Baasha planned to use this location to keep people and supplies from going in or out of Jerusalem (I Kings 15:16-17).

When Asa was informed of what Israel was doing so close to the capital of Judah, he was quite perturbed. Rather than trusting God for protection, as he did when the Ethiopians attacked, Asa took matters into his own hands.

Fearful of Baasha, Asa decided to ally himself with another nation. He chose Syria because the two nations had been allies in the past. Asa sent treasures from God's Temple and his own palace to Benhadad, king of Syria. Asa was pleased when the king of Syria accepted the gifts and decided to break his alliance with Baasha and join Judah (II Chronicles 16:1-3).

This alliance displeased God, because it showed that Asa no longer trusted God for protection. God sent a message to King Asa by Hanani the prophet. God reminded Asa how He had delivered Judah from the huge Ethiopian army. Hanani told Asa that God was displeased at his foolishness for trusting man instead of God. God promised war for the remainder of Asa's life.

Asa became so angry at these words that he took the prophet and threw him into prison. He also oppressed some of the people (II Chronicles 16:10).

Have you ever noticed how a person

may get upset and then take his or her anger out on others who may be completely innocent? Asa should have repented, instead of punishing the prophet and oppressing the people.

God is able to deliver us from all kinds of difficult situations. And He will do so if we learn to trust Him. Your memory verse in this lesson is part of God's message to Asa. Read II Chronicles 16:9 and write out the verse. _____

_____.

Instead of repenting and turning to God, Asa continued trusting man rather than God. Near the end of his life, he developed a severe disease in his feet. Rather than trusting God to heal him, Asa went to the physicians. They were unable to heal him and he later died after reigning forty-one years over Judah.

A lesson we can learn from Asa is that we should always trust the Eternal. When we put ourselves in God's hands, He promises to deliver us. When we put ourselves in man's hands, things often go wrong. After all, man's power is nothing in comparison to God's!

JEROBOAM RULES ISRAEL

Up to this point, we have learned about some of the events that occurred during the reigns of the first few kings of Judah after the ten tribes rebelled against Rehoboam's leadership. Let's now learn what happened to the House of Israel.

As God had promised, Jeroboam became king over the northern ten tribes of Israel. Jeroboam knew from the beginning that God had given him rulership over the ten tribes. But he did not trust God nor obey Him. He was afraid that if the people followed God's laws and kept His feast days, they would return to Rehoboam.

So shortly after becoming king, Jeroboam removed the priests and Levites out of their God-given offices. They moved their families to Judah and Jerusalem to serve God there. In their place, Jeroboam appointed priests from every class of people. This was in violation of God's command that only Levites were to fulfill priestly duties. Many of the people Jeroboam appointed did not obey God. They helped to lead the Israelites into idolatry and rebellion against God.

After changing the priesthood, Jeroboam reasoned that he must give the people a substitute for the feasts which were held annually in Jerusalem. In Leviticus 23:39 God's command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles is recorded. The feast begins on the ____th day of the ____th month. But Jeroboam changed the feast to the ____th month on the ____th day of the month (I Kings 12:32), and said it no longer had to be kept in Jerusalem.

Why do you think Jeroboam did this? The people went to Jerusalem to keep God's feasts each year. Jeroboam feared that if the people of Israel observed the feasts in Jerusalem, they might turn back to Rehoboam. Read Jeroboam's

thoughts about this in I Kings 12:27. "If this _____ go up to do _____ in the _____ of the _____ at _____, then shall the _____ of this _____ turn again unto their _____, even unto Rehoboam king of _____, and they shall _____ me, and go again to _____ king of Judah."

Not only did Jeroboam attempt to alter God's festivals, he also made two calves of gold for the people of Israel to worship. He put one calf in Bethel in the southern part of his kingdom. The other he put in Dan, up in the north. The people of Israel began worshipping these idols and sacrificing to them (I Kings 12:28-31).

Deliberately turning people from the true God is a serious sin. God was very displeased with Jeroboam for leading the nation of Israel into idolatry. So He sent a prophet from Judah with a prophecy of what would occur in the future.

As Jeroboam stood before the altar at Bethel, he noticed the prophet with the message from God. The prophet proceeded to tell Jeroboam that a child named Josiah would be born in the future who would clean up the terrible state of pagan worship. These events were fulfilled many years later just as God prophesied (II Kings 23:15-17).

As a sign that the prophecy would come to pass, God promised Jeroboam that the altar would split apart. Notice this promise in I Kings 13:3. "This is the _____ which the _____ hath

_____ ; Behold, the _____ shall be _____, and the _____ that are upon it shall be _____ out.”

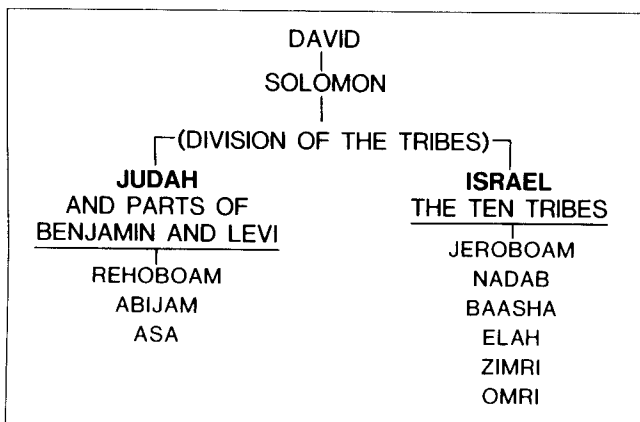
Jeroboam was furious at the message from God! He commanded his servants to grab the prophet.

“Lay hold on him!” Jeroboam shouted as he pointed to the prophet.

Then God intervened. The king’s hand pointing toward God’s messenger suddenly withered. Jeroboam couldn’t even draw it back to his body. At the same time, the altar split apart as God had promised and the ashes poured out from the altar.

Jeroboam was stunned by these events. After regaining his composure, he begged the prophet to pray that his withered hand be restored.

The prophet prayed and God mercifully restored the king’s hand. These dramatic events should have caused Jeroboam to turn from idolatry. But he did not change. Rather, Jeroboam continued to sin, causing more and more trouble for himself and the nation of Israel.



A chart showing the kings of Israel and Judah that are discussed in this lesson.

GOD’S JUDGMENT ON JEROBOAM

Soon after the incident at the altar in Bethel, one of Jeroboam’s sons became very sick. Instead of faithfully trusting God to heal him, Jeroboam decided to be deceitful. He told his wife to disguise herself and go to Shiloh and speak to Ahijah, a prophet of God.

“Don’t let him know who you are,” Jeroboam said. “Just find out what will happen to our son.”

As Jeroboam’s wife approached Ahijah’s house, God told the prophet who was coming.

“Come in, wife of Jeroboam,” the old prophet said. “Why do you pretend to be another person? I have bad news for you.”

“Go tell Jeroboam that evil will be on his house,” continued Ahijah. “God has said, ‘I gave you the kingdom. I exalted you from among the people. But you have done evil above all that were before you, for you have made for yourself gods and molten images. You have cast me behind your back. Therefore your family will die. You will have no heirs!’ ”

Concluding the message from God, Ahijah said, “When you return home, your sick child will die.”

God’s words came true. When Jeroboam’s wife returned home, the son died. Later, Jeroboam, who ruled twenty-two years over the nation of Israel, died also. Nadab, another of Jeroboam’s sons, would rule Israel for just two years. But after Nadab’s death, none of Jeroboam’s heirs ruled on the throne of Israel.

One of the major sins of Israel and Judah was idolatry. As we will learn in future lessons, idolatry and Sabbath breaking were two major sins that caused God to allow the House of Israel and the House of Judah to go into captivity!

God does not take idolatry lightly. Do you know why the first commandment is so important—why no one should have another god before the one, true God? Because without God none of us would exist and have the wonderful opportunity of becoming like Him and living forever as members of His Family. It is God who reveals a way of life that, if followed, brings us happiness and every good thing in life. Those who fail to keep the first commandment usually end up breaking many of the other commandments as well, bringing much misery and sorrow upon themselves.

God dealt severely with Jeroboam because he deliberately turned a whole nation into rebellion against God. Not only did Jeroboam deny himself and his family the blessings and happiness that result from obedience to God, he also denied them to the nation of Israel.

A MURDERER SEIZES THE THRONE

Instead of turning to God and putting away idolatry, Nadab followed in the footsteps of his father Jeroboam. The people continued to do evil in God's sight and worship false gods.

While Nadab and his army were laying siege to a nearby city belonging to the Philistines, a man named Baasha plotted to kill him and take over the

throne of Israel. Baasha's plan succeeded, and after murdering Nadab, Baasha proclaimed himself king and killed all of Jeroboam's heirs.

Baasha then moved the capital of Israel from Shechem (the capital city during Jeroboam's reign) to Tirzah and ruled the kingdom from there. Not having learned from the experiences of the kings before him, Baasha led the people of Israel deeper and deeper into sin.

God decided to send the prophet Jehu to Baasha and warn him of what would happen to him and his family. Read God's message to Baasha in I Kings 16:2-3. "Forasmuch as I _____ thee out of the dust, and made thee _____ over my people _____; and thou hast _____ in the _____ of _____, and hast _____ my _____ _____ to sin, to _____ me to _____ with their _____; Behold, I will take _____ the _____ of _____, and the _____ of his _____; and will make thy _____ like the _____ of _____ the son of Nebat."

A TRAGEDY REPEATS ITSELF

After reigning for twenty-four years, Baasha died. His son, Elah, became the next ruler. He lived as his father had lived, and ruled the nation of Israel for just two years. During his reign, Elah appointed one of his servants named Zimri as commander over half of his chariots.

But Zimri, wanting to be king himself, conspired against Elah. One

day when the king was in a dulled condition from drinking too much, Zimri treacherously murdered him and then proclaimed himself the new king.

As soon as Zimri secured Israel's throne in Tirzah, he immediately had all of Elah's family put to death. Jehu's prophecy to Baasha was fulfilled (I Kings 16:8-14). All of Baasha's male relatives and friends were killed!

KING FOR SEVEN DAYS

God allowed Zimri to reign for only seven days. When the people of Israel heard of his conspiracy and Elah's murder, they decided to choose another king. They picked Omri, their army commander, as the next leader of the ten tribes.

Omri and his troops marched toward Tirzah to remove Zimri from the throne of Israel. When Zimri saw Omri's army taking over the city, Zimri knew defeat was near. Instead of waiting for defeat, Zimri decided to burn down the royal palace. He died in the flames.

KINGS MUST OBEY GOD TOO

Terrible things can happen to people who turn from the true God. Some of the wicked rulers of Israel died in horrible ways. Jeroboam, Baasha and their sons wanted happiness. But when they forsook God and disobeyed Him, God also forsook them and did not bless them.

These wicked kings thought they could *get* whatever they wanted. They did whatever seemed right to them. Remember what is recorded in Proverbs 14:12: "There is a _____ which _____



King Zimri died in the flames when he set fire to the royal palace.

right unto a _____, but the _____ thereof are the _____ of _____."

The story of the kings of Judah and Israel is true but not always pleasant. Many of the kings' lives were not happy. Yet the lessons we can learn from these kings are very important.

God plans for each one of us to someday become *kings* and *priests*. He wants each one of us to learn how to rule according to His laws so we will be happy and so those we rule over will be happy, also.

Jeroboam, Baasha and the other kings we have studied about in this lesson did not heed God's warnings or learn from the bad examples of others. Let's strive not to make the same mistakes as did the kings of Judah and Israel.

In the next lesson you will learn more about the history of Israel and Judah. You will see that obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses to kings as well as to their subjects.

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BIBLE MEMORY

Proverbs 14:12

JUDAH AND ISRAEL

ASHER ✓	JUDAH
BENJAMIN	MANASSEH
BETHEL	NAPHTALI
DAN	REUBEN
EPHRAIM	SHECHEM
GAD	SIMEON
HEBRON	TIRZAH
ISSACHAR	ZEBULUN

Using a Bible Atlas, complete the map by writing the above names in their appropriate positions, noting that dots represent cities. The first name is filled in for you. Then, color all bodies of water blue, and show how Israel was divided by coloring Jeroboam's territory yellow, and Rehoboam's territory orange.

Map shows the borders of the tribes as promised by God.

