

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

The Age of Kings: What can history, even biblical history, possibly reveal to us about God? What was God up to in the reign of King David and his son Solomon? Why did God destroy ancient Jerusalem and send them into exile for seventy years? What relevance can the age of Old Testament kings possibly have in the life of a twenty-first century believer? Why did God speak prophetically to his people during this period of time? These questions and more will be considered in this class. We will explore together God's redemptive historical work revealed in the pages of scripture and see how the mission of the people of God both then and now has always been the same.

The objective of this class is: to gain an appreciation for the period of the northern & southern monarchies in the OT, and understand the relationship between the redemptive work of God and the events that unfolded during this specific time in history. Careful attention will be given to both the Davidic Covenant as well as the decline and exile of the people of God.

Introduction: This week we study together the life and death of Solomon and the Divided Kingdom. We will witness the turning point in his life as a vassal king, and will discuss the reign of his son, which is predominantly characterized by division. Never again would the house of Israel be united under one king. Never again will a unified covenant community have an earthly vassal sitting on the throne presiding over a geographically limited area to which the fullness of God's kingdom is confined.

Part One: *What is Crooked Cannot be Made Straight:* Last week we explored the commencement of the reign of king Solomon, the promised son of David who sought God for wisdom and gained riches and longevity of life. We noted the tell-tale verse of 1 Kings 3:3, "*Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father...*" it was during this time in which God was his heart's desire that he was used to build the magnificent house of God, the holy temple in Jerusalem. We do well to remember the promise that God covenantally made to David to establish his house after him forever, refusing to remove his mercy from him. He promised to chastise him with the rod of men in the event that his descendants reject God and fail to obey his laws. It is not long after that we see the extent to which this promise applies.

Our story today begins with the text, "*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods."* Solomon clung to these in love." There are two things that must be noted about this passage: 1) the weakness of the king was his love for idolatrous women; to these he "*clung in love*". One is reminded here of Samson, the strong judge (savior) of Israel whose one weakness was Philistine women. There is no doubt that both of their lives would have had different endings if they had been content with covenant marriages instead of foreign marriages. 2) It is also true that many of these wives were possibly political arrangements. After all, most kings in the ancient near east engaged in the same practice in an attempt to develop allegiances with surrounding nations. However, there is no reason indicated from the text that this was necessary since peace was sought after and obtained militarily during the reign of his father, David. It might have been important to maintain peaceful relations with the surrounding nations, but this did not need to be accomplished through intermarriage. Ultimately, Solomon married forbidden women because he *loved* them. Indeed, these women, "*... turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites*" (11:4-5).

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

Consequently, despite his numerous marriages, the end of Solomon's reign was not one of peace and tranquility. Verses nine and ten state, *"The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning these things that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded."* The Lord raised up the following adversaries to vex Solomon so that he witnessed prior to his death, the disintegration of the unity of the kingdom graciously gifted to he and his father by God.

The first adversary the Lord raised up against Solomon to chastise him with the rod of men was Hadad the Edomite. Interestingly enough, it was the military actions of his father, David, that created the scenario which gave rise to Hadad. Hadad was part of the royal household of Edom. During David's campaign against the Edomites, Hadad fled to Egypt, where he was cared for by Pharaoh. During this time, he developed a strategic connection with the Pharaoh, which resulted in him becoming his brother-in-law. After David's death, Hadad asked permission from the king of Egypt to return to Edom and from there he launched skirmishes against Israel.

Secondly, Rezon, the son of Eliada a leader of a marauding band of men who had fled from David when he attacked Hadadezer, the king of Syria. After David's death, Rezon became the king of Syria from Damascus and caused strife within Israel as well.

The final means used of God to chastise Solomon was Jeroboam. As was noted above, the other two aggressors (Hadad and Rezon) were both disenfranchised from the military exploits of King David. Jeroboam, however, was stirred to rebel at the instigation of God himself. Last week we referenced the fact that the role of the prophet and the role of the king grew side by side in ancient Israel, and that the prophet was used of God to inaugurate a new dynasty as well as reprimand the leader of the dynasty when he fell into sin. Once more, we witness the prophet Ahijah approaching Jeroboam, a young industrious man who was close to the court of king Solomon, with a prophecy. The text states, *"Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, 'Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes (but he shall have one tribe for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribe of Israel), because they have forsaken me... Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose... But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son, I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes, by keeping my statutes and my commandments as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever"* (11:29b-39).

Because of this prophecy, which Solomon somehow caught wind of, Jeroboam's life was in danger. Therefore, he fled to Egypt and remained there until the death of king Solomon. It is interesting that a near repeat of Saul and David occurred as a consequence of the sin of Solomon. Near repeat save for one extremely crucial exception: God's covenantal hesed. God had promised explicitly to David not to remove his mercy from David's descendants in the same manner that he had done from Saul and his

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

descendants. Instead, God will chastise David's son with the rod of men, and this rod just happened to be a potentially duplicate kingdom led by a divinely sanctioned king, Jeroboam. One may wonder, what is God doing? Will he truly have two kingdoms within his covenant community? It could well be that God was looking to preserve the integrity and purity of his OT church at any cost (save breaking covenant). If the creation of a second kingdom, ruled by a second divinely appointed dynasty was what it took to preserve the dominion of God, then so be it. However, we see a latent shimmering in Ahijah's prophecy, that such an arrangement would be both temporary and subservient to something that will one day happen in the Davidic dynasty. We see this in the statement, "...I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever..."

Part Two: Two Houses Apart – The death of Solomon witnessed a chain reaction that would result in the swift fulfillment of Ahijah's prophecy. Jeroboam immediately returned from Egypt where he had doubtlessly been hiding furiously waiting for the local daily post, checking the obituary column to see if King Solomon's name was listed. When he returns, he becomes the ring leader of a group of reformers who approach Rehoboam, Solomon's son and heir to the throne, with a request: lighten up! To place their request in the context of the reign of Solomon, it is true that he had increased taxation, military service and forced labor during his reign to accommodate the demand to build more and more temples for his idolatrous wives. Such demands made life difficult for the people of God. Jeroboam takes advantage of the opportunity to revolt and appears before the new king asking, "*Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore, lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.*" Rehoboam sends the people away for three days, and then responds roughly by declaring that he will be even more demanding than his father. His response was providentially orchestrated to be a catalyst for the fulfillment of the word of God. Jeroboam and his rebels departed from Rehoboam, and established the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The break was complete; God's word had been fulfilled.

One can speculate as to why Rehoboam chose to go with the advice of his peers instead of the advice of his father's wise counselors. Ultimately, it is an act of the providence of God. However, the secondary cause of such a choice can be attributed (perhaps) to an overinflated sense of value to God's kingdom rule among his people. The message to Rehoboam was strong: God does not need you, you need God!

When one considers the demand caused by the construction of idolatrous temples in the land, we quickly realize that the construction of the Jerusalem temple was only one use of indentured service. The people of God were not exhausted in the service of God and his kingdom, but they were exhausted by the creation of a system that demanded more and more of their time, talents and energy in idolatrous endeavors. To draw a pastoral application from this text to our own lives, we should heed a word of warning: programs and efforts that initially began for the sake of furthering God's kingdom purposes in the earth can become used for ulterior motives that will leave the people of God empty and depleted to the point of revolt. Indeed, at such time revolt is the best thing, the most godly thing that can be done.

After the initial rupture between Rehoboam and the remaining ten tribes (the Levites, house of Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to Rehoboam), Rehoboam assembled an army of 180,000 chosen warriors and prepared to go to battle. However, God spoke to the house of Rehoboam saying, "*You shall not go up or fight against your relatives, the people of Israel. Every man return to his home, for this thing is from me*" (12:24). The fact that Rehoboam obeyed and considered obedience to the word of the Lord

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

to be far greater than mending the unprecedented rift of a divided Israel is commendable and demonstrated the *hesed* of God working in the life of the king.

After Jeroboam established the kingdom in the north, he had the first of several weak moments. He had built Shechem and Penuel, and it was while he was staying at Penuel (*the face of God*) that he was distracted with the face of man. 12:26 reveals, “*And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will return back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam, king of Judah.’*” It is sad to hear such a statement, but all too familiar since it is undoubtedly a line of reasoning we have all engaged at some point in our lives: ‘If I give my life to God, then he might ask something of me that I do not want to do. If I remain faithful to the commands of God, people will think I am strange, and I will not have friends. If I allow the teaching of scripture to govern my ethics, I will not get ahead in my job.’ Such thoughts are in the same school of thought, the Jeroboam school of thought mentioned above. They are the same because they originate from the same source: the enemy of our souls.

Jeroboam failed to remember the reason he was given the ten tribes in the first place. He did not receive them because he was extremely talented, or because he was strong and a persuasive politician. He was anointed king over the northern kingdom because Solomon failed to honor God, and constructed shrines for idols. What does Jeroboam do? He makes two calves of gold, and places one at Bethel (*the house of God*), and the other at Dan. He declares before them, “*Behold your gods, Oh Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*” Note the redemptive historical acts ascribed to these idols of gold are the same as those associated with Yahweh: redemption from Egypt. It is because of such idolatry that Jeroboam will not long succeed as king of the north.

Part Three: Food for Dogs and Birds – The Lord was not pleased with Jeroboam because of his idolatrous actions. Indeed, from this point forward, there will be no other dynasty that is given the same covenantal prospect as was Jeroboam, but the house of Jeroboam will soon come to an end.

After a series of prophetic warnings (two to be exact) Jeroboam refuses to listen to God, and adds insult to injury by modifying the religion of God’s people, a religion that originated in God’s self-revelation. First he implements a sacrifice/feast to the Lord (golden calves) on the fifteenth day of the eighth month instead of the fifteenth day of the ninth month. This reorientation of the *feast of tabernacles* was more than presumptuous, it was blasphemous. Secondly, he ordains priests from the common people of the land and does not respect the fact that God ordained the tribe of Levi alone to sacrifice unto him. Consequently, scripture relates, “*...this thing became a sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.*”

Toward the end of Jeroboam’s reign, he had a son, his only son which would die a natural death and escape being eaten by dogs in the city and birds in the open field. This son’s name was, Abijah. This is significant for a reason that may at first not appear obvious. In Hebrew, Abijah means, YAHWEH (the covenant name of God) is my father. Why is this significant? If you recall one of the terms of the Davidic covenant, God promised that he would be a father to David’s son (2 Samuel 7:15). Jeroboam was promised by God through the prophet Ahijah that God would build Jeroboam a sure house if he obeyed him as did David. The name of the above son would seem to suggest (as would the other actions of Jeroboam previously mentioned) that Jeroboam wanted all the blessings of the covenant without any of the curses. If there was one song that pervaded his dynasty it would have been Sinatra’s, *I Did It My*

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

Way. Unfortunate for him, and for those whom he led into sin, his way was a pathway to death that could only be remedied by the sacrificial death of the Son of David, the true Son of God, whose death would atone for the sins of all God's children.

Conclusion: As we ponder the irreconcilable split that occurred in the life of God's covenant community, we might be tempted to ask why God never brought the northern kingdom back under the reign of the house of David after the death of Jeroboam. Again, the reason could be the same as that given for why God would allow a dual dynasty to begin with: to preserve the purity and integrity of the OT church. After the construction of the golden calves by Jeroboam, and the syncretized form of religion that grew up around them, absorbing the northern kingdom into the southern kingdom might have proven potentially dangerous to the purity of their faith. Attempts to do so were made, and some success in this regards was obtained by King Josiah, the king whose coming was foretold by one of the prophets mentioned this week. However, it would only be a matter of time before the kings of Judah would construct their own shrines for the worship of idols. This will eventually lead to the temporary exile of the people of God from the land of promise. As we reflect on the Divided Kingdom, we should remember that God often uses the seemingly disastrous occurrences in our lives to accomplish his good pleasure. Such a reality may not be made plain in Rehoboam's lifetime (or mine or yours), but when the redemption of God's creation is complete, all will be revealed, and we will glorify him.