

Summary for Session 13: Divided Kingdom—Part 1

Prep work: 1 Kings 12-22 and 2 Kings

DVD: From the outset, Jeff notes that this is a difficult period to learn about and keep straight in one's mind. However, it is crucially important to understanding two-thirds of the Old Testament (OT), especially when trying to figure out the role and message of the OT prophets. While the Book of Kings goes back and forth in describing the events of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, for simplicity's sake, Part 1 will cover the Northern Kingdom and Part 2 will follow the events of the Southern Kingdom.

While Solomon is on the throne, the prophet Ahijah finds Jeroboam, an Ephraimite working under Solomon, and gives him a message from God. Ahijah tears his cloak into twelve pieces and gives Jeroboam ten of them, symbolizing the ten tribes God will take from the line of David and give Jeroboam to rule. Ahijah tells Jeroboam that this will take place when Solomon's successor is on the throne, but it is because of the idolatrous sins of Solomon that the kingdom will be divided. When Solomon hears of this prophecy and tries to have Jeroboam killed, Jeroboam flees to Egypt for safety. Jeff pauses here to note that Jeroboam may have chosen Egypt for his refuge because, as an Ephraimite, he was part Egyptian (the tribe of Ephraim, from the clan of Joseph, whose wives were Egyptian). Jeroboam returns to Israel after Solomon's death.

With Solomon's death, his son, Rehoboam, ascends the throne. The tribes of the North come to him and ask if he will be as harsh to them as his father, Solomon, was.

Rehoboam consults both the elders and his peers, who give him very different answers. The elders tell Rehoboam to be a servant of the people and then they will follow him willingly. Rehoboam's peers, however, tell him to warn the people that he will be even harsher than his father. Rehoboam decides to follow the counsel of his peers and when the people hear his answer, they decide to rebel. Jeff stops to point out that it is in one verse (1 Kings 12:16) that a cataclysmic change occurs: the one nation of Israelites is now torn in two, with permanent ramifications. The Northern tribes, hereafter known as Israel, are led by King Jeroboam, and they make Samaria their capital. The Southern Kingdom is known as Judah, after the one tribe that remained with Rehoboam, and their capital is still Jerusalem.

With his new kingdom, Jeroboam has a problem: the center of their religion is still at the Temple in Jerusalem, now a foreign city. Jeroboam fears the people will remain tied with Judah because the religion is still centered there, so he decides to set up his own apostate religion, building golden calves, establishing new feast days, and setting up a new priesthood. The golden calves evoke the Israelites of Exodus days, who, under Aaron, set up the idol even while Moses was on Sinai receiving the Law from God. Jeroboam names his own sons after Aaron's sons, setting himself up as the new Aaron of this apostate religion. Jeff emphasizes the idea that when we renounce the leadership of God, we are left with a void that must be filled. We will look for leadership elsewhere, or make ourselves the authority. Jeff points out the importance of recognizing the Magisterium as the leadership of God in the Church today, and the hazards of forsaking God's design.

Besides Israel setting up its own religion, Jeff remarks on some other differences

between the kingdoms. One of these is the fact that the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy is through David's line, in Judah. Comparing the ruling authorities in the kingdoms, we can note that Judah has an established authority, the rule of the one dynasty—the Davidic line—from father to son in relatively peaceful continuum. Israel, in contrast, has no established rule for ascendancy, and as a result, nine dynasties compete to grasp the throne for various amounts of time, a tumultuous period until they are pushed into exile.

Jeff does not review every king of Israel from its break with Judah until exile, but he does point out three: Omri, Ahab, and Jehu. Omri, the seventh king of Israel, ruled for 12 years and is noted as being “extra-bad,” acting in the way of Jeroboam and setting up idols. Ahab is listed as “the worst,” and not only set up idols, but married Jezebel, a Sidonian, and went whole-heartedly over to idolatry, angering God. Elijah the prophet is sent to counter Ahab and Jezebel, and chastises them and all the people for their cruelty to the poor, their self-centeredness, and the corruption of their worship. Jehu is anointed to end the line of Ahab, and he may be considered the “best of the bad,” in that he cut off the worship of Baal in Israel, but still his heart was not with God.

Jeff pauses here to review the role of the prophets and point out who prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during this time. The prophets in general were sent by God to “warn and woo” the kings and people. The prophets of surrounding religions were normally priests who used extensive methods of divination (looking at smoke, stick formations, inspecting animal body parts) for yes or no answers. The prophets of God were often ordinary men (not priests), whom God spoke to (no need for intermediary divination and more specific than “yes” or “no”). Their purpose was to move hearts to obedience to God, and they often used strange means to get their message across (to shake people out of their stupor). In general, the message to Israel was to turn away from the depraved cult activity, while the message to Judah was more about the spiritual condition of the people, whose hearts had hardened and who had forgotten the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned. The prophets to Israel are Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea. Elijah taunts and defeats the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and Amos warns against the apostate cult (“[God] hates and despises your feast days.”) Hosea describes Israel's actions in terms of a marriage in which Israel has been unfaithful to God, her husband. He warns Israel of impending exile, but promises that even then, God be with them, coming to them in the desert and giving them living water. As an example of using strange methods to get Israel to heed the message, Hosea goes so far as to live out Israel's situation when he marries Gomer, a prostitute, and can express personally the deep anguish felt by the lover of an adulterer.

Despite such a dire warning, Israel ignores Hosea and the other prophets. As a result, Assyria conquers the Northern Kingdom of Israel and scatters a portion of the Israelites throughout their other territories. (As an aside, Jeff notes that God often uses our enemies as our chastisement.) The Assyrians bring into Israel peoples from five other nations to live there and mix with the remnant. From this time forward, Israel is known as Samaria, and becomes despised by the people of the Southern Kingdom (who will be known as Jews), because of their intermarrying, even until Jesus' time.

At this point, Jeff pulls together the prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus by going back to the powerful message of Hosea. In John 4, Jesus is walking through Samaria (most Jews would have walked around it) and stops at a well for a drink. He meets a Samaritan woman there and asks her to pull up some water for him, but she says she cannot, for she is a Samaritan and he is a Jew (they are still at odds, 700 years later). Jesus instead says that he can give her living water (the living water Hosea says God will give to the Israelites in the desert of exile). He then tells the woman to call her husband, but she replies she does not have one. Jesus points out that she, in fact, has had five husbands (the five nations settled in Israel by the Assyrians) and the one with her now is not her husband. The woman calls him a prophet and tells him that she believes in the Messiah (the one who will bring salvation to God's people). When Jesus tells her he is the Messiah, she returns to town to tell everyone about him, and many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus. Later in the New Testament, God will show again that he has not forgotten the ten tribes of Israel when he sends Paul out to preach to the Gentiles, including the Diaspora (those Israelites dispersed throughout the Assyrian territories). In concluding this session, Jeff asks us to consider whether our lives are following either Israel or Judah's trajectory: have we forsaken God and set up our own religion? Have we lost heart in following the values God has given us? Just as God sent prophets to "warn and woo" the people of the two kingdoms, God still speaks to us today, through the prophetic voices of the popes and holy men and women. The focus for the next session will be on the Southern Kingdom of Judah and whether they listened to the prophets God sent them, or whether they, too, will be cast into exile.