

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

by Casey Rohrer

KEY VERSES:

Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. (I Kings 11:11)

FAITH STORY:

- 1 Kings 11:1-13, 26—12:24
- 2 Chronicles 10

FAITH FOCUS:

God decided to tear away the kingdom from Solomon because of Solomon's unfaithfulness to the covenant between God and Solomon's father David. The punishment for Solomon comes not during his life but during Rehoboam's reign. There are history reasons as well as faith reasons why the Kingdom was divided. Rehoboam runs into problems with revolts from Israel. Rehoboam plans to attack to reunite the two kingdoms but is instructed by God through the prophet Shemaiah not to attack. Judah is also experiencing some attacks from Egypt on its southern border.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students see how God works in history.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

Students will have a better understanding of the story of the division between the Northern and Southern kingdoms.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Copies of drama for all participants
- 2 Contact people ahead of time to play the parts in the drama and give them the scripts so they can read it prior to class. This would be a good time to invite an adult class to join yours—the intergenerational interaction will be fun, and you will need 13 people for speaking parts plus followers for the North and South sides.
- 3 Paper rolled up into paper balls
- 4 An old shirt or robe that can be torn into ten pieces
- 5 Invite someone to speak to the class who has been involved in another country (such as a missionary) or a cause in the United States or Canada in which they believe God played a role in the outcome.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

Begin the class by asking participants to stand if they believe the following statement is true, and remain seated if they believe it is false:

God has worked, and is still working, in historical events.

Ask those participants who remained seated to explain their answer. Why do they feel God isn't at work in the world?

Ask the participants who are standing to each give one example of God working through historical events. Examples might be: bringing down the Berlin Wall, the racial equality movement led by Martin Luther King, the peaceful revolution led by Gandhi in India.

Note: *many conflicts, such as Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland, may seem to have elements of God working in them as well as elements that don't seem to be connected with God at all.*

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Ask participants to stand if they agree with the following statement, and remain seated if they disagree: God worked through historical events that are recorded in the Bible.

Ask participants who are standing (probably all of them) to name an example of an event in the Old Testament in which God was at work. Allow them to pass if they prefer not to answer.

Transition Statement: *Something very interesting and unique took place in the Old Testament when the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) divided. Let's take a look at this historical event that would have a huge impact later down the road.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (30 minutes)

Do the drama!

After the drama, lead a discussion about what happened in this story, using the Insights from Scripture as additional information. Some questions to discuss:

- 1 Why did this division happen?
- 2 How did God work in and through this division?

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Invite your guest speaker to share about their involvement in a country or a cause where they feel God was a part of "making history."

RESPOND: (3–5 minutes)

As a response to the lesson have the students pray for all governments of the world and for current world situations that God will have a hand in these different situations.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Problems were nothing new for Israel. Initially, Israel was a theocracy where God was the ruler. But the Israelites weren't satisfied with that—they wanted to have a king like other surrounding nations because they felt they needed a king to give them protection. So God gave them a king (Saul) and they moved from being a theocracy to a monarchy with a king as the ruler. With this change from a God-ruled nation to a nation ruled by a king, the Israelites also went from being freed from slavery in Egypt (through the Exodus) to being slaves of their own making under Solomon. Solomon enslaved his own people and overtaxed them so that many had to sell their land to pay debts. When Solomon disobeyed God, God decided he'd had enough and was going to rip the kingdom out of Solomon's hand.

The prophet Ahijah brought the news to Jeroboam that God was going to take the Kingdom out of Solomon's hands and give it to him—that he would be the king over the ten northern tribes. When Solomon found out about the prophecy and set out to kill Jeroboam, Jeroboam fled to Egypt and lived there under Pharaoh Shishak until he heard of Solomon's death and then returned to lead a rebellion against Rehoboam and the Southern tribes.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, took over as king, and Jeroboam asked him what kind of king he was going to be. Rehoboam went to his older advisors and they recommend him to lower the taxes and labor. Rehoboam also talked to his younger advisors and they recommended that he make the labor and taxes more. Rehoboam decided to take the advice of the younger advisors and make the yoke heavier for the northern peoples. After the northern people went home, Rehoboam decided to attack the Northern people to reunite all of Judah and Israel, but was unable to do that because of the attack they were getting from the Egyptians and Pharaoh Shishak. Through the prophet Shemiah, God also told him not to fight the Northern tribes.

Judah, being the smaller of the two nations, had more going for it because it had kings in the line of David and also had Jerusalem, God's chosen city, within its borders. This gave Judah more of an edge, but both Judah and Israel experienced defeat from different area nations, and both were eventually defeated and exiled into Babylon.

DRAMA

CHARACTERS:

Solomon, Rehoboam, Rehoboam's older advisers (at least two), Rehoboam's younger advisers (at least two), Jeroboam, King Solomon's servant, Adoram, Shemiah, Ahijah (wearing the shirt or robe to be ripped), Messenger to Rehoboam, Narrator, Rehoboam's followers (played by others without speaking parts), Jeroboam's followers (played by others without speaking parts).

SUPPLIES:

Paper balls to be used to stone Adoram.

A shirt or robe that it can be ripped.

THE SCRIPT:

Narrator: King Solomon has just appointed Jeroboam head of the forced labor gangs in the northern tribes and Jeroboam accepts gratefully the task given to him.

Scene 1: Ahijah meets Jeroboam and prophesies to him. Solomon's servant is lurking in the corner, listening.

Ahijah: Jeroboam, Jeroboam! I have a word from the Lord for you! (Rips his garment and gives 10 pieces to Jeroboam.) "Take for yourself ten pieces: for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "See, I am about to tear the Kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes. Two tribes will remain his for the sake of David and Jerusalem. All this is because he has forsaken me and worshipped the gods of the surrounding peoples. He has not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, as his father David did. Nevertheless, I won't take the whole kingdom away from Solomon."

Scene 2: Solomon's servant runs to Solomon to tell him what he heard.

Solomon's Servant: Solomon! Solomon! You won't believe what I just heard!

Solomon: Yes, my faithful servant? Where have you been? What did you hear?

Servant: I just heard Ahijah telling Jeroboam a prophecy! He said that God is going to give ten of your tribes to Jeroboam!

Solomon: What? Well, we'll see about that. It looks like you have a job to do—I want you to take care of that problem before sundown tomorrow. Do what you have to do. Kill Jeroboam!

Servant: Yes sir!

Narrator: Jeroboam finds out there's a death warrant on his head, so he gets out of the country fast. He escapes to Egypt, where Pharaoh Shishak gives him political asylum because Jeroboam wants to get out from under Solomon's control. While Jeroboam is in Egypt, Solomon dies, and Israel needs to crown a new king.

Scene 3: Rehoboam is crowned king and Jeroboam challenges him.

Rehoboam's Followers (cheering loudly!): Long live king Rehoboam! Yahweh bless Rehoboam! Long live the king! Long live King Rehoboam!!

Rehoboam stands and smiles as people cheer.

Narrator: When Jeroboam heard of Solomon's death, he went back to Israel to challenge King Rehoboam.

Jeroboam walks in with his followers behind him.

Jeroboam: I am coming to you in the name of my people to ask, "What kind of king are you going to be?"

Jeroboam's Followers: Yeah, what kind of king are you going to be?

Jeroboam: Are you going to continue the forced labor and unbearable taxes like your father, King Solomon? Or are you going to be more humane and godly and serve the people rather than enslave them?

Jeroboam's Followers: Yeah, what are you going to do?

Rehoboam: Let me have a word with my advisers and I will give you an answer. (He goes over to speak to older advisers) What kind of king should I be? They want me to get rid of forced labor gangs and lower the taxes. What do you think I should do?

Rehoboam's older advisers: (talk amongst themselves and then answers): If you will be a servant to this people and treat them well, they will be your servants forever.

Rehoboam: (talking to himself) That makes sense, but lower taxes and cut out the forced labor gangs? What kind of building program could I do? We'd have to cut staff in the palace and we'd have to lower our lifestyle. I think I'll ask my younger advisers.

Rehoboam: (talking to his younger advisers) What do you think I should do? The people say to me, "Lighten the yoke that your father put on us!" Should I listen to them?"

Rehoboam's young advisers: Are you kidding? Here's what you should tell them: "You think my dad was bad? You ain't seen nothing yet! My father gave you heavy burdens, but I'll make them worse! My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!" That's what you should tell them!

Rehoboam goes back to Jeroboam and his followers and says: Here is my answer to you: You think my dad was bad? You ain't seen nothing yet! My father gave you heavy burdens,

but I'll make them worse. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions. So there!!!

Jeroboam: He's obviously not going to listen to us!

Jeroboam's followers: What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David.

Jeroboam: You're right. We'd better go home.

Scene 4: Rehoboam wants to fight Jeroboam but listens to God instead.

Narrator: Adoram was taskmaster over the forced labor gangs. When King Rehoboam sent him out to make the people work, they stoned him to death.

Followers of Jeroboam stone Adoram with paper balls.

Narrator: King Rehoboam knew he was in trouble, so he hurriedly mounted his chariot and fled to Jerusalem. After all the Northern tribes heard that Jeroboam had returned from Egypt, they called him to the assembly and made him king over all of Israel.

Rehoboam: (talking with his advisers) We've got a problem. It's time we showed those rebellious tribes who's in charge in the kingdom. Let's see what kind of army we have ready to invade them and teach them a lesson.

Rehoboam's advisers (old and young): We have 180,000 troops ready to fight the tribes who seceded from the king in the line of David.

Rehoboam: Then get them together! Let's go!

Prophet Shemiah comes in.

Prophet Shemiah: Hold your horses! The Lord spoke to me and gave me a message for the King, the house of Judah and Benjamin and to the rest of the people, and this is what he said: "You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me."

Messenger to Rehoboam comes running in: O King, I have bad news! Pharaoh Shishak has

invaded the kingdom from the south. He has already conquered a number of cities and is on his way to Jerusalem! We've gotta stop him!

Rehoboam: Okay! Listen up! My intelligence sources tell me we need a new plan. We can't invade the Northern tribes and also fight Pharaoh Shishak. We can't fight a war on both the southern and northern fronts. If we're going to survive, we have to send all the troops to the south to stop Pharaoh Shishak, and forget about the Northern Kingdom for now.

Narrator: So Rehoboam and the people of the southern kingdom listened to the word of the Lord and went home and did not fight against the northern tribes according to the word of the Lord.

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