



## *Divided Kingdom*

A narrative about how the choices we make affect more than just ourselves.

## **THE BIBLE**

1 Kings 11:28-16:34

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

Have you ever received good advice that you ignored? What was a piece of advice you wish you had taken? Why didn't you take it, and what happened as a result?

*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- The First King – Saul
- David – Fighting Giants and Kings
- Solomon's Quest - Wisdom, Wives & Building the Lord's Temple

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: The Kingdom Torn**

God had blessed David's son Solomon and was with him while he ruled over Israel, but because of Solomon's foolish actions, God told him that his son would only keep a portion of the kingdom after his death. God told Solomon that the rest of the kingdom would be given to one of his servants.

So, God raised up one of Solomon's servants. He was a rising star, a man of excellent standing in Solomon's administration. His name was Jeroboam, and one day, while he was leaving Jerusalem, he was approached by a prophet wearing a new cloak.

The two men were alone on the road, and as Jeroboam approached, the prophet took off his new cloak and tore it into twelve pieces. He said to Jeroboam, *"Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will keep one tribe. This will be done because Solomon has not walked in my ways or done what is right in my eyes. But I will not take the whole kingdom directly from Solomon because I want to honor my servant David, who was obedient. Instead, I will take the kingdom from his son. '"*

*"As for you, I will take you; if you do whatever I command and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes, then I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty like the one I promised David. I will humble David's descendants because of this, but not forever."*

Solomon knew what God had promised, and when he heard about the prophet's conversation with Jeroboam, he decided to try to do something to prevent it from happening. He attempted to murder Jeroboam, but Jeroboam managed to escape. He fled to Egypt and stayed there until he heard King Solomon died.

Solomon reigned over Israel for forty years. When he died, he was buried with his father, David, and Rehoboam, his son, succeeded him as king.

### **Scene Two: Rehoboam's Choice**

As representatives from all over Israel gathered to make Rehoboam their new king, it was clear there was a problem. The tribe of Judah, Rehoboam's own tribe, quickly accepted him as king, but the other tribes hesitated because they did not want another king like Solomon, a ruler who put heavy taxes and burdens on the people.

Meanwhile, word had spread to Egypt that Solomon was dead, and his son was the new king. Hearing this, Jeroboam returned from Egypt to join the people and to be a spokesman for their concerns.

The people told Rehoboam, *"Your father put a heavy yoke on us; if you lighten the load, we will serve you."* Rehoboam heard their concerns and asked the people to give him three days to consider them.

During this time, he consulted his father's advisors. They told the new king, *"If today you will be a servant to these people by giving them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."* Rehoboam heard the advisors but didn't entirely trust their judgment, so he consulted with some of his personal advisors, young men who had grown up with him. They said, *"Say to the people: 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."*

Three days later, Jeroboam and all the people returned, anxious to hear what the new king would do. Rehoboam rejected his father's advisors and said exactly what his personal advisors had suggested. So the king did not listen to the people, and this turn of events was directed by the LORD and fulfilled what was told to Jeroboam through the prophet.

The people responded angrily, saying, *"What share do we have in David's house? Go back to your tents. Everyone in Israel must worry about themselves."* So the ten tribes rebelled against the king, but fearing for his life, Rehoboam managed to escape to Jerusalem. The tribes then gathered together and made Jeroboam king over all of Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

### **Scene Three: Rehoboam's Response**

When Rehoboam safely arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered everyone from the tribe of Judah – 180,000 young men – to go to war against the house of Israel and try to regain the kingdom. But a man of God said, *"Say to Rehoboam, son of Solomon, king of Judah, this is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing."* So they obeyed the word of the LORD and went home just as the LORD had ordered.

### **Scene Four: Jeroboam's Choice**

Meanwhile, Jeroboam, the new king of Israel, was building a fortified city, which the ten tribes would recognize as Israel's new capital.

As construction was underway, Jeroboam considered another potential problem. He thought to himself, *"The kingdom could possibly revert to the house of David if these people are forced to offer sacrifices to the LORD at the Temple in Jerusalem. If they have to do this, they will give their allegiance to Rehoboam. They will turn their backs on me, kill me, and give the kingdom back to him."*

After seeking advice from his advisors, Jeroboam made two golden calves. He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." Then, the king set up places to worship these idols. One was established in the town of Dan in the northern part of Israel; the other was constructed at Bethel in the south. In those days, if anyone wanted to go to Jerusalem, they would have to travel through Bethel. This way, the people would never have to go to the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. This choice was a great sin against God, and the people began to worship these false idols.

But Jeroboam did not stop there in his sin. He appointed all kinds of priests and built altars in many high places. He even instituted new festivals and days of sacrifice to keep the people from worshipping and offering sacrifices in Jerusalem.

### **Scene Five: Jeroboam's Warning**

These practices went on for some time. Then, at the LORD's command, a man of God from Judah, the southern kingdom, went to Bethel, in the northern kingdom, to confront Jeroboam. As he arrived, Jeroboam was approaching the altar he had built, getting ready to make sacrifices to the golden calf. The man of God shouted, *"Altar, Altar! This is what the LORD says: a son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you, he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who make offerings here and human bones will be burned on you. There will be a sign this altar will split apart, and the ashes on it will be poured out."*

King Jeroboam was very angry with the man of God for speaking against the altar. So he pointed to the man and shouted, *"Seize him!"* But instantly, the king's hand became paralyzed. At the same time, a wide crack appeared on the altar, and ashes began to pour out, just as the man of God had said. Jeroboam was shocked and cried out to the man of God, *"Please ask the LORD your God to restore my hand again!"* so the man of God prayed to the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to its original state.

Even after these events, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways; he continued to appoint people for the high places, allowing anyone to become a priest and make sacrifices to the golden calves.

### **Scene Six: The Cost of Jeroboam's Sin**

Sometime later, Jeroboam's son became very ill; he was so sick that Jeroboam sent his wife to the prophet who, all those years ago, had told him he would become king. She had to travel to Judah to speak to him, and when she did, the prophet did not have good news for them. He told them that Jeroboam's son would die because he didn't keep the LORD's commands and made for himself other gods, ignoring all God had done for him and asked him to do.

The prophet told Jeroboam's wife that "*The LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. The LORD will strike Israel so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their ancestors and scatter them because they have worshipped other gods.*"

When she returned home, their son died. This was one of the greatest tragedies of Jeroboam's twenty-two years as king over the northern kingdom of Israel.

### **Scene Six: The Reign of Rehoboam**

Meanwhile, Rehoboam, son of Solomon, was king over the southern kingdom, Judah. He was forty-one when he became king, and he reigned for seventeen years in Jerusalem. The people of Judah also did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They stirred up God's jealous anger more than their ancestors did by setting up high places, sacred stones, and idols to worship. It was so prevalent that on every hill, there were pagan shrines. The people imitated the detestable practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites.

In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He stole everything that Solomon had acquired, but this was not Rehoboam's only conflict.

There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam; it continued until the day of Rehoboam's death. Rehoboam's son, Abijah, became the new king of Judah in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam's reign over Israel. Abijah committed all the sins that his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD as the heart of David, his ancestor, had been.

Nevertheless, for David's sake, the LORD gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up one of his sons to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong, for David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD.

### *Retell the Story*

- How did God punish Solomon for worshipping pagan idols?
- How did God choose Jeroboam to be king?
- When Solomon died, his son became king; what challenge was he faced with?
- What choice did Rehoboam make, and what were the consequences?
- When Jeroboam became king, what was he afraid of?
- What did he decide to do to avoid his greatest fear?
- What happened when God sent a messenger to Jeroboam at the altar?
- What were the consequences of Jeroboam's sin?
- What did Rehoboam do as a king?
- What did God do to keep His promise to David?

### *Discuss the Story*

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?

- Why do you think God chose to give ten tribes to Jeroboam? What were the instructions and promises God gave to him?
- God told Solomon what would happen; why do you think Solomon tried to prevent it from happening? What would you have done?
- What do you think motivated Solomon's son, Rehoboam, to choose the advice of his friends rather than that of his father's advisors?
- Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam were given equal opportunities to build a nation that obeyed God. Where did they each go wrong?
- How do you view the invasion of the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak? Do you think there is any foreshadowing in this? If so, what do you see coming?
- Compare and contrast the motivations and focuses of King Rehoboam of Judah and King Jeroboam of Israel.
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- What do you notice from this story about God's character or qualities?

## 1) GOD'S MESSENGERS

The prophets (men of God) play a more significant role in this story than in past stories. It seems that as the kings obey God less, they need more messengers from God to remind them what God desires. Who or what are God's messengers in your life? Make a list and tell us how you typically respond to each of these 'messengers.'

## 2) COMPROMISE

To accomplish his goal of keeping his rule over the ten tribes, Jeroboam made a compromise. He built new places for his people to worship and fashioned two golden calves to be the objects of their affection. His compromise led to many other people falling into sin. Compromises, big and small, are a big deal. What are some typical ways in which we fall into compromise? How do you think we can avoid making such compromises?

## 3) BLAMING GOD

In our story, King Rehoboam makes a decision that separates the nation, but God is given credit. How active do you think God is in our decision-making? Does he force, manipulate, or even deceive us into making bad decisions? Can you think of any other occasions where God is 'responsible' for someone's choices?

## Pray

God,

*Your kindness and patience have so often been tried by Your people. Too often, we have done the same by taking Your grace for granted and doing what we wanted to do, hoping that You would go along or ignore our actions. Deliver us from the sin of presumption, where we treat your grace as something we are owed. Humble our hearts so that we may remain faithful to You and to your purposes for our lives. Help us become vigilant against all forms of idolatry so that we will not lead ourselves and others astray. Amen.*