

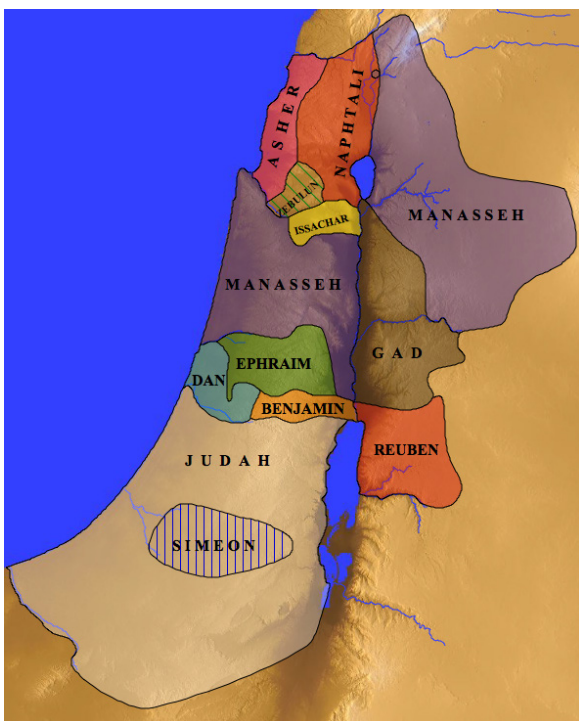


## LESSON 1 THE ROOTS OF DIVISION

The year was 586 B.C. and Jerusalem lay in ruins, her walls torn down and the temple of God destroyed. Her inhabitants lay dead in the streets and surrounding fields, or had been marched off to Babylon. Her last king had tried to escape from the Babylonians, but had been captured, blinded and taken away captive leaving the city without a leader. God's prophet Jeremiah was witness to the devastation and wrote, "Judah has gone into exile under affliction And under harsh servitude; She dwells among the nations, But she has found no rest; All her pursuers have overtaken her In the midst of distress." (Lamentations 1.3)

Jerusalem's destruction and the affliction of God's people had not occurred by accident, rather it was punishment from the Lord. Again, Jeremiah wrote, "The Lord has rejected His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary;" (Lamentations 2.7), and "the Lord has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions" (Lamentations 1.5). But why had God rejected His chosen people and the place where He caused His name to dwell?

This class covers the period of the Divided Kingdom, from the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. It was during this time that God's people reached the point where God declared "there was no remedy" (2Chronicles 36.16). Our study will cover the kings of Judah and Israel, the spiritual condition of the people, God's warnings through His prophets and the rise and fall of the nations surrounding Israel. But as we begin our examination of these events we must first examine the factors that led to God's people dividing.



### Tribal Divisions

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons, born to four different women, would have inter-tribal conflicts. For much of their history, "the nation of Israel" was more a confederation of tribes than a united people. Recall that the land of Canaan was divided among the

people according to their tribes (Joshua 15-21). The natural boundaries of the land would have maintained a sense of separation among the various tribes. Eugene Merrill explains, "There was the Jordan, which sealed off the eastern tribes from the west; the result was mutual suspicion and even military skirmishes between the two sides from time to time. Similarly, the so-called Galilean tribes were isolated from Manasseh and Ephraim by the Valley of Jezreel. In this case, the wedge between the two was not so much geographical as it was practical. The Canaanites, who could not be driven out of the Jezreel and other broad valleys and plains, occupied the space between northern and central Israel from the time of the conquest to the reign of David... Judah was, for the most part, psychologically and physically cut off from central Israel by various transverse valleys and wadi-beds. To the west was a foreign people, the Philistines; to the south the hostile Negev deserts with their equally hostile nomadic populations; and to the east the barrier of the Dead Sea. Thus Judah, of all the tribes, was the most isolated and therefore most subject to a sense of not belonging." (Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel. Page 332)

Tribal divisions come to the fore during several episodes occurring in the time of the Judges.

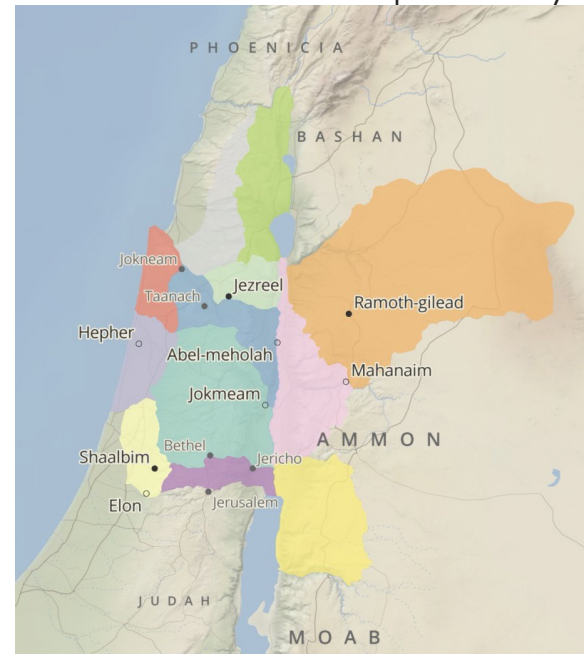
- » Ephraim complained that Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh, had not called them to battle against the Midianites (Judges 8.1-3). Gideon had summoned men from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali (Judges 6.35).
- » Ephraim again complained against Jephthah (Judges 12.1-6). Jephthah was from Gilead (i.e. Gad) and forces from Gad and Manasseh did battle against the Ammonites. The complaint of the Ephraimites led to open conflict with Gad, with Gad being victorious.
- » The horrific events surrounding the abuse and death of the Levite's concubine at the hands of the Benjamites in Jebus led to war between Benjamin and the other tribes of Israel. 25,000 men of Benjamin were slain (Judges 19-21).

While the tribes of Israel were united in their desire for a king (1Samuel 8), the monarchy led to further fissures among the tribes. Saul, the first king of Israel, was from the tribe of Benjamin (1Samuel 9.1-2). Because of unfaithfulness, the Lord rejected Saul as king and had David of Judah anointed (1Samuel 16). However, following Saul's death only the tribe of Judah recognized David as king (2Samuel 2.4). A seven year civil war ensued as the other tribes remained loyal to Saul's son, Ish-bosheth. Only after Ish-bosheth's death did all of the tribes recognize David as king (2Samuel 5.1-5).

The tribes of Israel remained united during David's wars of conquest, but tribal rivalries came to the fore once again when Absalom rebelled against his father. Absalom may have shrewdly exploited tribal grievances in winning over

the people (2Samuel 15.1-12). As David fled from Jerusalem he was cursed by Shimei, a man from the house of Saul and still loyal to the former king (2Samuel 16.5). Further rifts were exposed following the death of Absalom, as Judah vied with the other tribes for the honor of escorting David back to Jerusalem. Sheba, a Benjamite, led the other tribes into further rebellion that had to be quelled by the forces loyal to David (2Samuel 19-20).

Perhaps the most egregious example of tribal favoritism occurred during the reign of Solomon. 1Kings 4.7-19 details how Solomon appointed 12 deputies to oversee 12 districts of his kingdom, each district being responsible to provide 1 month of the lavish expense for the king's table. However, one tribe was exempted from the heavy burden: Judah, the king's own tribe (see map). In our next lesson we will see how the tribes of Israel divided into two kingdoms, but the roots of division ran deep in Israel's history.



## Leadership Failures

Approximately 400 years before the tribes of Israel demanded that Samuel anoint a king to rule over them, God foretold that they would make such a request. Furthermore, God gave instructions for the future king:

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (NASB95)

<sup>14</sup> "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' <sup>15</sup> you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. <sup>16</sup> "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' <sup>17</sup> "He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. <sup>18</sup> "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, <sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

In brief, Israel's king must not put his trust in military might (horses) in political alliances (wives) or in riches. Rather, he was to place his trust in God and be guided by His Law. If he did this he would remain a humble servant of the people and his kingdom would be firmly established.

Solomon's reign began with great promise as he requested from the Lord "an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil" (1Kings 3.9). However, he quickly turned from real wisdom and violated all of the Lord's commandments for Israel's king:

- » He multiplied horse (1Kings 10.26-29)
- » He multiplied wives (1Kings 3.1; 11.1-4)
- » He multiplied silver and gold (1Kings 10.14-23).

The result was that Solomon's heart was lifted above his countrymen so that he placed excessive burdens on them (cf. 1Kings 12.4) and he departed from the ways of the Lord and turned to idols (1Kings 11.4-8).

## **Covenant Unfaithfulness**

The ultimate reason why the kingdom divided was the God decreed it would happen; He decreed it would happen because Solomon had been unfaithful to the covenant.

1 Kings 11:9–13 (NASB95)

<sup>9</sup> Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, <sup>10</sup> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded. <sup>11</sup> So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. <sup>12</sup> "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup> "However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

However, the division of the kingdom wasn't the result of just one man's unfaithfulness, but of the entire people. Recall that when Israel first asked for a king the Lord declared, "they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day" (1Samuel 8.7-8). Even after the Lord declared how oppressive the king would be to them (vss. 11-17, all of which was true in Solomon's time), the people still insisted upon having a king. Ominously, the Lord revealed that the people "will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day." (vs. 18).



## Geopolitics

While not the reason why Israel divided into two kingdoms, the geopolitical situation of the ANE (ancient near east) would be a factor in how the division came about and would greatly influence the fortunes of both Israel and Judah. Egypt was of particular importance when Solomon died in 931 B.C. As FF Bruce writes, "Towards the end of Solomon's reign a change of dynasty took place in Egypt. The weak twenty-first dynasty (to which Solomon's father-in-law belonged) came to an end, and a new and ambitious king, Shoshenq by name - or Shishak, as the biblical narrative calls him (c. 945-924 BC) - took the double crown as first ruler of the 22 dynasty... In earlier centuries ambitious kings of Egypt had often looked towards Asia to enlarge their territory. The Mediterranean coastal road ran north to Megiddo, where it turned east through the pass into the Plain of Jezreel and crossed the Jordan, to turn north again and run through Syria as far as Carchemish, where the Euphrates could be forded. But when Shishak came to the throne this road, from his own frontier as far as the Euphrates, was controlled by Solomon. It was therefore to his advantage to weaken Solomon's power. His chief method was to encourage any movement for independence that showed itself among Solomon's subject - peoples. And there was no lack of such movements." (Israel and the Nations, page 27). 1Kings 11.14ff records how the Egyptian Pharaoh fostered revolt in Edom and supported Jeroboam.

## Takeaways

1. If we are to remain a united people, we must find our identity in Christ and in nothing else (Galatians 3.26-28).
2. Godly leaders are sacrificial leaders. Christ is the ultimate example of godly leadership, for He sacrificed Himself for us (John 10.11). Furthermore, He has declared that the great ones in His Kingdom are those who serve others (Matthew 20.26-28).
3. Security belongs to those who remain faithful to the covenant (Revelation 2.10). The nations may very well rage, but our King and His Kingdom will endure! (Psalm 2).