

DIVIDED KINGS

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 12:25-32; 14:21-26

CONTEXT

After King Rehoboam's disastrous start, the northern tribes united under Jeroboam and made him their king. Rehoboam mustered 180,000 troops from his tribes of Judah and Benjamin to fight against the rebel Israelite tribes. The prophet Shemaiah brought Rehoboam a message from the Lord: "You are not to march up and fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Each of you return home, for this situation is from me" (1 Kings 12:24). Judah listened to the Lord and went home, but both kingdoms were at odds with each other for several decades.

KEY CONCEPT

Our sin and false worship anger God.

As you examine 1 Kings 12:25-32; 14:21-26:

- Reflect on how Jeroboam's worry caused him to lead Israel into idolatry.
- Consider how Rehoboam allowed Judah's idolatry to run rampant, and that God subsequently allowed enemies to seize treasure from the temple and palace.



TIMELINE

Solomon Marries Foreign Women,
Turns to Idolatry, and Is Disciplined
by the Lord (1 Kings 11)

**SESSION STUDY: Both Rehoboam
and Jeroboam Lead Their Nations
in Idolatry (1 Kings 12–14)**

The Prophet Elijah Confronts
Ahab (1 Kings 17–21)

Rehoboam Accepts Foolish Advice;
the Kingdom Is Divided (1 Kings 12)

Wicked Ahab Becomes King
in Israel (1 Kings 16)

Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 12:25–14:20

☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 14:21–15:24

☐ **Day 3:** 1 Kings 15:25–16:34

☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 11:5–14:1

☐ **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 135



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

SELF-INTEREST SKEWS OUR WORSHIP AND LEADS TO IDOLATRY (1 KINGS 12:25-32).

Circle Jeroboam's motivations, underline the actions he took, and then draw an arrow to the result.

25 Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built Penuel. **26** Jeroboam said to himself, "The kingdom might now return to the house of David. **27** If these people regularly go to offer sacrifices in the LORD's temple in Jerusalem, the heart of these people will return to their lord, King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill me and go back to the king of Judah." **28** So the king sought advice. Then he made two golden calves, and he said to the people, "Going to Jerusalem is too difficult for you. Israel, here are your gods who brought you up from the land of Egypt." **29** He set up one in Bethel, and put the other in Dan. **30** This led to sin; the people walked in procession before one of the calves all the way to Dan. **31** Jeroboam also made shrines on the high places and made priests from the ranks of the people who were not Levites. **32** Jeroboam made a festival in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the festival in Judah. He offered sacrifices on the altar; he made this offering in Bethel to sacrifice to the calves he had made. He also stationed the priests in Bethel for the high places he had made.

Jeroboam, the newly enthroned ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, worried about losing his power, so he worked to solidify his control. First, he built up his defenses at key military points in the region. But his main concern was the worship practices of his subjects: If the people went to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, they would eventually return to the king of Judah. So Jeroboam created his own substitute religion for the worship of the Lord.

The Lord had told Jeroboam that if he would follow the Lord like David, the Lord would establish a dynasty for him as well (1 Kings 11:38). Instead of following the Lord's commandments, however, Jeroboam took a page from the Israelites' playbook in Exodus 32:4—he made two golden calves. Instead of brute force, Jeroboam appealed to people's love for convenience and set up two places of worship, with one calf on the southern border in Bethel and one in the north at Dan. He also opened the priesthood to tribes other than the Levites. Jeroboam's religion was inclusive and convenient, but his self-interest skewed Israel's worship and led the whole nation into idolatry.

LEADER NOTE: What Jeroboam introduced to Israel is called syncretism, a blending of religions. He sought to mix the worship of the Lord, with its priesthood, sacrifices, and festivals, with the trappings of pagan idol worship. Jeroboam's false worship would mar the Northern Kingdom for their whole existence as a nation.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SIN AS IDOLATRY: Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc., where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-3).

What are some ways we might skew our worship of God for convenience or self-interest?

The Levites, who were supposed to make God's sacrifices and teach His law, were righteously angry about the appointment of non-Levites to lead worship. So they left and moved south to Judah (2 Chron. 11:13-17). With their departure, the spiritual shepherds of the north were gone.

These spiritual shepherds were to teach the Israelites the law so they in turn could disciple their children as they went about everyday life (Deut. 11:19). But with their departure, the tribes in the north lost all semblance of faithful worship and simply followed their king into his imposed idolatrous worship practices. They quickly forgot that whom we worship and how we worship matters greatly to God.

LEADER NOTE: The mandate for God's people to disciple their children has never ceased; rather, it has been expanded. In Matthew 28:18-20, also known as the Great Commission, Jesus commanded all His followers to make disciples throughout the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded. This discipleship process is not dependent on a class of priests because in Christ we are a kingdom of priests to lead in His praise (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

How can we be on guard against imitations of the true worship of God to which we are called?

GOD WILL PUNISH ALL WHO FOLLOW THE DETESTABLE WAYS OF THE WORLD (1 KINGS 14:21-26).

Underline what Judah did to anger the Lord. Highlight what the Lord allowed to happen to His temple.

21 Now Rehoboam, Solomon's son, reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king; he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city where the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put his name. Rehoboam's mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite.

22 Judah did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They provoked him to jealous anger more than all that their ancestors had done with the sins they committed. **23** They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree; **24** there were even male cult prostitutes in the land. They imitated all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

25 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt went to war against Jerusalem. **26** He seized the treasuries of the LORD's temple and the treasuries of the royal palace. He took everything. He took all the gold shields that Solomon had made.

As forceful as Rehoboam presented himself when he rejected the request of the northern tribes and then rallied troops to put them under his subjection, he ultimately proved to be a weak and permissive king—"he abandoned the law of the LORD—he and all Israel with him" (2 Chron. 12:1). Rehoboam allowed Judah's idolatry to run rampant.

Rehoboam's father had been deeply attached to foreign wives who worshiped foreign gods. Solomon's marriages, numbering 700 wives with 300 concubines, represented political alliances with foreign nations. Solomon built a form of peace that was characterized by the absence of war, but the kingdom was divided in worship with each wife he married. Like his father, Rehoboam pursued peace in a similar manner by permitting whatever kind of worship the people wanted rather than promoting obedience to the Lord as his grandfather David had done.

LEADER NOTE: In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matt. 5:29). Removal of body parts to fight sin is extreme, but Jesus was using hyperbole to communicate how serious we need to be about getting idolatry out of our lives. Rehoboam had both authority and opportunity to root out the worship of other gods in Israel, but he did not, and it cost him dearly.

What do you do when you know you need to root out sin?

Notes

Rehoboam allowed Judah's idolatry to reach the most intimate parts of the people's lives. They built high places and Asherah poles, and male cult prostitutes were in the land (1 Kings 14:23). These practices came from surrounding cultures, and God had taken the land away from Israel's predecessors for detestable activities such as these (v. 24).

Israel had lived among these cultures for centuries, but they did not keep God's covenant laws, which would have set them apart from the pagans around them. So God allowed Judah's enemies to seize the treasures of the temple and palace. In another sign of weakness, Rehoboam had to replace the gold shields his father had made with inferior bronze shields (v. 27).

LEADER NOTE: The promise God made to David that He would be with David's offspring if his sons followed God's laws and walked in His ways was for Rehoboam too, but Rehoboam failed to trust in God's covenant, just as Jeroboam did. Judah's lack of wise, godly leadership caused them to spiral into idolatry. Judah did not even pretend to say they were worshiping God alone. They either abandoned the worship of the Lord or placed Him as equal to other gods in their hearts and spaces of worship, thereby breaking the first and second commandments (Ex. 20:3-6), just like the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

What role should our holiness as believers play in sharing the gospel with the world around us?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

So often the kings of Israel and Judah led their people astray into idolatry that imitated the world, but a true king leads his people to worship faithfully the one true God. Jesus came as this King, for He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As the group arrives, ask volunteers for their opinions on off-brand products. Encourage them to share the name brand, the off-brand, whether or not they have a preference, and what feeds into that opinion (cost, taste, etc.).

TRANSITION: Sometimes off-brand products are exactly the same as a name brand. But other times they are noticeably different. We may find ourselves content with an imitation product because of a cheaper cost, convenience, or a consistent experience, but not all imitations live up to the original.

CONTEXT

SAY: Prior to having kings rule over them, everyone in Israel did whatever seemed right to them (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), only turning to God for help when their self-serving ways got them into trouble. Once they had a king, generally speaking, as the king went, so went the nation. For the most part, David led the people in faithful worship. Solomon ended his reign in idolatry with a coming split for the kingdom. Now two nations, two kings could rule faithfully and be blessed by the Lord, or they could take another route. Unfortunately, both chose the latter.

RECAP

IDENTIFY: Using information from this week's preparation, call for volunteers to name obstacles that concerned Jeroboam as he began his reign over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (*His subjects would recognize Rehoboam as their true king; the people would return to Jerusalem to sacrifice and worship at the temple; the people would kill him.*) Ask: "What obstacles might Rehoboam have been facing as king over the Southern Kingdom of Judah?"

TRANSITION: Obstacles in life can cause us to look for shortcuts or imitations to bypass what concerns us. These can be inconsequential, as it might be with an off-brand cereal purchase for a cheaper breakfast option. But as it was with the two kings in our Scriptures for today, and often can be with us, some imitations can have great spiritual consequences.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on

Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify

ministrygrid.com/gospelproject • gospelproject.com/leader-training.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 30 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find “Cheap Imitations.” Recreate the chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s finding’s as they interact with Scripture.

Cheap Imitations	
JEROBOAM/ISRAEL	REHOBAM/JUDAH

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 12:25-32.

ENGAGE: Briefly restate the obstacles Jeroboam faced. Then ask the group to identify the imitations of faithful worship that Jeroboam introduced to his kingdom, Israel. Record these on the board along with the Scripture references. Read God’s promise to Jeroboam from 1 Kings 11:38: “After that, if you obey all I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight in order to keep my statutes and my commands as my servant David did, I will be with you. I will build you a lasting dynasty just as I built for David, and I will give you Israel.” Ask: “How does Jeroboam’s off-brand worship compare to what the Lord called him to do?” Read 1 Kings 13:34 for the judgment of the Lord against Jeroboam: “This was the sin that caused the house of Jeroboam to be cut off and obliterated from the face of the earth.”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 14:21-26.

Notes



ENGAGE: Call for the group to identify and record the sins of Rehoboam and Judah in these verses. Ask: “How were the sins of Judah a form of imitation? If Jeroboam and Israel had an “off-brand” form of worship, how would you describe the imitation worship of Rehoboam and Judah? Is one form of imitation worship better than the other? Why or why not?”

DEBRIEF

Why is it right for the Lord to be angered by cheap imitations and false worship?

(PSG p. 30) What are some ways we might step into the trap and consequences of sinful imitation and false worship?

SUMMARIZE

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5: The Better King** and review it with your group. Say: “Our sin and false worship does not humor, surprise, or confuse God. He knows who we are—sinners—and what is in our hearts. But the sin and false worship of God’s image-bearers does disappoint and anger Him. We were created to worship and obey Him alone, and this was for our good and His glory. But sin leads us to chase after imitations that can never live up to the one true God and can only lead to death and destruction. If we would be wise, we will learn from the consequences of Israel’s and Judah’s imitation forms of worship and choose instead to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).”

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 31). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Jeroboam made his decisions in favor of imitation worship out of worry for the longevity of his situation. He forgot what the Lord had promised—a dynasty if he obeyed God’s commands. Rehoboam consolidated his power in Judah after the division of kingdoms, and once he was settled, he and his people abandoned the law of the Lord to worship the idols of foreign nations (2 Chron. 12:1). Whether we find ourselves in a place of worry or comfort, we must be on guard against the temptation of cheap imitations and false worship.

Why does God deserve our sole devotion and worship?



HEART: The temptation toward cheap imitations of worship is strong because it puts us in control over the direction of our heart. But true worship is a matter of loving and total submission to the One who created us and saves us in Jesus. Like children, we can be subtle in our rebellion, putting on a good show that satisfies an audience but falls short of pleasing the Lord.

We can also be blatant in our rebellion, going after anything and everything but what the Lord has given us and called us to. The temptation is strong, but our salvation in Jesus and the powerful gift of God's Holy Spirit is more than adequate help us keep our eyes on God alone.

How do you guard your heart to protect it from temptation taking root?



HANDS: As believers in Jesus Christ, we have “[tasted] and [seen] that the LORD is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!” (Ps. 34:8). While imitation forms of worship tempt us to abandon the Lord, the world is full of people already caught in the trap and consequences of false worship, and many don't even know it. God has called us to challenge the imitations that hold sway over others by proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

With whom will you share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read Proverbs 21:4; Romans 14:23; James 4:17; and 1 John 5:17, recording what makes something a sin. Pray for a growing desire to avoid every kind of sin.
- Take a prayer walk through your home to see if there is anything that would dishonor God. Determine to rid yourself of those items.
- Seek out a prayer and accountability partner of the same gender to help you identify and reject imitation forms of worship in your life.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 135:13-21 with your group. Bless the Lord who is true and infinitely better than any imitations we might make or be tempted to follow.



THE PROPHET ELIJAH

By Jim Gantenbein



The prophet Elijah was a pivotal figure for the Old Testament people of Israel, and his significance reached far beyond his own life on earth. Yet he did not author a book of the Bible, as did later prophets, nor have a book named for him. His ministry is primarily narrated from 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2.

ELIJAH'S MINISTRY

As a prophet, Elijah was personal, empowered by the Holy Spirit, prayerful, and peculiar. His clothes were crafted from animal skins (2 Kings 1:8), and for a time, he dined on food brought to him by ravens (1 Kings 17:5). He prophesied a drought in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (17:1). He raised a boy to life (17:22). He challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a sacrifice duel and executed them when they lost (18:38-40). Yet when threatened by Jezebel, he ran away and hid in a cave (19:1-9). Later he anointed two future kings as well as his own successor (19:15-18), and he prophesied the deaths of Ahab, Jezebel, and all of their dynasty (21:20-24).

This was Elijah's life, but perhaps he is most remembered for his departure from this life with transportation more spectacular than any hearse could provide. God carried him into heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11-12), but his work was not yet finished.

Elijah relied completely on the Lord to prove Himself in front of the people. Both on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-37) and earlier at the onset of the drought in the land (1 Kings 17:1; Jas. 5:17), Elijah prayed. He prayed and proved his faith in the Lord by acting on God's word even before it came to fruition.

ELIJAH'S IMPACT

Elijah's impact continued well beyond his lifetime. He was mentioned by name 29 times in the New Testament, 7 times by Jesus Himself. Alongside some of the most significant Old Testament figures, Elijah often was connected with the life and ministry of Jesus.

In the close of the Old Testament, God foretold the coming of His promised Messiah with a connection to the past: "Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes" (Mal. 4:5). God promised the arrival of a familiar and powerful prophet who would boldly declare God's truth and confront the godless, regardless of what it might cost him personally. More bold confrontation was coming!

The Jewish scribes in Jesus's day knew of this promise and believed that Elijah would return before the Messiah appeared (Matt. 17:10), and that prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist (17:11-13). The single-mindedness of Elijah's work had such an impact that when Jesus's ministry was causing a stir and shaking up the religious establishment, some people thought He was Elijah (16:13-14). The Jews understood there was a direct link between Elijah and the coming of the promised Messiah.

Elijah continues to be a significant figure in modern-day Judaism. Drawing from Aharon Weiner's essay, "The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism," commentator Ralph L. Smith writes:

Elijah had faithfully served the Lord as a prophet in his days on earth, and even in the New Testament, he faithfully pointed people to Jesus Christ.

Elijah still plays a significant role in Jewish liturgy and ritual. He is mentioned when grace is said after meals . . . in the benedictions after the weekly Sabbath reading of a chapter from the books of the prophets . . . in the circumcision ceremony and in the Passover seder. At the beginning of the celebration of the Passover a special cup of wine, called “Elijah’s cup” is placed on the table. When grace is said after the meal, a child opens the door in expectation of Elijah’s appearance and biblical passages are recited which express the hope of Jewish people for deliverance from oppression.¹

ELIJAH’S MISSION

Jesus—the promised Messiah and God in the flesh—was not being deceptive by saying the long-dead prophet was coming. He was using a figure of speech the Hebrews of the day understood quite well. As recorded in Luke 1, the meaning was stated plainly when God sent an angel to the aged priest Zechariah announcing that his wife, also advanced in years, would bear him a son and he was to name him John. Part of that announcement was a callback to the prophecy we find in Malachi:

He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. (Luke 1:17)

The Jews knew about Elijah, his life and ministry, and they were anticipating his return, whether literal or symbolic. During His crucifixion, some thought Jesus was calling for Elijah (Matt. 27:46-49; Mark 15:34-35). Yet not everything was symbolic or representative. At the transfiguration, Jesus was with Elijah and Moses as they “were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). In this one-of-a-kind moment, all the words and works of Moses and Elijah served as an endorsement of God’s Son, Jesus. Elijah had faithfully served the Lord as a prophet in his days on earth, and even in the New Testament, he faithfully pointed people to Jesus Christ.

1. Ralph L. Smith, Micah–Malachi, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 342 [Logos].

Jim Gantenbein is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He retired in November 2022 after more than thirty-one years of ministry, including over sixteen years as a Senior Pastor. Jim and Cathy have been married over fifty-one years and live in Port Orchard, Washington.