

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

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 1 Kings 12:25–14:20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 2 Chronicles 11:5–14:1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 1 Kings 14:21–15:24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 1 Kings 15:25–16:34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 135 |



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

1 KINGS 12:25-32

SELF-INTEREST SKEWS OUR WORSHIP AND LEADS TO IDOLATRY.

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.

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 (Matthew 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 (James 4:1-3).

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.

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 Chronicles 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 (Deuteronomy 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.

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



PERSONAL PREPARATION

1 KINGS 14:21-26

GOD WILL PUNISH ALL WHO FOLLOW THE DETESTABLE WAYS OF THE WORLD.

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.

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).

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 Chronicles 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.

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

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).

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

CHEAP IMITATIONS

Read 1 Kings 12:25-32; 14:21-26, and identify the ways Jeroboam/Israel and Rehoboam/Judah imitated forms of worship that angered the Lord.

JEROBOAM/ISRAEL

REHOBAM/JUDAH

What are some ways we might step into the trap and consequences of sinful imitation and false worship?

Key Concept: Our sin and false worship anger God.



HEAD

Why does God deserve our sole devotion and worship?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 135 and consider how our Lord is better and stronger than all the imitations of this world. Pray through the psalm, confessing your repentance of false worship and your faith in God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Bless the Lord!



HEART

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

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

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



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; James 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" (Malachi 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 (Matthew 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 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 (Matthew 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].

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