

THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

Synopsis & Context – Session #14– A Kingdom Torn in Two

Solomon, whose name means peace, found peace slipping away during the final years of his reign. His son Rehoboam was to take his place as ruler over the 12 tribes of Israel. A large party of disgruntled leaders led by Jeroboam showed up at Rehoboam's coronation ceremony requesting that he grant relief from the heavy burden of taxation and forced labor that Solomon had placed on them. Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the experienced elders and took the advice of his immature peers who theorized that bullying and intimidation were better leadership tactics than servanthood (the latter being the counsel of experienced elders). Rehoboam promised even heavier taxation and more forced labor. With one decision, the nation divided and its fate was now set.

Only Rehoboam's tribe of Judah remained loyal to him. The other 10 tribes to the north seceded, took the name of Israel and made Jeroboam their king. Instead of appreciating the gracious gift of God, Jeroboam, like Aaron centuries before, set up idols of counterfeit worship, leading Israel into idolatry. God sent a prophet who warned of judgment for their idolatry and predicted that someday a king named Josiah, a descendant of David, would destroy their pagan worship sites (this was fulfilled some 290 years later). As a sign to authenticate his message, the pagan altar split in two and Jeroboam's outstretched hand turned leprous.

This did little to curb Jeroboam's pagan practices. When his son became ill he sent his wife in disguise to the prophet Ahijah to inquire about their son's fate. Though blind, the word of God came to Ahijah so as to be forewarned. He not only saw through the charade, but gave Jeroboam's wife a clear message of judgment predicting that her husband's dynasty would soon end and Israel would one day be carried away into captivity. This message of doom was authenticated with the death of their son as soon as her footsteps crossed the entrance to the palace.

Ironically, God's chosen people were now, themselves, committing the same idolatrous and immoral practices that compelled God to purge the land of its Canaanite inhabitants in the first place. God's righteousness and covenant moved Him to anger. Rehoboam allowed Judah to fall into the same idolatry as the North. The golden years of peace faded further when Shishak, king of Egypt attacked Judah and carried off the all of the gold and silver treasures. Rehoboam replaced them with bronze, but the decline in moral and spiritual values was even sharper than the drop in value from gold to bronze.

The Lower Story seems primarily a list of idolatrous kings who lead both Judah and Israel further and further away from God. Abijah son of Rehoboam became the next king of Judah. His tenure was short and sinful like his father's. No good kings reigned in Israel after the split of the kingdom. Things went from bad to worse with the house of Omri. His evil son King Ahab and her royal wickedness Queen Jezebel drove Israel to new lows in idolatry.

There is, however, the Upper Story perspective – the overall mission of God to seek us and bring us into a whole and right relationship. There is the whole matter of the Covenant that is made, the promise of the Davidic line. Despite wholesale apostasy and evil that is rationalized and even directed from the monarchy in both kingdoms, God still keeps the promise and the Davidic line continues with each new heir. Along the way, there are some exceptional God-followers, including the prophets and King Asa, but it would seem that the paths of both Israel and Judah are now set to be apart from God – lost in the wilderness figuratively. Nevertheless, the Upper Story, through the Davidic lineage in Judah a path is still set for the promise to be fulfilled...ultimately with a new kind of anointed King (but there's still a lot of ground and history to cover).



Chapter #14 *A Kingdom Torn in Two* is 'woven' from selections from *The Second Book of Kings*.

1 Kings 12—16

Plot Points for Chapter 12: A Kingdom Torn in Two by Adam Barr

In three generations, Israel came to see that Samuel's warnings about monarchy were true. Following Solomon's rule, the divided kingdoms were marked by unfaithfulness to the Lord and nationalized idolatry, with righteous kings being the exception. Only the Lord's continuing regard for the house of David kept his hand of judgment from falling.

Just three generations before Rehoboam, Israel had begged for a king. They believed that having a king would unite the separate tribes and form one strong nation. They dreamed they could be just like the nations around them, with a national identity centered around a royal line. But by the time Rehoboam assumed the throne, the dream of past generations had become a nightmare.

The monarchy, from this point forward, would be one of the key sources of the nations undoing. When Rehoboam tried to carry on his fathers forced labor policies, rebellion erupted. Jeroboam, a prophesied leader with great potential, would only lead the people deeper into idolatry in a futile effort to shore up his own power base.

Six in twenty kings of Judah would be categorized as "doing right" in the Lord's eyes. Israel was even worse, with only one king, Jehu, rising to the level of a "mixed" record. As went the monarchy, so went the nation. Rather than strengthening Israel and uniting them as one, the monarchy became the catalyst for the eventual wholesale dissolution of the nation.

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

From 1 Kings

*Ch. 11 – Solomon's errors, enabling apostasy; adversaries arise, Jeroboam rebels → NOT included in *The Story*.

Ch. 12 – After the death of Solomon, the Northern Tribes secede; Jeroboam becomes King of Israel

Ch. 13 – Jeroboam's reign is immediately marked by Pagan idol worship; Jeroboam is visited by a holy man from Judah

Ch. 14 – Judgment on the House of Jeroboam, his downfall; Rehoboam in Judah is not fairing better

Ch. 15 – Abijam reigns over Judah: more idolatry and war; Asa becomes King of Judah two years later; Asa is the exceptional king, restoring much, makes an alliance with Artam against Israel to the North, Nadab becomes King in Israel

Ch. 16 – A Second Dynasty: Basha reigns over Israel, then Elah; a Third Dynasty: Zimri; then a Fourth Dynasty: Omri, then Ahab; Samaria becomes the new capital for Israel; each King seems even more 'evil' culminating in in this part of the Story with Ahab (and his wife Jezebel)

*Ch. 17 – ENTER Elijah → NOT included in *The Story*.

God's Story – YOUR story!

- What do you feel is happening that enables the people to choose "Plan B" (AKA: the idol of a golden calf) once again over God?
- Is there an overall pattern or theme that calls attention for us to reflect on?
- Is there a standard that emerges from this part of *The Story* as to what constitutes a "good king"?
- Reflecting on "the People of God," both over 2,000 years ago and today is there a way(s) that history is seemingly repeating itself?
- Is there grace anywhere in this part of *The Story*?