

## **The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)**

### ***Division between Israel and Judah***

**Readings: 1 Kings 13:33-34; 14:1-18; 2 Chronicles 11:5-12, 18-23; 1 Kings 14:22-31; 2 Chronicles 12:1-16; 1 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 13:1-22, 14a**

### ***Reflections:***

- The story of Jeroboam's son dieing and the judgment pronounced by the prophet Abijah has to frighten any reader. Sin in the Bible is never fully contained within the individual but bleeds into the lives of others. Like many other times, as judgment falls, it falls on a whole household. The saddest statement is that the first one to die is Jeroboam's son, the only one in whom the Lord has found something good. Now, this again raises a moral question for the reader. Why did God judge the only one who has any good in his life? The answer in the Old Testament prior to the coming of Christ is that in a world of sin and separation from God, it is not just the vile and outrageously rebellious who come under judgment but all people fall under the curse of sin's humanity, even those whom have in their lives a mix of good and evil. We must notice that his son was not found to be completely righteous without any sin but simply one in whom good was found. In other words, he had the potential to possibly be better than his father but because of his father's rebellion before God, his son is the first to die. As Jeroboam's lineage is wiped out, we are left feeling the sadness of a world gone wrong. The story of "what doesn't work" is littered with stories that grieve the human heart and yet for some reason when left on our own, we repeat this story a thousand times.
- The story of Judah, with their kings, Rehoboam and Abijah, and Israel and her king, Jeroboam, is interesting. Both fall into idolatry. Both turn away from God. Yet in Judah there is a pattern of turning back to God and receiving God's help. Rehoboam turns to idolatry and sin, even to the institution of both male and female shrine prostitutes for men to worship the fertility gods. God sends Shishak, King of Egypt to attack and bring judgment against Judah. The leaders immediately humble themselves but this only lessens the judgment and does not stop it entirely. The beautiful and perfect temple of Solomon is sacked and destroyed. This helps us to see that God is not too worried about religious property. This temple is the first thing to go. Shishak and the judgment finally subside but the war between Israel and Judah continues.

- Abijah takes over for his father as king of Judah and things remain bad. Abijah makes some bold statements declaring the sins of Jeroboam and survives as severely outmatched battle because of God's help. Yet he still turns away to idolatry and sin. Judgments are held back against the house of David because of God's desire to honor David. Yet it is clear that the sin of both Israel and Judah is equally great and will now be the norm.
- In terms of leadership, there is one statement well worth reflecting on: "Some worthless scoundrels gathered around him and opposed Rehoboam son of Solomon when he was young and indecisive and not strong enough to resist them." If you are given significant leadership at a young age, be very careful who you keep close to you. You will need to rely on wise counsel and you need to ensure that those that counsel you have God's heart and mind.
- What is fascinating to the reader is that there is the very clear mix of trusting and relying on God with outright idolatry and sin. The story of Israel, right from the time they escaped Egypt is one where they simply can not resist the temptation of idolatry. It is no surprise that the prophets will soon declare that the only thing that will work is a completely new work of God where he changes people from the inside out. The evidence is in and mounting. Religion, wise kings, holy buildings and priests, national security...none of these things can actually keep people on the right track. The transformation of humanity starts with the human heart. If we don't experience a radical heart change, we are doomed to sin, violence and ultimately, self-destruction.