

Divided we fall

John Houghton ©

A. Introduction

1. During the period when Homer wrote the Iliad and Odyssey, and Rome was born, God's people tore themselves apart. A nation that had fought and overcome enemies and tasted glory now sunk into two hundred years of intermittent civil war. This complex period dating from 931–587 BC is a tale of prophets and kings, of obedience and idolatry, of divine faithfulness and divine judgement.
2. The events are recorded for us in the parallel accounts of 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, which draw on a variety of written and eyewitness resources. It is also the period when many of the prophetic books were compiled.

B. The great divide

1. Trouble began when Solomon's servant, Jeroboam, rebelled and fled to Egypt. This was because Ahijah the prophet had pronounced him conditional ruler over the north as a judgement on Solomon's sin of tolerating the worship of pagan gods (1 Kings 11:26-40). The one condition laid on Jeroboam was that he should walk in obedience to the Lord, a condition he failed to obey.
2. After Solomon's death, Rehoboam, Solomon's heir, refused to negotiate peacefully with Jeroboam's plea for lighter taxation. Rehoboam listened to his arrogant young advisors, rather than to mature wisdom (2 Chronicles 10:10-11). A national divide ensued—10 tribes in the north, two in the south—Israel v. Judah.
3. War was temporarily avoided thanks to the prophet Shemiah but Jeroboam, fearing in unbelief that if people visited the Jerusalem Temple they would side with Rehoboam, built idolatrous alternative sites of worship at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12) with an unauthorised priesthood and independent feasts. In so doing, he broke God's condition for blessing. Many Levites became refugees in Judah.

C. The history of Israel

1. The northern kingdom of Israel was founded upon rebellion and idolatry. None of its kings ever renounced the sins of Jeroboam. Regicide was common with whole royal families being wiped out.
2. Omri founded Samaria (1 Kings 16:23-26) but was an idolator.
3. Ahab married the Sidonian, Jezebel, who greatly strengthened paganism and instituted state persecution of true believers. Elijah famously confronted her prophets on Mount Carmel. Syria tried to invade the land but at a prophet's word was twice defeated by Ahab, who then made a foolish treaty with Benhadad. Jezebel was the power behind the throne

as illustrated over the matter of Naboth's vineyard. Ahab died in battle after heeding a false prophet.

4. Elisha succeeded Elijah as the major charismatic prophet. He anointed fast driving commander Jehu as the avenger of blood against Ahab and Jezebel. As part of his bloodbath he also slaughtered all the priests of Baal.
5. The last kings of Israel were a disaster and came under the control of Assyrian king, Tiglath Pileser III. After Hoshea's rebellion Shalmaneser invaded Israel. In 722 BC, the northern capital of Samaria fell to the Assyrian army after a three year siege and the bulk of the people were deported.
6. Captives from other nations were settled in northern Palestine. Israel as a nation was finished and the ten tribes are permanently dissipated and lost among the nations of the world (2 Kings 17-18). Israel became a mongrel polytheistic culture at odds with Judah from thenceforth. All this was the consequence of wilful idolatry and breach of covenant against the living God.

D. The history of Judah

1. Judah, the southern kingdom, carried the dynastic line of David through Rehoboam. It also contained the Temple at Jerusalem. Unlike the north, idolatry was not built into the national foundations; nonetheless, it continually infiltrated the social structure. There were good kings and bad ones.
2. Rehoboam embraced fertility cult syncretism (1 Kings 14:21-24) and as a consequence Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. Rehoboam heeded Shemiah's word and repented. Jerusalem was spared but at a high financial cost.
3. Civil war finally broke out under Abijah. It cost Israel half a million casualties.
4. Asa was a reforming king who obeyed the prophets and cleansed Judah of idolatry. He saw off the African incursions but did a deal with Syria in later life, rejected prophet Hanani's words, and died of gangrenous feet without seeking God's help.
5. Jehoshaphat reestablished the Law of God and destroyed the pagan high places. He joined forces with Ahab to see off Syrian incursions. He reformed the judiciary and defeated Moab and Ammon by putting worshippers at the head of his army!
6. Jehoram murdered his brothers and reestablished paganism in Judah, earning a rebuking letter from Elijah (2 Chronicles 21:12-15). He died of gut rot 'to no one's regret'.
7. Queen Athaliah wiped out all the royal family but Joash was hidden by Jehoidah the priest who in due course arranged a military coup. Joash restored the Temple and obeyed God while Jehoidah lived. After that he turned to paganism, killed the prophet and was invaded by the Arameans (Syria). His officials assassinated him.
8. Amaziah started well and defeated Edom, but he worshipped their gods and was defeated by Israel as a consequence.

9. Uzziah obeyed the Lord. He developed military might including ballistic catapults. Arrogantly, he acted as priest and contracted leprosy.
10. Ahaz was an evil king who embraced paganism and closed the Temple. He was defeated by Syria and Israel, harassed by Edom and the Philistines, and his envoy to Assyria was rejected.
11. Hezekiah was a great king who reestablished true worship. Sennacherib of Assyria invaded the land but God miraculously delivered Jerusalem. His life was likewise miraculously extended but in that time he foolishly displayed his wealth to Babylonian envoys.
12. Manasseh was a wicked king who was deported to Babylon where he repented and was restored to power.
13. Josiah instituted a major spiritual reform, purifying the land of paganism, restoring the Temple and celebrating the Passover. He died in an avoidable battle with Necho of Egypt that led to Jerusalem coming under Egyptian control until the rise of Babylon.
14. The last kings of Judah were a disaster and in 587 BC Nebuchadnezzar totally destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and deported the remaining population.

E. Perspective

1. The deal entered into under the Mosaic covenant was quite clear and was spelled out in the Ten Commandments. No other gods, no idols, no misuse of God's name, sabbath rest, care for parents, no murder, adultery, stealing, lying, coveting. Do this and you live; turn away and you are cursed. Yet God loved his people still and he maintained his covenant love towards them. Judgement anguished his heart and his pleas for their repentance were eloquently expressed through the prophets.
2. Although the nations failed under the Mosaic covenant, both in Israel and in Judah there were true believers who held to the Abrahamic covenant based upon justification by faith. These are called the remnant and many of them made a reappearance from their graves at the resurrection of Christ (Matthew 27:51-53). Spiritually, we are part of that remnant.

Reign	North (Israel)	Prophet	Reign	South (Judah)	Prophet	Empires and events
931-910	Jeroboam I	Ahijah	931-913	Rehoboam	Shemiah	Aramean (931-702)
910-909	Nadab		913-911	Abijah	Iddo	Shishak invades 926
909-886	Baasha	Jehu	911-870	Asa	Azariah	Ethiopian & Libyan incursions
886-885	Elah				Hanani	
885	Zimri					
885	Tibni					
885-874	Omri					Founding of Samaria
874-853	Ahab	Micaiah/Elijah	870-848	Jehoshaphat	Jahaziel	War with Syria
853-852	Ahaziah					
852-841	J(eh)oram	Elisha	848-841	Jehoram	Elijah's letter	
841-814	Jehu		841	Ahaziah	OBADIAH (Edom)	
			841-835	Athaliah		
814-798	Jehoahaz		835-796	Joash	JOEL	Homer
798-782	Jehoash		796-767	Amaziah		
782-752	Jeroboam II	AMOS	767-740	Azariah (Uzziah)		
753-752	Zechariah	HOSEA				Rome founded 753
752	Shallum				JONAH (Nineveh)	
752-742	Menahem					
742-740	Pekahiah					Assyrian (745-650)
742-732	Pekah	Oded	740-732	Jotham	MICAH	
732-722	Hoshea		732-716	Ahaz	ISAIAH	Fall of Samaria 722
			716-687	Hezekiah		Sennacherib invades
			687-642	Manasseh	NAHUM (Nineveh)	
			642-640	Amon	ZEPHANIAH	
			640-609	Josiah	JEREMIAH	Babylonian (625-539)
			609	Jehoahaz	HABAKKUK	Egypt invades
			609-597	Jehoiakim	DANIEL (Exiles)	1 st Babylon deportation 605
			597	Jehoiachin		2 nd Babylon deportation 597
			597	Adar	EZEKIEL (Exiles)	
			597-587	Zedekiah		Fall of Jerusalem 587