



Chapter 12

The Divided Kingdom

*"I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts;
for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant,
thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets . . .
and I, even I only, am left; . . ."*

1 Kings 19: 10

Chapter 12

The Divided Kingdom



Read

- 1 Kings 12:1 - 20
- 12:25 - 30
- 18:17 - 40; 19:9 - 18
- 2 Kings 2:1 - 14
- 17:6 - 8
- Jonah 1 - 4

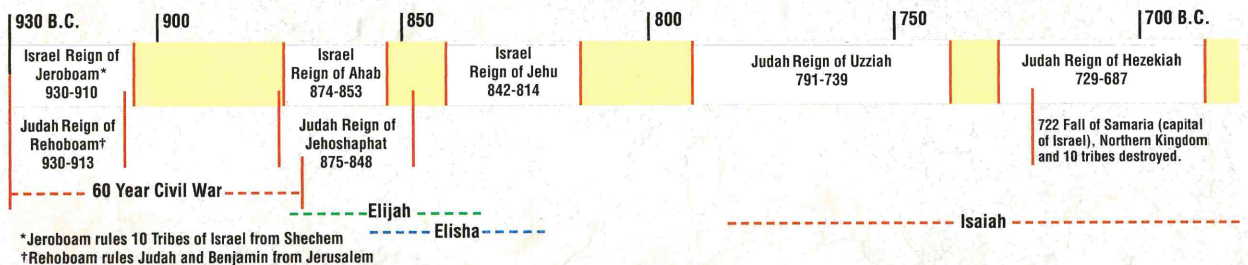
Solomon's reign was Israel's peak of glory. But his taxes and forced labor were making him unpopular with his subjects. Worse yet, his apostasy demanded chastisement from God.

The pride and idolatry of Solomon were the seeds of his empire's undoing. Imperial Israel would never again be a leader among the nations. In fact, the empire itself would not survive Solomon's death.

The Torn Kingdom

One of old king Solomon's top ministers was a young man named Jeroboam.

And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Abijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Abijah had clad himself with a new garment; and the two of them were alone in the open country. Then Abijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten



pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give you ten tribes ... because he has forsaken me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and has not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and ordinances, as David his father did.'" (1 Kgs 11: 29-33)

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam was set to succeed him. Rehoboam had grown up in Solomon's magnificent court; he had never known any other life than luxury and idleness.

The people had been suffering under Solomon's policies. Now the elders, with Jeroboam, came to ask Rehoboam if he could take some of the weight off their shoulders. "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke upon us, and we will serve you."¹



Shechem with Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. When the kingdom divided, Jeroboam, ruler of the Northern Kingdom, Israel (ten tribes), chose Shechem as his capital. Rehoboam ruled the Southern Kingdom, Judah (Judah and Benjamin), from Jerusalem.

Rehoboam told the elders to come back in three days and he would have an answer for them. Then he turned to the wise old men who had been his father Solomon's counselors. "How do you advise me to answer this people?" he asked them. "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them," the wise old men replied, "and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants for ever."²

That was not really what Rehoboam wanted to hear. He turned to the young men who had grown up with

him, the friends who had shared his luxurious and wasted young life at Solomon's court. They told him to take a hard line. So when the elders came back, Rehoboam had this proud answer for them: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."³

It was exactly the wrong answer. Once again that old rallying cry of rebellion was heard:

What portion have we in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

To your tents, O Israel!

Look now to your own house, David.

(1 Kgs 12: 16)

Although Israel had been a united kingdom for more than a century, the tribal traditions were still very important. The large and powerful southern tribe of Judah stayed faithful to its own house of David. But ten tribes rebelled and chose Jeroboam as their king. Aside from Judah, Rehoboam was able to keep control only over the tiny border tribe of Benjamin. Civil war loomed, but at the last minute Rehoboam decided not to try to recover the north. The prophet Shemaiah told him that the division of the kingdom was God's doing, and Rehoboam—perhaps unwilling to risk a war he could never win—backed down.

The kingdom was divided, and it would never be united again.

The Divided Kingdoms Of Israel And Judah, ca. 930 B.C.





Back To The Golden Calf

Jeroboam, as the prophet Abijah had made clear, was made king only because it was part of God's plan. But he did not trust God's promises.

And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David; if the people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their LORD, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." (1 Kgs 12: 26-27)

So instead of trusting in God, Jeroboam made a political decision that would scar the new Kingdom of Israel for centuries.



So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. (1 Kgs 12: 28-29)

Israel had gone right back to the Golden Calf! Even the words Jeroboam used were the same words Aaron had used when he dedicated the first Golden Calf in the wilderness (see Ex 32: 4).

God had chosen Jerusalem as the place for his Temple. But Jerusalem was in Judah. To keep the loyalty of his subjects, Jeroboam went back to the sin that had nearly destroyed Israel in the wilderness.

Bull-calf idol from the Ashkelon, a Canaanite city, ca. 2000-1550 B.C.

Good And Bad Kings

Jeroboam's sin set the pattern for the wicked kings of Israel for the rest of its history. From then on, as the books of Kings and Chronicles tell us, both Judah and Israel alternated between good and bad kings.

Good kings, in the sacred authors' way of seeing things, were the ones who reformed worship and led the people back to God. Bad kings introduced foreign gods and sometimes even persecuted true believers.

Both Judah and Israel had their share of bad kings, but Israel had far more bad kings than good. Even the good kings there could never undo the damage Jeroboam had done by setting up golden calves. But at least the golden calves (which were supposed to represent the God of Israel) were better than the horrible Canaanite gods, with their human sacrifices and male and female cult prostitutes.

God did not leave his people without guidance. Prophets rose in Israel and Judah, men and women who were not afraid to denounce the false gods the people were worshiping. It was a dangerous business being a prophet of the True God when the king preferred false gods. Many prophets paid with their lives. But still they spoke out. They couldn't help themselves: God had called them.

**If I say, "I will not mention him,
or speak any more his name,"
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire
shut up in my bones,
and I am weary holding it in,
and I cannot. (Jer 20: 9)**



King Jeroboam orders the arrest of a prophet. (1 Kgs 13: 4)

Jonah

In order to understand the literal sense of a biblical text, "it is necessary to understand it according to the literary conventions of the time. When it is a question of a story, the literal sense does not necessarily imply belief that the facts recounted actually took place, for a story need not belong to the genre of history but may be instead a work of imaginative fiction."⁴

The book of Jonah gives us a good idea of how impossible it is to avoid God's call. Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel at a time when the barbaric Assyrians were a constant threat. The story makes its point very clear: that God's mercy overcomes the boundaries of Israel, and that God will be merciful even when his prophets would rather not be.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. (Jon 1: 1-3)

The last thing Jonah wanted to do was go east to Nineveh, the wicked capital of the hateful Assyrians, and tell them to repent. Like any good Israelite patriot, Jonah wanted to see Nineveh wiped off the face of the earth. He was not a coward: he simply hated the Assyrians, as any good Israelite did, and he wanted them to be destroyed.

So he set off toward Tarshish, which was probably in Spain. It was as far as he could possibly go in the opposite direction. Jonah had a limited opinion of God; he thought he could somehow run away from God's sphere of influence.



But that, of course, is not possible. God sent a “mighty tempest” to toss the ship. The sailors thought they were all going to die; they prayed to their idols, but the storm just got worse. Jonah finally admitted that it was his fault: he had disobeyed God. He made the sailors toss him into the sea, and the tempest stopped immediately.

But God still had plans for Jonah. A great fish swallowed up Jonah and saved his life. For three days he was in the belly of the fish, as good as dead—in fact Jonah says he was in the belly of Sheol, the place of the dead. Then God spoke to the fish, and the fish spit Jonah out onto the land. It was as though he had risen from the dead.

God had not given up on Jonah.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. (Jon 3:1-3)

This time Jonah had learned his lesson. He went to Nineveh and proclaimed to the people what God had told him to say: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

Forty days is the symbolic time for serious repentance. God was giving the people of Nineveh time to repent in earnest. And they did. The king made everyone fast and put on sackcloth and ashes, traditional signs of repentance. Even the animals were dressed in sackcloth.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it. (Jon 3:10)

Jonah’s message had had the effect it was supposed to have. And that was exactly what Jonah had been afraid of.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD, and said, “I pray thee, LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentant of evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take my life from me, I beseech thee, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?” (Jon 4:1-4)

Jonah had no answer for that question. Instead, he went out into the hot desert east of the city to sulk.

So God gave him an object lesson. By God’s command, a tall plant with big, shady leaves grew over Jonah’s head and shaded him from the burning sun. “So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the

plant.” But the next day, God sent a worm to eat the base of the plant, and it withered away. The sun beat down on Jonah again, and again he sulked. He just wanted to die.

But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jon 4: 9-11)

The book ends on that rhetorical question, but we know the answer. The people of Nineveh are worth much more than Jonah’s plant. Jonah should not have been angry when God decided to be merciful.

The book of Jonah shows what a prophet had to go through. He had to forget about his own opinions and wants and go where God sent him to say what God told him to say. It was never easy. Of course, there were false prophets, too. They usually had easy lives. They told the king what he wanted to hear, and the king gave them a good living in return. They lived in ease and comfort, right up to the time when God brought on the judgment that his true prophets had warned of.



Jezebel relentlessly tried to replace the true God with Baal and other pagan deities. Accused of sorcery, she died a brutal death. (2 Kgs 9: 30-37)

Elijah And Jezebel

Of all the wicked kings of Israel, the one most remembered is Ahab—and he is remembered not so much for what he did as for the woman he married. She was a Sidonian princess, an enthusiastic worshiper of the Phoenician god Baal. Her name was Jezebel.

Jezebel persuaded her husband to worship Baal, too. Ahab had a temple of Baal put up in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. He also set up sacred poles for pagan fertility rites. “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him,” says the author of 1 Kings.

Jezebel was not content just to have her god’s temple in Samaria. She persecuted the prophets of the true God. The persecution was so terrible that a hundred of the prophets hid in a cave, fed by one of Ahab’s ministers who still loved the true God.

To respond to one of the worst of all kings, God sent one of the greatest of all prophets. This is the first we hear of him:

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” (1 Kgs 17: 1)

The first thing we hear of Elijah—whose name means “The Lord is my God”—is that he was able to stop the rain by his prayer. It would be a convincing demonstration of the power of the True God. But it only made Ahab hate Elijah the more.

Elijah often demonstrated the power of God by miracles. On the run from Jezebel’s assassins, he stopped at the house of a poor widow in Zarephath. He asked for something to eat; she told him she had only enough meal and oil for one cake. Because of the drought, a famine had spread over the



land; the widow and her son were about to die of starvation. But Elijah promised her that the meal and oil would last for the duration of the drought, and the widow had plenty from that day on. When the widow's son sickened and died, Elijah's prayer raised him again.⁵

But Elijah's most famous miracle was the contest on Mount Carmel. Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to prove that their god was not real.

The rules were simple. Each side would build an altar and prepare a sacrifice. But no one would light a fire. The real god would send fire down from heaven to light the sacrifice himself. There hadn't been any storms since Elijah shut off the rain, so there was no chance of a random lightning strike.

A huge crowd gathered around to watch the contest. The 450 prophets of Baal went first. From morning till noon they prayed to Baal, but nothing happened. They danced and shouted, but nothing happened. They cut themselves to ribbons and let their blood spill all over the altar, but nothing happened.

Meanwhile, Elijah, the only prophet of God who was brave enough to show his face, stood by

and made fun of them. "Cry aloud," he shouted, "for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside" (which probably was a euphemism for "he had to go to the bathroom"), "or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be wakened."⁶

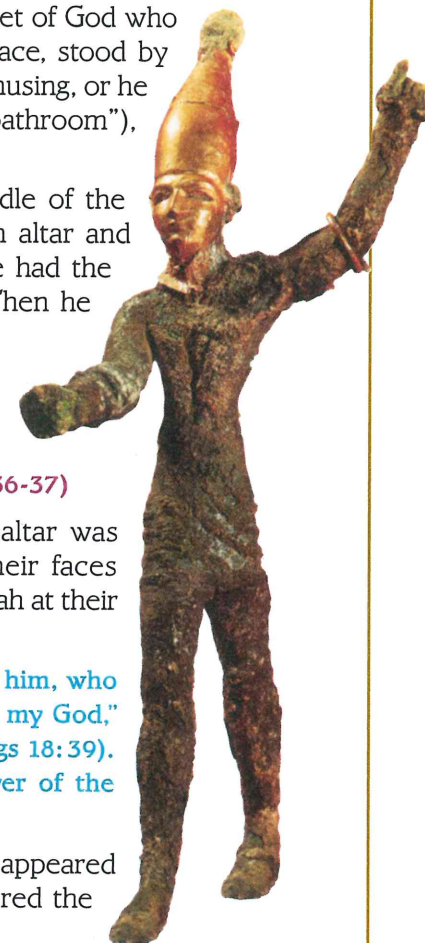
The prophets of Baal kept shouting and dancing and bleeding till the middle of the afternoon, but nothing happened. Finally Elijah took his turn. He built an altar and prepared the sacrifice; then, to add to the drama of the demonstration, he had the sacrifice soaked with water three times until the whole altar was awash. Then he prayed to God:

O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back. (1 Kgs 18: 36-37)

When Elijah had prayed, fire came down from heaven, and the whole altar was incinerated, stones and all. The people were convinced: they fell on their faces shouting, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." Then the angry mob, Elijah at their head, killed all the prophets of Baal.

Elijah is the "father" of the prophets, "the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob" (Ps 24: 6). Elijah's name, "The LORD is my God," foretells the people's cry in response to his prayer on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18: 39). St. James refers to Elijah in order to encourage us to pray: "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective" (Jas 5: 16b-18). (CCC 2582)

Now Elijah told Ahab to eat and drink, for rain was coming. A tiny cloud appeared on the horizon; it grew and grew until at last it was a huge storm that watered the whole land.



Baal, the false god of weather and harvest worshiped by Ahab and Jezebel.

Above: Elijah raises the widow's son from the dead.



Elijah At Sinai

It looked like a complete triumph for Elijah. But Jezebel was still the real power in the land, and she was not pleased that her god's prophets had been killed. She sent a message telling Elijah he would die like them the next day. Elijah did the only sensible thing: he ran for his life.⁷

Hiding out in the desert, Elijah prayed to God to take away his life. But God still had plans for him. Twice an angel brought him food to eat. "Arise and eat," the angel said, "else the journey will be too great for you." And on the strength of that heavenly food he went forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain in Sinai where Moses had also spent forty days and forty nights. There he saw a vision of God.

And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (1 Kgs 19:11-13)

To people who were used to thinking of God in terms of fire and earthquakes and mighty wind, this revelation was something new. God was all-powerful, but the truth about God was in that "still small voice" that Elijah listened to, not in all the fireworks.

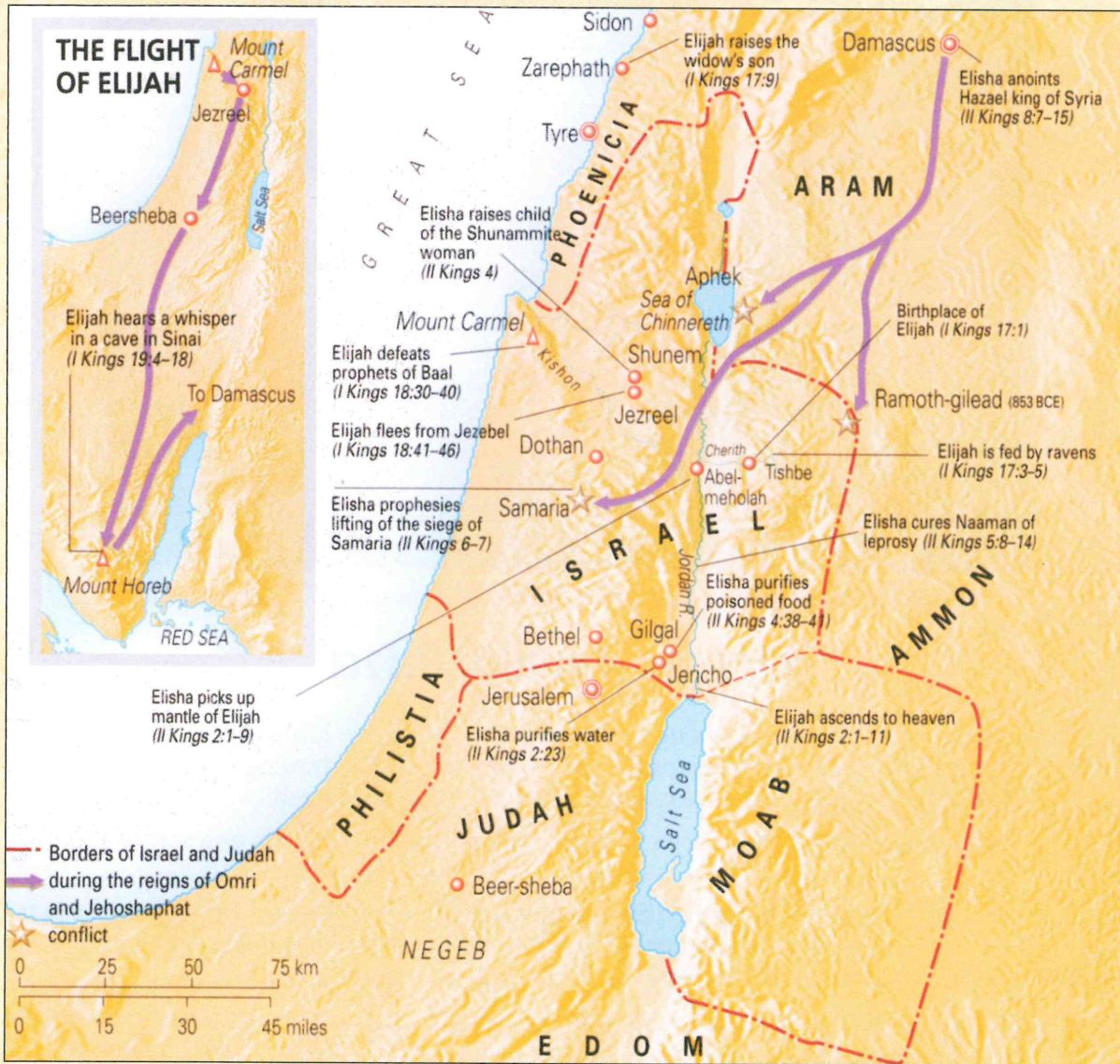
After Elijah had learned mercy during his retreat at the Wadi Cherith, he teaches the widow of Zarephath to believe in The Word of God and confirms her faith by his urgent prayer: God brings the widow's child back to life (cf. 1 Kgs 17:7-24).

The sacrifice on Mount Carmel is a decisive test for the faith of the People of God. In response to Elijah's plea, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me," the LORD's fire consumes the holocaust, at the time of the evening oblation. The Eastern liturgies repeat Elijah's plea in the Eucharistic *epiclesis*.

Finally, taking the desert road that leads to the place where the living and true God reveals himself to his people, Elijah, like Moses before him, hides "in a cleft of the rock" until the mysterious presence of God has passed by (cf. 1 Kgs 19:1-14; cf. Ex 33:19-23). But only on the mountain of the Transfiguration will Moses and Elijah behold the unveiled face of him whom they sought; "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God [shines] in the face of Christ," crucified and risen (2 Cor 4:6; cf. Lk 9:30-35). (CCC 2583)

Above: Elijah's Basin with ancient Cyprus trees below the summit of Jebel Musa (Mt. Horeb, Mt. Sinai) where Elijah heard the "still, small voice."

The Journeys Of Elijah And Elisha



Elijah hid from Ahab after he had declared a drought upon the apostate Ahab and his kingdom. 1 Kings 17: 4-6 tells us the LORD ordered ravens to feed Elijah morning and evening by the brook Cherith until it dried up. The raven seems like an odd choice to carry out God's mission because the raven is listed as an unclean animal in Mosaic law. But the books of Job and Psalms mention the raven as a creature under God's care (Job 38: 41; Ps 147:9). Noah also used the services of a raven, sending one from the ark (Gn 8: 6-7). Because it was strong enough to fly until the waters receded, it did not return to Noah.



"My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" (2 Kgs 2: 12)

Elijah And Elisha

At Horeb, God told Elijah to anoint a new prophet to take his place: Elisha. On his way back, Elijah found Elisha plowing the field. He tossed his mantle over Elisha, showing that Elisha would take over his prophetic call. Elisha took a hasty leave of his people and followed.

Elijah continued his ministry for several more years, with Elisha following him as a sort of apprentice prophet.

But eventually a time came when both prophets knew that Elijah was about to be taken away. In fact, all the prophets of God knew it.⁸ Three times Elijah gave Elisha the chance to stay behind, but Elisha replied, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."⁹

When they came to the Jordan, Elijah struck the water with his mantle, and a dry path appeared through the river—a very Moses-like miracle from a prophet who had also spent forty days and nights at Sinai. The two prophets crossed the river, and on the other side Elijah finally mentioned what was on both their minds.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so; but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." (2 Kgs 2: 9-10)

A "double share" was the inheritance of a first-born son. Elisha was asking to be made Elijah's heir and successor. The thing he asked for wasn't a privilege by most standards: Elijah had spent most of his life under threat of death from the wicked kings of Israel. But it was what a prophet would ask for if his only motive was a burning love for the Lord.

And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. (2 Kgs 2: 11-12)

Then Elisha tore his own clothes and put on Elijah's mantle. On his way back from the amazing vision of Elijah being taken up into heaven, Elisha again came to the Jordan. "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he said. And he struck the water with the mantle. Once again, a dry path appeared.

Elisha had indeed inherited Elijah's spirit. We see the confirmation in the miracles done through Elisha: dividing the Jordan, making oil last indefinitely,¹⁰ and raising a young man from the dead¹¹—all things Elijah had done.

The Assyrian Threat

But even with prophets like Elijah and Elisha to call them back to God, the people of Israel still went after false gods. Judah, too, had many idol-worshippers, but Israel—in spite of a few outbursts of reform—never really came back to the true worship of God.

Meanwhile, an ominous threat from the northeast was growing more ominous all the time. The Assyrians were rapidly expanding their empire, and it could not be long before they set their sights on Israel.

All conquest was horrible and bloody in ancient times. but the Assyrians were more than usually horrible. Their art and literature shows a real delight in war and killing, as though massacre were the national sport.

Conquest was an Assyrian king's chief glory. At the king's coronation, the pagan priest solemnly informed the new king of what the gods expected from him: "Expand your territory!" It was the king's religious duty to conquer.

For Israel, the most dreadful thing about the Assyrians was their cruel policy of resettlement as insurance against rebellion. The Assyrians would uproot the whole population of a conquered province and send everyone off to live in some foreign land, or even scatter them throughout their empire. They hoped that uprooted refugees would have neither the resources nor the spirit to rebel against the empire.



The capital of Assyria was Nineveh, an enormous city of hundreds of thousands of people. The city was richer than anyone could imagine, swollen with loot pillaged from all over the known world. To the people of Israel and Judah, who lived in constant fear of Assyrian attack, Nineveh was the symbol of everything that was evil in the world—as we saw in the story of Jonah.

The Assyrian reliefs found lining the walls of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh depict the siege on Lachish and are the only visual data illustrating the siege and its consequences. Many panels of the relief show either the killing of captives or the exile of families from the city. In one scene, the Lachishites are shown impaled on the Assyrian's sharp stakes. The Assyrians used a form of psychological warfare. They raped, murdered and mutilated many of the inhabitants to set an example for the other cities in the area which rarely needed much more encouragement to surrender.

The End Of Israel

Hoshea, the last king of Israel, tried to play the Assyrians off against the Egyptians. It was a big mistake.

After losing a battle with the Assyrians, Hoshea had been forced to pay annual tribute to Nineveh. But one year the tribute didn't arrive. The Assyrian king, Shalmaneser, found out that Hoshea had been sending messengers to Egypt, suggesting a secret alliance that would help Israel break free of Assyria.

The last thing the Assyrians wanted was an Egyptian foothold in Israel. Shalmaneser came down with a huge army and besieged Samaria, the capital of Israel. For three years the city held out, but at last it fell. The Assyrians carried off everyone they could find and resettled them—all the leading citizens of Israel, more than 27,000 of them according to Assyrian records.

And this was so, because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs which the kings of Israel had introduced.... Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. (2 Kgs 17: 7-8, 13-14)

The Downfall Of Israel, ca. 721 B.C.



SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Augustine, *City of God*, Book XVII

But Jeroboam king of Israel, with perverse mind, not believing in God, whom he had proved true in promising and giving him the kingdom, was afraid lest, by coming to the temple of God which was in Jerusalem, where, according to the divine law, that whole nation was to come in order to sacrifice, the people should be seduced from him, and return to David's line as the seed royal; and set up idolatry in his kingdom, and with horrible impiety beguiled the people, ensnaring them to the worship of idols with himself. Yet God did not altogether cease to reprove by the prophets, not only that king, but also his successors and imitators in his impiety, and the people too. For there the great and illustrious prophet Elijah and Elisha his disciple arose, who also did many wonderful works. Even there, when Elijah said, "O LORD, they have slain Thy prophets, they have digged down Thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life," it was answered that seven thousand men were there who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

So also in the kingdom of Judah pertaining to Jerusalem prophets were not lacking even in the times of succeeding kings, just as it pleased God to send them, either for the prediction of

what was needful, or for correction of sin and instruction in righteousness; for there, too, although far less than in Israel, kings arose who grievously offended God by their impieties, and, along with their people, who were like them, were smitten with moderate scourges. The no small merits of the pious kings there are praised indeed. But we read that in Israel the kings were, some more, others less, yet all wicked. Each part, therefore, as the divine providence either ordered or permitted, was both lifted up by prosperity and weighed down by adversity of various kinds; and it was afflicted not only by foreign, but also by civil wars with each other, in order that by certain existing causes the mercy or anger of God might be manifested; until, by His growing indignation, that whole nation was by the conquering Chaldeans not only overthrown in its abode, but also for the most part transported to the lands of the Assyrians,—first, that part of the thirteen tribes [counting the two half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh] called Israel, but afterwards Judah also, when Jerusalem and that most noble temple was cast down,—in which lands it rested seventy years in captivity. Being after that time sent forth thence, they rebuilt the overthrown temple.



"And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat.'" (1 Kgs 19: 5)

VOCABULARY

ABIJAH

A prophet who announced to Jeroboam that God would give him ten of the twelve tribes of Israel.

AHAB

The wicked king of Israel. Led by his Phoenician wife Jezebel, he established the cult of Baal and persecuted the worshipers of the True God.

ASSYRIA

A bloody and wicked empire that terrorized the whole Middle East and constantly threatened both Israel and Judah. Eventually the Assyrians destroyed Israel and scattered its people.

BETHEL

The southern of the two centers of worship in the northern kingdom of Israel where Jeroboam set up golden calves for the people to worship.

DAN

The northern of the two centers of worship in the northern kingdom of Israel where Jeroboam set up golden calves for the people to worship.

ELIJAH

The great prophet who challenged the pagan rulers of Israel. He was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot.

ELISHA

Elijah's devoted disciple, who continued his mentor's mission in Israel.

ISRAEL

Originally the whole kingdom of the twelve tribes of Israel, but after Solomon's time refers to the northern of the two kingdoms into which Solomon's kingdom was divided. The Assyrians scattered Israel, yet the prophets promised that all twelve tribes would eventually be brought together at the coming of the Messiah.

JEROBOAM

A minister of Solomon who led the revolt against his son Rehoboam. Jeroboam became the first king of the new northern kingdom of Israel.

JEZEBEL

The wicked queen of Israel who persecuted the prophets of the True God. She was a Phoenician, and she was fanatically devoted to the Phoenician god Baal.

JONAH

An unwilling prophet sent to preach repentance to Nineveh. He spent three days as good as dead in the belly of a great fish. Jesus Christ referred to "the sign of Jonah" as a type of his own death and resurrection.

JUDAH

The name used for the southern of the two kingdoms into which Israel was divided after Solomon. Judah kept Jerusalem as its capital and remained loyal to David's line.

NINEVEH

The capital of the Assyrian Empire. See Assyria and Jonah.

REHOBOAM

Solomon's son and heir. His pride caused all but two of the twelve tribes to rebel against him.

TARSHISH

A far-off place, possibly in Spain, to which Jonah planned to escape from his mission to Nineveh.



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the seeds of undoing for the empire of Solomon?
2. Who succeeded Solomon?
3. What favor did the people ask of Rehoboam when he succeeded his father Solomon?
4. What did Rehoboam's wise old men advise him?
5. What was Rehoboam's response and what did it cause?
6. What happened in the rebellion?
7. According to Abijah's prophecy, why was the northern part of the kingdom taken from Solomon's son?
8. How did Jeroboam try to keep the tribes under his control from turning back to Jerusalem?
9. How did God guide his people in times of bad kings?
10. What is the point of the book of Jonah?
11. Why was Jonah on a boat to Tarshish?
12. How long was Jonah in the belly of the fish?
13. What effect did Jonah's preaching have on Nineveh?
14. Why was Jonah angry when Nineveh repented?
15. Describe two miracles God worked through Elijah.
16. What did Elijah do when Jezebel threatened his life?
17. Where did Elijah have his vision of God?
18. What did Elisha ask of Elijah?
19. What signs indicated he had inherited Elijah's spirit?
20. Who was Hoshea?
21. How long did it take for the Assyrian king to take over the city of Samaria?



Elisha's Well. This is one of the predella pictures of the altarpiece made for the Carmelite Church in Siena. The painting depicts a rocky landscape on Mount Carmel, in the foreground is the well which according to tradition was opened up by Prophet Elisha. Scenes from the life of Carmelite hermits are represented both beside the well and in the background.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Rehoboam refused to listen to the wise old men when they told him to be merciful to the people of Israel. Instead, he listened only to his malformed friends because they told him what he wanted to hear. In the end, he decided he wanted to appear even more powerful than his father, Solomon, and so increased the burden on the people. What deadly sin is this an example of? Explain your choice. What else was wrong with Rehoboam's decision and its effects on the people?

2. During the reigns of bad kings in Israel, many prophets rose up to defend the true God and turn the people away from worshipping idols. Jeremiah wrote about being called by God to be one of these prophets: "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer 20: 9). Do you think that Jeremiah was forced to be a prophet and could not help it? What other possible explanation could there be for this quote?

3. Reread the section on Jonah and Nineveh. What can we learn about our world today from the story of Jonah's change of heart regarding the people of Nineveh? Do we have

enemies to whom we should be bringing the word of God, rather than hoping for their destruction? Think of examples in your own life. How does this lesson affect the way you treat your enemies, or even the way you think about them?

4. A large crowd of people became convinced that the Lord is God when Elijah asked God to send fire from heaven to light his sacrifice. Analyze Elijah's prayer: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O LORD, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back" (1 Kgs 18: 36-37). What is Elijah's overall attitude in the prayer? How does he start it and how does it end? What is the purpose of the prayer and what were Elijah's intentions?

5. Reread the section on Elijah at Sinai. Elijah's vision of God started not with a powerful presence but with a "still small voice." How does this revelation tie in with the idea that God has given us complete freedom to choose whether or not to accept his will? How does this revelation help us in our search to know God's will?



Endnotes

- | | | | |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. 1 Kgs 12: 4. | 4. Pontifical Biblical Commission, | 5. 1 Kgs 17: 8-24. | 9. 2 Kgs 2: 2, 2: 4, 2: 6. |
| 2. 1 Kgs 12: 7. | The Interpretation of the Bible | 6. 1 Kgs 18: 27. | 10. 2 Kgs 4: 1-7. |
| 3. 1 Kgs 12: 12. | in the Church, 79. | 7. 1 Kgs 19: 1-3. | 11. 2 Kgs 4: 32-37. |
| | | 8. 2 Kgs 2: 3. | |