

PROMISED LAND 2: Lesson Seven,
The Divided Monarchy
1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 14, 2 Chronicles 10 – 25

Subject: Israel's divided kingdom was ruled by multiple dynasties, while David's descendants ruled over Judah.
Main Idea: Most divisions result from sin, but God can use them for good.

Principles:

1. *Divisions force us to make decisions.*
2. *Divisions test our commitment to holiness.*
3. *Division is an opportunity to witness God's faithfulness.*

Introduction

Most of us have experienced heartache from some kind of division: a family member no longer speaking to you, a neighborhood torn by prejudice or disagreement, or a church that has split. We live in a world divided by racial, political, and cultural differences. To varying degrees, all of us suffer from these divisions.

But not all divisions are bad. Some divisions allow good to multiply. For example, a disagreement between the apostle Paul and his missionary partner Barnabas resulted in a decision to go separate ways, but in the end, the division multiplied their ministry efforts (Acts 15:35-41). Others divisions are necessary to preserve good. 1 Peter 2:9 tells us that we have been separated from the world for a purpose: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." For God's holy people, separation from evil is not just good; it's necessary!

The Bible does not specifically indicate God's greater purpose in permitting Israel's kingdom to divide. The Book of 1 Kings only tells us that the division of Israel's kingdom was a consequence of Israel's idolatry in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 11:31-33), yet it also speaks of the division as "from God" (1 Kings 12:15). Considering the rapid spiritual deterioration of the northern kingdom, perhaps the division was for the purpose of slowing down the negative impact on David's descendants (the messianic line), who continued ruling in the south. Most divisions seem to stem from sin, but they *can* result in good. As we will see, God certainly brought some good from the division of Israel's kingdom.

The division in the kingdom of Israel that had been foretold when Solomon became idolatrous, took place in the days of his son, Rehoboam. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel, while the kingdom of their southern brothers was named for its dominant tribe, Judah. David and Solomon's descendants continued ruling over Judah, while Israel was ruled by several different dynasties.

I. **Rehoboam and Jeroboam** – 1 Kings 12-16; 2 Chronicles 10-16

A. **The Division of the Kingdom**

i. Rehoboam's Answer

1. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, came to the throne at a time when the Israelites' resentment of heavy taxation and forced conscription was boiling over and ready to threaten the established monarchy. Early in Rehoboam's reign, the Israelites requested that he lighten these burdens. If he would do so, they promised him their unwavering loyalty (1 Kings 12:4). The elders who had served his father Solomon advised him to reply favorably, but the younger men with whom Rehoboam had grown up urged him to answer harshly. They had been raised in the court and knew little about hard work. Rehoboam listened to the younger men and told the people that he would be even more heavy-handed than his father had been. 1 Kings 12:15 says, "For this turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite."

ii. The Prophets and Their Message

1. When the Lord had something to say to the king or to the people, He did not speak directly to them. He spoke through His prophets. We notice a great increase in the mention of prophets in these chapters in Kings and Chronicles. Some of them are named and some are not named. Among these are:
 - a. Ahijah was the prophet who foretold the division of the kingdom and who was sought for divine assistance by Jeroboam and his wife when their young son became deathly ill.
 - b. Shemaiah, the man of God who prophesied to Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:22, 2 Chronicles 12:5)
 - c. The unnamed man of God who cried out against Jeroboam's altar, foretold the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, and was later killed by a lion (1 Kings 13:1)
 - d. Azariah, son of Oded, who encouraged Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1)
 - e. Micaiah, who was courageously willing to foretell Ahab and Jehoshaphat's defeat in the presence of a host of false prophets who said differently (1 Kings 22:9-28)
 - f. Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, who was stoned to death in the Temple courtyard at Joash's command (2 Chronicles 24:20-21)

- g. The great prophets Elijah and Elisha and the company of prophets who lived in their day. Our next lesson covers the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.
2. Perhaps the fulfillment of the prophecies recorded in these chapters has caused you to wonder whether or not the kings of Israel had the freedom to make real choices (or whether any of us have). Does God just foretell what He knows we will choose? If that is the case, is God really sovereign? Or, on the other hand, are human beings merely robots whose every move is predetermined?
- a. In the case of Rehoboam, 1 Kings 12:8 says that he rejected the counsel of his father's wise counselors. As a result, the kingdom divided. Yet a few verses later (verse 15), we find the statement already mentioned indicating that Rehoboam's unwillingness to listen to the people was "from the Lord" to fulfill Ahijah's prophecy. Taken together, the verses indicate that God is sovereign but that Rehoboam also had a real choice.
 - b. The church has long debated the relationship between God's sovereign determinations and our ability to choose. While, in our human reasoning, the ideas seem to contradict one another, in God's supreme wisdom, no contradiction exists. In the words of scholar Wayne Grudem:

God's providential direction as an unseen, behind-the-scenes, "primary cause," should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions. Again and again Scripture affirms that we really do cause events to happen... We do have choices... God causes all things that happen, [but does so] in such a way that He somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for which we are held accountable.¹

iii. Jeroboam's Representation of the Disgruntled Northern Tribes

1. Jeroboam had served as an overseer of Solomon's labor force. Specifically, he was over the tribes of Joseph (that is, the large northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh [1 Kings 11:28]). After Ahijah told Jeroboam that the kingdom would be torn and that he would rule over ten tribes, Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam fled to King Shishak in Egypt, but after Solomon's death, he returned to Israel and emerged as the leader who represented the interests of the disgruntled Israelites in the north.

2. Divisiveness between the northern tribes and the tribe of Judah was not a new thing. Until David's time, the southern tribe of Judah (and Simeon, which had been absorbed within Judah) had been geographically cut off from the northern tribes. When David captured Jerusalem, that barrier disappeared, but the spirit of disunity between the northern and southern tribes remained. Since David and his descendants were from the tribe of Judah, the southern tribes naturally remained loyal to his monarchy. However, the northern tribes felt no such obligation.
3. When Rehoboam rejected the request of the Israelites, the monarchy divided with Jeroboam ruling over the ten tribes of the north and Rehoboam maintaining leadership over Judah, plus the one other tribe of Benjamin. Occasionally, border disputes erupted in battles for control over the towns of Benjamin, since it was geographically positioned between Judah and the northern tribes.
4. Rehoboam planned to initiate a civil war but the prophet Shemaiah persuaded him against it (1 Kings 12:22-24). He reigned over Judah for 17 years. Although Rehoboam acted wisely in some respects (2 Chronicles 11), with the idolatrous example of both father and mother (his mother was an Ammonite), it is not surprising that he eventually abandoned the Lord and tolerated idolatry. As a result, God caused the glorious kingdom that once belonged to David and Solomon to weaken and Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem and carried off the treasures of the temple and royal palace.

B. The Sins of Jeroboam

i. Jeroboam's Syncretistic Cult

1. Jeroboam ruled from the northern cities of Shechem (1 Kings 12:25) and Tirzah (1 Kings 14:17). In Judah, Jerusalem remained the capital, but to the northern tribes, Jerusalem was significant for another reason: the temple was there! Jeroboam was concerned that if his people continued to worship and sacrifice in Jerusalem, as required by the Law of Moses, their sympathy for the southern kingdom would re-develop. In order to discourage the long pilgrimage, he built shrines in closer proximity to his people. One was at Bethel in the southern end of Israel's territory and other was in Dan in the far north. Jeroboam appointed his own priests, allowing anyone (even non-Levites) to serve at these shrines. He also established a new festival day (probably his version of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated in Jerusalem a month earlier). A golden calf was set up at each worship site.

2. Some scholars believe that the calves were pedestals upon which the invisible Yahweh would sit, stand, or ride. Even if that was his intention, the calves were soon worshipped as idols. Jeroboam perverted Yahwehism and formed his own monotheistic cult. Such a blending (or attempted blending) of religions is known as syncretism. The writer of the books of Kings was so outraged that he evaluated subsequent northern kings (and some of the southern kings) on the basis of whether or not they “walked in the ways of Jeroboam.” Unfortunately, this cult persisted for generations.
 3. However, since Jerusalem was the place the Lord had exclusively chosen for the Israelites to worship (2 Chronicles 11:13-16), those Levites and Israelites who set their hearts on worshipping the Lord moved to Judah (1 Kings 14:21). In so doing, they strengthened Rehoboam’s kingdom.
- ii. The Lord’s Prophetic Warnings
1. The Lord sent a prophet who denounced Jeroboam, crying out against his altar at Bethel. Amazingly, he named Josiah, three centuries before his birth, as the Davidic king of Judah who would one day burn the idolatrous, northern priests on their own altar. The Lord had promised Jeroboam a lasting dynasty if he served Him faithfully as David had (1 Kings 11:38), but Jeroboam committed more evil than those who lived before him (1 Kings 14:9).
 2. The prophet Ahijah also foretold the premature deaths of all of Jeroboam’s male descendants. The one young son of Jeroboam in whom God saw any good was the only one to receive a burial.

C. Changing Northern Dynasties

- i. Dynasty of Jeroboam: Jeroboam’s son Nadab ruled Israel for two years and followed in his father’s evil ways. Baasha murdered Nadab, along with Jeroboam’s entire family. Thus, Jeroboam’s dynasty ended as the Lord foretold.
- ii. Dynasty of Baasha: Baasha ruled Israel for 24 years and followed the ways of Jeroboam. The prophet Jehu, son of Hanani foretold the violent end of his dynasty (1 Kings 16:2-4). Baasha was buried in Tirzah and his son Elah succeeded him. Zimri, one of Elah’s officials, murdered Elah while he was getting drunk in his palace in Tirzah. Then, Zimri killed all of the relatives of Baasha. Another dynasty ended in fulfillment of the word of the Lord.

- iii. Zimri's Brief Reign: No sooner had Zimri put himself on the throne than Omri, the commander of Israel's army, challenged him. A power struggle ensued and Omri, the stronger man, won. Zimri had reigned in Tirzah for a mere seven days. The scriptural commentary on Zimri is that "he died because of the sins he had committed, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and following the ways of Jeroboam and committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit" (1 Kings 16:19).
- iv. Dynasty of Omri: Omri ruled Israel for 12 years and established Samaria as the capital of the north. Although secular historical records applaud Omri as one of Israel's great kings, the Bible says very little about him. The Lord often deems insignificant those whom the world calls great. According to the Bible, Omri sinned more than all those before him (1 Kings 16:25).

D. Rehoboam's Son and Grandson

- i. Abijah, king of Judah: Rehoboam's son Abijah ruled only three years. Although the Lord graciously granted him military victory over Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13), his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord as David's had been. He committed all the sins of his father Rehoboam.
- ii. Asa's Reforms
 - 1. Asa, son of Abijah, did right in the eyes of the Lord, as David had done. The first ten years of his reign were characterized by peace. During that time, he built up the towns of Judah and prospered (2 Chronicles 14:6-7).
 - 2. He deposed his wicked grandmother, removed the "high places" (where idols were worshipped) with their sacred stones and incense altars and cut down the Asherah poles. He also commanded Judah to seek the Lord. The Lord sent Azariah the prophet to encourage Asa. Asa took courage and repaired the Lord's long-ignored altar, assembled all Judah and Benjamin, and entered into a covenant to seek the Lord.
 - 3. When Zerah the Cushite marched against Asa with a vast army, Asa cried out to the Lord and the Cushites fled before him.
- iii. Asa's Failure to Trust the Lord
 - 1. Later in his reign, Asa fell away from complete reliance on the Lord. Baasha, king of Israel, went to the border town of Ramah in Benjamin and cut off Judah's access to the north. Asa's response was politically shrewd but spiritually shortsighted. He sent treasures from the Lord's temple and from his palace to the king of Aram to encourage him to break his peace treaty with Baasha. Baasha was unable to handle trouble on his southern border

from Asa and on his northern border from Aram at the same time, and was forced to abandon the fortification project in Ramah.

2. The prophet Hanani told Asa he had not trusted in the Lord to handle this trouble with Baasha, as he had when Zerah the Cushite attacked him. Asa did not respond well to Hanani's chastisement. He imprisoned him and oppressed some of his own people (perhaps these were supporters of Hanani). After that, Asa was afflicted with diseased feet. Sadly, 2 Chronicles 16:12 comments, "He did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians."

Summary Statement: The monarchy in Israel was divided with several different dynasties ruling Israel in the north and David's descendants ruling Judah in the south.

The division of the kingdom forced every Israelite to make choices. Each king was forced to choose whether or not he would live under God's authority. Additionally, the people of the north had to decide whether they would worship in Jerusalem, as God required, or whether they would follow the example of Jeroboam and worship as they pleased. The priests and Levites from all their districts throughout Israel chose to abandon their pasturelands and property and go to Judah and Jerusalem, along with those from every tribe who set their hearts on seeking the Lord (2 Chronicles 11:13-16).

Principle: *Divisions force us to make decisions.*

Division often forces difficult decisions upon us. Those who relocated to Judah from the north had to leave behind extended family and friends. They abandoned the land inheritances handed down to them by their ancestors. But they did so because they set their hearts on seeking the Lord.

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He said,

Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53). Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:37-39).

Application: Perhaps there is division in your homeland, your neighborhood, your workplace, your church, or your family that is forcing you to make a decision. Will you set your heart on seeking the Lord, as the Levites did, no matter the cost?

Transition: The sons of Omri, king of Israel, and Asa, king of Judah, represented even greater extremes of good and evil than their fathers.

II. Jehoshaphat and Ahab – 1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 17-23

A. Ahab, Son of Omri

i. Ahab's Personality

1. Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him (1 Kings 16:30). He was so vile that the scriptures compare him to the depraved Amorites who lived in Canaan before the Israelites (1 Kings 21:26). So great was Israel's evil during Ahab's reign that only a few thousand people in the land continued to faithfully serve the Lord (1 Kings 19:18). In those days, the Lord spoke through the powerful voice of Elijah to call Israel to repentance (1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 2 are largely devoted to Elijah and his ministry).
2. In addition to being evil, Ahab was a cowardly man. He was willing to give up his own family and wealth (1 Kings 20:4-8), rather than fight the king of Aram. On another occasion, when he was refused a piece of property that he wanted, he became angry and sullen (1 Kings 21:4). He was also characterized as "angry and sullen" when challenged by a prophet (1 Kings 20:43).
3. Finally, Ahab's evil wife Jezebel dominated him. 1 Kings 21:25 says, "Never was there a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil... urged on by Jezebel his wife." Jezebel's father was king over the Phoenician port city of Sidon. The Phoenicians were notoriously obscene and immoral people. Apparently, he was also a priest of Baal. Under Jezebel's influence, Baalism became Israel's state religion. Ahab built a temple and altar for Baal in the capital city of Samaria. He also made an Asherah pole. These were probably trees carved into the image of Asherah, Baal's mother and a fertility goddess.

- ii. The Lord's Grace Toward Ahab: The Lord sent many prophets to Ahab. He also delivered him from Ben-Hadad, his northern enemy. Nevertheless, Ahab failed to honor the Lord and continued in his evil ways. Elijah told Ahab that the Lord was going to wipe out every last one of his male descendants, as He had with the households of Jeroboam and Baasha. On hearing this, Ahab put on sackcloth and fasted, and as a result, the Lord delayed judgment on his household.

- iii. Ahab's Successors: Ahab reigned 22 years. Two of his sons reigned after him. Ahaziah reigned for two years, and when he died without fathering any sons, his brother Joram came to the throne. Joram (also known as Jehoram) ruled Israel for twelve years. Joram was not the Baal worshipper his parents had been, but he nevertheless clung to the sins of Jeroboam. Ahaziah had the witness of Elijah (2 Kings 1) and Joram had the witness of Elisha (2 Kings 3), yet neither of these sons of Ahab turned to the Lord.

B. Jehoshaphat's Greatness and Error

- i. Jehoshaphat's Greatness: Early in Ahab's reign, Jehoshaphat came to the throne of Judah. Like his father Asa, he was a good king. He ruled Judah for 25 years.
 1. Jehoshaphat sent officials, including Levites, throughout Judah to teach the Law of Moses to the people. He also appointed judges throughout the land to settle disputes. The Lord gave Jehoshaphat great wealth and honor and firmly established his kingdom. Furthermore, the fear of the Lord fell on the Philistines and Arabs and they brought gifts to Jehoshaphat. He became more and more powerful.
 2. On one occasion, apparently late in his reign, a vast trans-Jordanian coalition marched against Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast and called the people together to seek the Lord. He stood before the people and prayed a beautiful prayer, concluding, "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chronicles 20:12). The Spirit of the Lord spoke through a Levite, who told Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah not to be afraid, "for the battle is not yours but God's." He instructed them to go out and face the enemy army and see what the Lord would do. After Jehoshaphat encouraged his people early the next morning, he appointed men to sing and praise the Lord as they marched out into battle. As they sang, the Lord set ambushes against their enemies so that they began slaughtering one another. When Jehoshaphat's singing army came upon them, they found them all dead.
- ii. Jehoshaphat's Foolish Alliances: Although Jehoshaphat served the Lord faithfully, he made a foolish mistake by entering into alliances with Ahab and his son.

1. The first alliance was a marriage alliance. Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Ahab's daughter Athaliah. As a result, the house of Ahab gained political influence over Judah. Athaliah influenced her husband and son Ahaziah negatively. Later, during the reigns of Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram and grandson Ahaziah, the people of Judah lived as wickedly as their northern brothers (2 Kings 8:18-19).
2. In addition to the marriage alliance, at Ahab's request, Jehoshaphat agreed to go to war with him against the Arameans. Ahab was killed in the battle. Jehoshaphat was nearly killed but the Lord helped him. Afterward, the prophet Jehu rebuked Jehoshaphat for having assisted the wicked in battle.
3. Thirdly, Jehoshaphat foolishly agreed to join Ahab's son, Ahaziah, in a shipping venture. According to the Chronicles record, the Lord wrecked the ships before they were able to set sail.

C. Kings of Judah Related to Jehoshaphat *and* Ahab

i. Jehoram, king of Judah

1. During the time when Joram, son of Ahab, sat on Israel's throne, Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat (*also* known as Joram) ruled over Judah. Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat followed the ways of the kings of Israel, for he was married to Ahab's daughter Athaliah. He led the people of Judah away from the Lord and back into idolatry.
2. Elisha sent a letter to Jehoram that prophesied Jehoram's death by a lingering disease of the bowels. When Jehoram died, his people made no fire in his honor, as they had for his predecessors (2 Chronicles 21:19). He had ruled eight years. Since Judah was as wicked as Israel in the days of Jehoram, the only reason the Lord did not end David's dynasty as he had the dynasties of wicked northern kings was because of His covenant with David (2 Chronicles 21:7).

- ii. Ahaziah, king of Judah: Jehoram's son Ahaziah ruled Judah for one year. Since Athaliah was his mother, he too followed the ways of Ahab. His advisors were from the house of Ahab and he went to war with his uncle Joram, king of Israel. Joram was wounded in the battle. Ahaziah went to visit him during his recovery, and as it turned out, the visit ended with the deaths of both kings.

D. Jehu's Zeal

- i. Ahab's Family Put to Death: The prophet Elisha anointed Jehu king of Israel and charged him with destroying Ahab's household. Jehu killed Joram and then chased after the visiting Ahaziah and killed him too. He had Jezebel thrown down a window and put to death the seventy remaining sons of Ahab. He also killed 42 men who claimed to be Ahaziah's relatives. Whether or not he had justification for killing Ahaziah and his relatives is questionable. It is true that Ahaziah was related to Ahab, so perhaps Jehu reasoned on this basis, but it seems as though Jehu may have carried God's instructions beyond what was intended.
- ii. The Prophets of Baal Killed: Jehu tricked the prophets of Baal into assembling in their temple. Once they were inside, he blocked their escape and put them all to death.
- iii. Jehu's Evil: Despite his zeal in carrying out the Lord's commands, once Jehu's reign was established, he followed in the ways of Jeroboam by worshipping the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Because of the good he had done, the Lord kept Jehu's descendants on Israel's throne to the fourth generation. However, his dynasty did not last because he failed to honor and obey the Lord. Additionally, as a result of Israel's ongoing sin, the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel in Jehu's day (2 Kings 10:32-33).

Summary Statement: Jehu put an end to the wicked house of Ahab, but by then, Jehoshaphat and his descendants had already been corrupted by their alliance with Ahab's family.

Principle: *Division tests our commitment to holiness.*

To be holy is to be set apart, separated from all that is unholy. The Bible warns believers against entering binding agreements with nonbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). It takes spiritual maturity and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to distinguish between loving sinners (as Jesus did) and making alliances with them. Often, less mature or careless believers fail to make the distinction. However, mature believers like Jehoshaphat also sometimes make this mistake. Our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), and we can easily convince ourselves that such alliances won't hinder our walk with Christ. How differently things might have turned out for Jehoshaphat's descendants and all of Judah, if only he had sought the Lord and consulted His prophets before entering these alliances.

Application: Some believers were already married to an unbelieving partner when they came to faith. Such individuals are to remain in the marriage, as long as their spouse is willing (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). However, some believers have sinned by knowingly entering a marriage with an unbeliever. Paul’s advice is the same: remain if your spouse is willing. God forgives sin, and although you will live with the difficult consequences, He will give you grace if you confess and turn to Him. God will also forgive the sin of those who have knowingly entered into other kinds of binding relationships with unbelievers (such as business partnerships). As God’s representatives, our pledges have great significance and should not normally be broken. Therefore, we should pray along with our brother and sisters who have fallen into these traps for grace and for guidance about how to proceed.

It is important to add that God never wills divorce. Sometimes a believer will claim that God has given him or her “permission” to divorce because of “irreconcilable differences” or because they have met a “more suitable” partner. Such a person is self-deceived. God never wills divorce. Occasionally, when sin has run deep, a period of separation can be a necessary step toward the healing of a marriage relationship, particularly in the case of physical abuse. However, God wills that husbands and wives *remain* married to one another. (In today’s world, this statement must be qualified since God does not condone or recognize homosexual “marriage.”)

Transition: Jehoshaphat was a good king of Judah, but his commitment to holiness was tested by opportunities to ally himself with the house of Ahab. Although Jehu put an end to Ahab’s dynasty in Israel, the consequences of Jehoshaphat’s alliance with Ahab’s family spilled over onto a third generation.

III. Jehoiada the Priest and Joash – 2 Kings 11-14: 2 Chronicles 23-25

A. Jehoiada’s Strength

i. Athaliah’s Reign

1. One child of Ahab and Jezebel remained alive and politically active: Athaliah, Queen Mother of the southern kingdom. When Athaliah saw that Jehu had killed her son Ahaziah, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of Judah (2 Kings 11:1), *including her own grandchildren!* Her attempt to wipe out David’s dynasty and establish Baalism in Judah (2 Kings 12:18) was the horrible result of Jehoshaphat’s unwise alliance with the house of Ahab. But it must also be seen as the evil plan of Satan, who has, on several occasions, attempted to annihilate God’s people and thus, remove from the earth any witness to God’s faithfulness and His Messiah.

2. Athaliah usurped the throne and ruled Judah for six years. Her “reign” was an anomaly, since she was not a descendant of David, and the writer of Kings reflected this by omitting the usual introductory and concluding words about each monarch. He also offered no details about her “reign,” except to say that when she was killed, “all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was calm, because Athaliah had been slain with the sword” (2 Chronicles 23:21).
- ii. Jehoiada the Priest
1. While Judah fell to its lowest point, God was secretly preserving a faithful few. Unknown to Athaliah, Ahaziah’s sister Jehosheba had hidden her infant nephew Joash (the rightful king) at the temple of the Lord. As it turns out, Jehosheba was not only the sister of Ahaziah but also the wife of the high priest Jehoiada.
 2. What a man was Jehoiada! He was committed to God’s purposes, which included having a descendant of David on Judah’s throne. While the young prince remained hidden, he bravely and covertly worked against Athaliah, quietly gathering the support of the commanders of Judah’s army, the Levites, and the heads of Israelite families from all the towns (2 Chronicles 23:1-2). On Joash’s seventh birthday, the entire group made a covenant with the king at the Temple, presented him with a copy of the covenant, and proclaimed him king.
 3. Athaliah heard the noise, went to the Temple, and saw Joash. Jehoiada ordered the commanders to put her to death. Then he made a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people. Afterward, all the people went to the temple of Baal, tore it down, and killed its high priest.
 4. Unlike Jehu, who rid the northern kingdom of Ahab’s descendants and the priests of Baal but then turned and followed the sins of Jeroboam, Jehoiada remained faithful to the Lord all his life. Apparently, Jehu’s zeal was not based on personal knowledge of the Lord or an accurate understanding of God’s greater commands and purposes, as revealed in the Law (Romans 10:2). On the other hand, Jehoiada’s zeal was born out of his intimate acquaintance with the Law as a priest and his deep personal commitment to Yahweh.

B. The Reign of Joash

- i. Joash and the Temple: Jehoiada continued to positively influence Joash as long as he lived. Together, they reinstated the temple tax (Exodus 30:12-16) and used it, along with other offerings, to repair the Temple.

ii. Kings in Israel

1. *Jehoahaz*: During Joash's reign, Jehu, king of Israel, died and his son Jehoahaz succeeded him. Jehoahaz reigned 17 years and, like his father, followed in the evil ways of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. The king of Aram severely oppressed Israel, and in distress, Jehoahaz turned to the Lord. Although his repentance seemed to be sincere, he allowed the state religion of Jeroboam's cult to remain intact.
2. *Jehoash*: Near the end of Joash's reign in Judah, Jehoahaz's son Jehoash became king in Israel and ruled for sixteen years. He recaptured some of the towns taken by the king of Aram in his father's day (2 Kings 13:25). Despite the witness of Elisha, he too followed the evil ways of Jeroboam.

iii. Joash's Later Life

1. Jehoiada lived an unusually long life and received the special distinction of being buried with the kings in the City of David (2 Chronicles 24:15-16). While his faith was genuine, apparently Joash's was not. After Jehoiada died, Judah's officials swayed Joash. He abandoned the Lord's Temple and reinstated the pagan practices that he and his people had earlier rejected (2 Chronicles 24:17-22). When Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, confronted Joash with the Lord's displeasure, Joash "did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him" and had Zechariah killed (2 Chronicles 24:22).
2. As a result of Joash's disobedience, the Lord allowed the king of Aram to invade Judah and kill the leaders of the people. When the Arameans withdrew, Joash was severely wounded. After that, his officials conspired against him for murdering the son of Jehoiada the priest and killed him in his bed. Although Joash was buried in Jerusalem, he was not buried with the kings, as his mentor Jehoiada had been.

C. Joash's Son, Amaziah: After Joash died, his son Amaziah ruled over Judah for 29 years. Amaziah followed the good example Joash set in his earlier years. He hired troops from Israel to help him re-conquer Edom, but in obedience to the word of the Lord, sent the northern Israelite soldiers back home. As a result, the Lord gave him victory over Edom. However, Amaziah did not follow the Lord wholeheartedly (2 Chronicles 25:2). He brought the gods of Edom back with him after his victory. The victory also made him arrogant and he foolishly challenged Jehoash, king of Israel. Judah was routed by Israel and Amaziah was captured, along with other hostages. After this, Amaziah never regained the confidence of his people. A number of years later, they conspired against and killed him.

Summary Statement: During the years that Judah was influenced by the house of Ahab, the Lord preserved a faithful remnant in Judah, like the priest Jehoiada.

Principle: *Division is an opportunity to witness God's faithfulness.*

In the next lesson, when we learn about Elijah's confrontations with Baalism and the house of Ahab, it will become all the more evident that Jehoiada lived in a time where commitment to holiness was dangerous. Athaliah would surely have wanted him killed. We see God's faithfulness in preserving Jehoiada. He faithfully preserves a remnant of His people in every generation and gives them courage to live holy lives.

Jehoiada not only had the privilege of being part of that remnant, he also witnessed God's faithfulness in *using him* to restore the throne of Judah to the house of David. As high priest, he surely would have known of the prophecy that the Messiah was to descend from David (2 Samuel 7). In a spiritually hostile and divided land, Jehoiada stayed committed to God's greater kingdom purposes and worked to put Joash on the throne.

Conclusion

Most divisions result from sin but God can use them for good. Are you willing to be God's instrument in our divided world today? God may reward you with an unusually long life, as He did Jehoiada. Or, as happened to many prophets in Jehoiada's day, it could one day cost you your life. But as Jesus said, "*Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it*" (Matthew 10:37-39).

ⁱ Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (pp 321-322). Leicester, Great Britain: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan.