

Unit 4

Part 1 Israel Becomes a Nation

Note: Communicate with your Mentor as indicated

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A Split Kingdom ... Israel Becomes a Nation

Bible Text:

- 1 Kings 11—12;
- 2 Chronicles 33;
- Amos 6:1-7

Lesson Focus: When the kings and tribes of Israel were unfaithful to God, their internal conflict split the nation in two.

Big Question: Why does God let us all fight so much?

Key Words: CONFLICT, JUDAH, ISRAEL

SUMMARY

- Solomon's faithfulness to God, rather than his political prowess, was the measure of his success according to 1 Kings. As his reign matured, his faithfulness to God was compromised when he worshipped the idols he constructed in order to please his many foreign wives.
- The kings who followed Solomon continued the pattern of unfaithfulness to God. When some repented of their evil ways and good things resulted, the faithfulness to God did not last.
- The political stress of being a nation versus an extended family erupted in a schism between the northern and southern tribes.
- These stories reflect the chosen people's theological struggle to make sense of the exile; written during or after the exile, these stories prefigure the exile chronologically.
- The prescientific worldview of these stories is quite different from ours. While we may identify God's redeeming influence in retrospect, we do not generally ascribe God's causal action to the events of our daily lives like these stories do.
- The violence and judgment in these stories are a consequence of a different worldview and the author's agenda to emphasize the importance of faithfulness to the well-being of God's chosen people.

DISCUSSION

There is a reason the story of God's chosen people goes back again and again to King David as the paradigm for how a monarchy should function. After his reign, the monarchy became more and more compromised. The early theological wariness about rule by kings, eased by David temporarily, is borne out in this story of family feud and schism.

God's chosen people were once clustered in small family groupings named after Jacob's sons. Now they have become a nation, complete with rival tribes. Even in David's day, the tribes who had settled in the north lived in uneasy alliance with the tribes who had settled in the south (2 Samuel 20:1-22). The family disease festered during Solomon's reign, heightened by his conscription of the northern tribes as forced labor to build the temple (1 Kings 5:13-17), but united by the vision of the Jerusalem temple. Once Solomon's uniting presence fades, the northern tribes secede.

The text does not focus on the politics or historical markers of this event. Instead, the author focuses on the theological meaning and significance. With the hindsight of one who is charged with the task of making theological sense of the devastation of the exile, the author weaves the interpretive thread of unfaithfulness into the fabric of the story. Solomon, for so long a promising and blessed leader, drifts away from the demand to worship only Yahweh, seduced by the charms of his thousand-plus wives, who worshipped many gods.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son and logical heir of his throne, demonstrates a stunning immaturity in his dealings with the rebellious but enslaved north. As a consequence, he is soundly rejected by the north and is relegated to rule the Southern Kingdom only. Jeroboam, originally praised by God's prophet as the rising star of the north, ends up making idols to represent God and encouraging the people of the Northern Kingdom not to go to Jerusalem to worship. He is bitterly discarded by the story's end. Future kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon (2 Chronicles 33), also do much evil, and despite Manasseh's late return to God, the nation is desperately in need of reform.

In each case, the kings fail to honor their relationship with God. Though the story is difficult to follow and God seems to direct the action to further God's plan, it is this issue of unfaithfulness that is the common denominator in the story. If we look ahead to the events to which these stories point, the same unfaithfulness will continue to be the fundamental cause of God's seeming abandonment of God's people in the exile. These stories pointedly say that God's people, by their unfaithfulness, abandoned God first. Amos, the shepherd farmer and prophet from Judah, preached that message to both the northern and southern tribes. They will be punished because the rich and powerful people took advantage of the poor and worshipped foreign gods.

These stories present some interesting issues for contemporary hearers. The author presents a God who is profoundly active in the life of God's chosen people. Unlike our typical understanding of God as primarily personal, the God we see in this story is God of a nation and even the whole world. This God works through people other than the chosen ones, and this God readily intervenes and punishes. Though this kind of God certainly appears in the public conversation in our world, most 21st-century Lutherans do not imagine God to be so punitive or manipulative. It is important to remember that the author has an agenda: to call the people back into faithfulness to the one God of their ancestors so as to preserve their identity and recapture the favor of that God.

The violence and cut-and-dried pronouncements of these stories can be disturbing. This does not seem to be the God of justice and mercy we see in Jesus. Instead, we see a taskmaster who has very little patience with human limitations, who manipulates national tides to suit God's purposes, and who orchestrates death and shame for those who have sought to serve their own purposes. We need to remember that the author's purpose was not journalistic or even historic in nature. The author writes from a very different worldview from the one we hold. In a prescientific era, every turn of fate, every natural event, was seen as coming from God's hand and intention. This is not how we interpret our world. We know about the moral indifference of natural disaster, for example. It is not divine punishment for the sins of the people. We understand that history unfolds as a collision of circumstance and human power. We may look back and see God's redeeming hand at work, but we do not generally say that God's will has been done because this or that leader died or a certain candidate won or lost.

Yet the confession of these stories is that God is deeply invested in God's people. What happens in our national life together, how we manage our relationships with each other, both personal and civic, makes a difference to God. We are called to faithfulness, to focus our perspective, energy, and time on God's will and way.

ADOLESCENT CONNECTION

Why does God let us all fight so much?

When adolescents put their needs and wants before what God needs and wants for them, there is inevitably conflict. In today's world, young people can seldom understand delayed gratification. Think about examples of this concept to help with your understanding of the possible perils of placing your needs and wants first. Consider the effects and consequences of actions before you act. They live in the "now" and find it difficult to project any cause and effect into the future. Some may say that if it feels good now, then it must be good, and besides, who knows what tomorrow holds anyway. But your behavior reflects your choices; for example, giving in to peer pressure may lead to turning their backs on what they know is right. The desire to be like others can lead to unfaithfulness to God, as the people of Israel discovered in their desire to be like other nations.

Key word summary

CONFLICT: a disagreement between opposing sides; fight; competitive action. The tribes of Israel in the north had conflicts with those in the south, which led to a divided nation.

JUDAH: the southern part of the kingdom after Israel's twelve tribes split in two. The first king of Judah was Rehoboam.

ISRAEL: the northern part of the kingdom after Israel's twelve tribes split in two. The first king of Israel was Jeroboam.

READINGS/ACTIVITIES

1 Kings 11

- read verses 1-4 to set the scene for what was about to happen,
- read verses 9-10, and verses 11-13 to discover God's response to Solomon. Because of Solomon's unfaithfulness to God and the unfaithfulness of the people, God warned that the once-united kingdom of Israel would split apart and come to an end. When Solomon died, most of his kingdom was ruled by someone other than his son, as God had said would happen if Solomon did not stop worshipping idols.

Questions

- What did Solomon do to upset God, and what was God's response to Solomon?
- Why do you think God chose to remove the kingdom not from Solomon, but from his son Rehoboam?
- Why do you think Rehoboam was punished for the sin of his father?

•Even though God punished Solomon and Rehoboam, what was the promise God made to them?

•Would you say that Solomon was a good king or a bad king?

Review Lutheran Study Bible pages 2102, 2105. The map “The Twelve Tribes of Israel” shows where the original tribes (sons of Jacob) settled, and the map “The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah” shows the split kingdom. You will note that the Northern Kingdom, Israel, had a lot more territory than the Southern Kingdom, Judah. In which kingdom is Jerusalem, the religious center? The thing that unified the 12 tribes was the common worship of the one God, and that worship was centered in Jerusalem. Without that religious tie, the kings and the kingdom could not last. As the people strayed from faithfulness to God, things went from bad to worse. The nation split and became prey to stronger nations nearby.

Read 1 Kings 12:1-14.

Solomon had imposed high taxes and slave labor on the people of Israel. After Solomon died, Jeroboam asked King Rehoboam to “lighten the yoke” placed on his people. Rehoboam refused. This strategy was perhaps the last straw. The ten northern tribes split off and formed their own kingdom. They chose Jeroboam as king of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Rehoboam was left with the Southern Kingdom, Judah. Once Israel had established a worship center in the Northern Kingdom, there was no longer a need for the people to travel to Judah for worship in Jerusalem.

The kings who followed often refused to obey God’s law and were unfaithful to God. We have an example of two kings of Judah in 2 Chronicles 33. For almost all of his reign, Manasseh was one of the least God-fearing kings.

Read 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.

Manasseh desecrated the temple and practiced human sacrifice. The people he ruled were more evil than ever before. But at one point, the king had a change of heart; perhaps he was sincere or perhaps he feared for his life. Despite what he had done before, God was willing to forgive him and restore him to the throne in Jerusalem. What does this tell you about God and God’s grace? While God punishes evil and unfaithfulness, God also forgives and restores. The prophets of the Old Testament warned the people that their punishment for unfaithfulness would be to be captured and exiled by their enemies. But God would forgive them and lead them back to Jerusalem where they could once again be a shining light to other nations.

OPEN THE CATECHISM

Here We Stand Student Book page 304: Read the seventh petition of the Lord’s Prayer. In your own words, what do we ask for in this petition.

We are asking God to watch over us so that we don’t get lured into temptations that can result in our being unfaithful to God. God doesn’t remove temptations from our lives, but God gives us what we need when we are tempted—grace. God takes us as we are, sinners who don’t always

resist temptation, and forgives us, time and time again. That grace of God we receive in God's word and the sacraments. When we are weak, God's word makes us strong and able to overcome all the temptations we face.

Connect with Mentor. Using communication method of your choosing, discuss following with your Mentor

- When a conflict arises in your life, what steps can you take to work through it to get to a solution?
- Does prayer have a place in conflict resolution?
- At what point do you need to bring an adult or a professional (counselor, parent, other) into the picture to resolve a conflict?
- Is it ever good to question authority?

STUDENT BOOK CONNECTION

Here We Stand Student Book page 220: Read each of the seven tips of "How to Resolve Interpersonal Conflict." Conflict is an unavoidable part of being in a relationship with other people. Conflict affected the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and it continues to affect God's people today. Encourage students to take an active role in resolving conflict in their own lives as a way of living out their faith in God.

Here We Stand Student Book page 216: Talking about others or saying things that are not for you to say is destructive to relationships.

- Read the four points under number 1 in "How to Avoid Gossip."
 - Read numbers 2–5 silently. ~~Certainly the students are aware of how frequently gossip occurs among teens.~~ Pose this question: What harm is there in a little gossip?
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See you on the 19th. Bring this assignment sheet with you.