



### **What happened before?**

After David died, his son Solomon became king. He was the wisest and richest of all the kings. During his reign, he built the great temple and dedicated it to the Lord.

Even though Solomon was wise he made a very serious mistake by marrying women who worshipped idols. He built places for his wives to worship and before long he turned away from God and began to worship idols also. Because of this, the prophet Ahijah prophesied that after his death, the kingdom would be divided and his son would only reign over two tribes. One of Solomon's servants, Jeroboam would be made king over the other ten. When Solomon heard this, he tried to kill Jeroboam, but he escaped and went to Egypt.

After Solomon's death, his son, Rehoboam, was made king over all of Israel, but before long the kingdom was divided just as the prophet had said.

### **BIBLE STORY:**

When Jeroboam heard that Solomon had died, he returned from Egypt. Solomon had worked the people very hard and taxed them heavily. Jeroboam, along with the people went to talk to the new king. They told Rehoboam that if he would make things easier for them than Solomon had they would serve him. Rehoboam told them to come back in three days and he would give them an answer.

Rehoboam asked the elders what he should do. They told him that if he was good to the people, the people would be loyal to him. But Rehoboam was not satisfied with that answer and went to the younger men and asked them. The young men told him to be harder on them than Solomon was and to tell them, "My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" He took the young men's advice and that is what he told the people. The ten tribes of the north said they would have nothing to do with such a king and made Jeroboam their king. Only Judah and Benjamin remained with Rehoboam.

The Jewish people were now divided just as the prophet Ahijah had said. Rehoboam ruled over Judah and Benjamin, which was referred to as the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Their capital was in Jerusalem. Jeroboam and the other ten tribes were referred to as the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam set up his capital in Shechem.

Even though they were divided, they all still lived under the same commandments given by God. God had commanded them to go to Jerusalem to worship. This was a problem for Jeroboam, because Jerusalem was in the South where Rehoboam ruled. Jeroboam was afraid that if the people went back to Jerusalem to worship they would decide to stay and let Rehoboam be their king.

Jeroboam decided to ignore God's commands. He made two golden calves, placing one in Dan and the other in Bethel. He told the people not to go to Jerusalem, that it was "too far." Jeroboam made feast days different from what the Law of Moses required. The priests from the tribe of Levi refused to serve in this worship of idols and moved to Judah. Jeroboam then made the lowest of the people priests. He changed God's way of worship to please himself.

God had promised to bless Jeroboam if he obeyed Him, but Jeroboam chose idolatry instead. God sent a prophet from Judah to condemn Jeroboam's sin. As Jeroboam stood at the altar at Bethel, the prophet cried out against him. He told Jeroboam that a king was coming in Judah who would burn Jeroboam's wicked priests on that altar. The king's name was Josiah. When Jeroboam heard this, he stretched out his hand to seize the prophet, but immediately his hand was paralyzed. Jeroboam asked the prophet to pray that his hand would be healed. The prophet prayed and the hand was healed.

Jeroboam continued to sin. His son, Abijah, became very ill. Jeroboam remembered the prophet of God named Ahijah. Jeroboam sent his wife to see Ahijah, but told her to disguise herself. Before she arrived, God told Ahijah that she was coming. When she arrived, the prophet had bad news for her. He told her to go tell Jeroboam that he had done more wickedness than all the other kings. The prophet said that her son would die, and that the kingdom would be taken from Jeroboam. When Jeroboam's wife returned home, the child died.

After 22 years as king, Jeroboam also died. His son, Nadab, reigned in his place for two years. Nadab was murdered and the next four kings were Baasha, Elah, Omri and Ahab. Every one of these kings were wicked. Not one of them was good!

Meanwhile, things did not go well in the southern kingdom of Judah. Rehoboam was a weak king. The Egyptians came into his land and carried away much of the rich treasure that Solomon had placed in the temple. After he died his son, Abijam, reigned in his place.

Abijam was a bad king and little is said about him. Asa, his son, became the next king. He was a good king and tried to get rid of the idolatry that was causing so much trouble in the land. After he died his son, Jehoshaphat, became the fourth king of Judah. He was king during the same time that Ahab was king of Israel in the north.

Ahab was worse than all the kings before him. He married a wicked woman named Jezebel; they both worshipped Baal. Even though these were wicked people, God still wanted them to turn from their evil ways and do right. God sent the great prophet, Elijah, to warn the people and to try to get them to turn to God again.

Elijah came to King Ahab and told him that because the people were so wicked God was going to punish all the land. There would be no rain for several years.

God knew that Ahab wanted to harm Elijah because of the things Elijah had told him. God told Elijah to get out of Israel quickly. While Elijah was hiding from Ahab near the brook Cherith, God sent ravens each day with bread and meat for him to eat. Eventually the brook dried up because there was no rain. Crops were not growing and there was very little food.

Elijah went to a small town where he saw a widow gathering sticks for a fire. Elijah asked her for a drink and something to eat. She told Elijah she had only enough oil and flour to make one last meal for her and her son. He told her that God would provide for her and that her meal and oil would last as long as the famine lasted. She made Elijah a small piece of bread from her last little bit of oil. Then it happened just as Elijah said, there was more flour and oil. She fed her family many days and the flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry.

During this time, the woman's son died and God worked another miracle; Elijah raised the young man from the dead! The woman said, "By this I know you are a man of God and your word is true."

After three years, God told Elijah to go tell King Ahab that He would send rain again. When Ahab saw Elijah he called him a troublemaker. Elijah told Ahab that he (Ahab) was the one who had caused the problems in Israel because he worshipped Baal. Then Elijah challenged Ahab to a contest to prove which one was worshipping the true God. Ahab agreed and he and his prophets met Elijah on Mount Carmel.

They had taken two bullocks. Elijah told the priest of Baal to choose one and he would take the other. Both would prepare their bullock and place it on an altar to be sacrificed, but no fire would be lit under them. Elijah told the prophets to call upon Baal to light the fire on their altar. They prayed and prayed but nothing happened. They leaped upon the altar, cried out loudly and even cut themselves with knives trying to get Baal's attention. Still nothing happened.

Then Elijah repaired an altar of the Lord that had been broken down. He took 12 stones, one for each tribe in Israel, and rebuilt the altar. He made a trench around the altar, put wood on it, killed the animal and placed it on the wood. He then poured a huge amount of water on the whole thing, even filling up the trenches around the altar.

Then Elijah prayed to God and fire from the Lord fell and consumed the water, the sacrifice and the altar. When the people saw it, they confessed that the Lord is God! Immediately following this, the 450 prophets of Baal were executed.

Ahab went straight to his queen, Jezebel, and told her all that had happened. When she heard what had happened to the priests of Baal, she was furious. Elijah hoped that the miracle on Mount Carmel would cause Ahab and Jezebel to worship the true God. But instead, Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah and told him that by this time tomorrow he would be as dead as the prophets of Baal.

When Elijah got this message he was discouraged and frightened. He ran as fast as he could into the wilderness to escape the queen's vengeance. He was so discouraged that he was ready to die. He thought he was the only one left who was true to God. At the end of that day he was so tired and worn out that he lay down under a juniper tree and fell fast asleep.

God did not forget his faithful prophet. The Lord sent an angel to comfort him and give him food. God told Elijah that he was not the only one in Israel who was faithful; there were 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed down before Baal. This gave Elijah the courage to continue his work for the Lord.