

**UNIT 6 – LESSON 3****THE UNITED KINGDOM DIVIDES**

Following David's death, Solomon ruled as the last king of a united Israel. His reign is recorded in 1 Kings 1-11. 1 Kings 12 tells how the kingdom divided when Solomon's son Rehoboam ascended the throne. These chapters should be studied carefully in conjunction with the lesson notes.

**1. THE REIGN OF SOLOMON**

Solomon inherited from David a kingdom which had reached the height of its power. David had fought the wars and gained territory for Israel therefore Solomon could reap the benefits of his father's work in an era of peace and prosperity. In many ways Solomon's reign was an extension of the golden age of David. But there were features of his reign which prepared the way for the division of the kingdom immediately after his death. The wise man Solomon was guilty of many foolish actions in his government.

Note the following points about Solomon's reign:

- a) Political events favoured him with peace. Israel's neighbours, Egypt, Assyria, and Syria were all weak at the time.
- b) Solomon established a powerful army including chariots and horsemen as a major force (1 Kings 10:26) for the first time in Israel's history.
- c) Solomon developed Israel as a commercial state, engaging in trade with Phoenicia and other neighbouring states. He built a fleet of ships to engage in trade (1 Kings 10:11-12; 14-29).
- d) Archaeological research has produced evidence of a copper refinery at Ezion-Geber.
- e) Solomon was a great builder. Most important was his building of the temple, but he also built a magnificent palace and engaged in building operations throughout the land. Phoenician influence was very strong in the temple building.
- f) These operations were very costly and required a great deal of labour. Solomon recruited slave labour from his conquered territories – normal practice in ancient times (1 Kings 9:14-22). What caused widespread resentment in Israel is that Solomon went beyond this normal practice and forced free Israelites to work on certain public buildings. The temple, at least, was constructed in this way (1 Kings 5:13-18).
- g) Solomon made certain administrative changes, probably to help his system of taxation. Twelve prefectures were instituted to replace the old system of twelve tribes. Each district was responsible for supplying the court for one month a year and this was a heavy burden, especially as it was an additional tax apart from normal religious taxes (1 Kings 4:7-28). The top posts in government were delegated to trusted advisors (1 Kings 4:1-6).



- h) The extent of Solomon's building operations, the record of his court provisions, the size of his court and harem, all suggest the development of a splendid court life. The king of Israel could take his place with pride beside any king in his region and his court reflected his personal magnificence (1 Kings:1-10; 23-25).
- i) Marriage alliances with foreign princesses led Solomon into syncretism. Instead of remaining faithful to the worship of Yahweh, he began to worship other gods as well (1 Kings 11:1-13).
- j) The age of Solomon was an age of literature. Solomon developed a reputation as a collector of wise sayings, attracting many people to his court to hear his wisdom. He influenced the later wisdom tradition within Israel.

## 2. THE DIVISION UNDER REHOBOAM

A study of Solomon's reign shows quite clearly the basis of discontent when Rehoboam attempted to succeed his father. The people were overtaxed. The old simple values of Israel were being replaced by foreign values and a grand style of life for the rich at the expense of the poor. The old divisions between North and South were again thrust into prominence.

A conciliatory act by Rehoboam would have saved the situation (1 Kings 12: 6-7). Instead he tried to bluff his way through the situation with an assertion of authority, and the northern tribes seceded under the leadership of Jeroboam. Rehoboam found himself left with a kingdom consisting of Judah and Benjamin, and known as Judah. The Northern kingdom was called Israel.

Because Jerusalem was a religious as well as a political capital, Jeroboam revived two ancient shrines in Israel, Bethel and Dan, as places of worship. He made a golden Calf for each shrine and the worship of Israel soon degenerated into idolatry. Subsequent references to Jeroboam's sin in the book of Kings are allusions to this act.

### QUESTION 1:

What was Solomon's request to God in his dream (1 Kings 3) and how do we know God answered?

### QUESTION 2:

Samuel had warned the people of the dangers of a monarchy (1 Sam.8:10-18). How did these dangers eventuate under Solomon?

### QUESTION 3:

What were the main achievements of Solomon's reign?

### QUESTION 4:

In what ways was Solomon not a wise king?

### QUESTION 5:

What was Jeroboam's greatest sin? Why did he do it? 1 Kings 12:26-30.



**SUGGESTED FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY**

- a) What do you think Solomon means by 1 Kings 8:27?
- b) What are the consequences of this for our understanding of worship?