



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Northern Kingdom and Judah Compared

The Short Answer

After Solomon, the united kingdom divided into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12). Israel consisted primarily of ten tribes and eventually centered its government in Samaria. Judah was centered in Jerusalem, retained the Davidic dynasty, and included the temple. Israel fell to Assyria in 722/721 BC; Judah survived longer but fell to Babylon in 586 BC. Yet the Bible does not tell a simple story of “bad Israel and good Judah.” Both kingdoms repeatedly broke covenant with God, both received prophetic warning, and both experienced judgment. Judah had greater spiritual privileges, but greater privilege created greater responsibility - not automatic safety. Through judgment, exile, return, and incomplete restoration, God preserved His promises and pointed His people toward the need for a faithful King and a new heart.

1 Kings 11-12 · 2 Kings 17 · 2 Kings 24-25 · Jeremiah 31:31-34 · Ezekiel 36:24-28

Opening Memory Anchor

The kingdom divided, but God's covenant purposes did not. Both kingdoms needed more than better kings - they needed transformed hearts and the faithful King God had promised.



PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

1. HOW DID ISRAEL BECOME TWO KINGDOMS?

Saul, David, and Solomon ruled the united monarchy for roughly a century. Scripture assigns forty-year reigns to each, though ancient chronology can involve questions of accession years and counting methods. After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam rejected the elders' counsel and threatened heavier burdens. Ten tribes rebelled under Jeroboam. The northern tribes became the kingdom commonly called **Israel**; Rehoboam retained **Judah** and Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:1-24).

2. WAS THE DIVISION ONLY A POLITICAL ACCIDENT?

No. Human pride, poor leadership, and rebellion were real causes, but 1 Kings also presents the division within God's judgment on Solomon's idolatry. The prophet Ahijah had already announced that most of the kingdom would be torn from Solomon's house (1 Kings 11:29-39). Scripture holds divine sovereignty and human responsibility together: God's purpose did not make Rehoboam's foolishness virtuous, and Rehoboam's choices did not defeat God's purpose.

3. WHAT WERE THE BASIC DIFFERENCES?

Category	Northern Kingdom - Israel	Southern Kingdom - Judah
Capital	Eventually Samaria	Jerusalem
Tribal core	Primarily ten tribes	Judah and Benjamin; others also present
Dynasty	Multiple dynasties and coups	Davidic dynasty
Worship center	Jeroboam established Bethel and Dan	Temple in Jerusalem
Independent life after division	About 200 years	About 345 years
Fall	Assyria, 722/721 BC	Babylon, 586 BC

Memory Anchor

Israel and Judah were politically divided, but both remained accountable to the same covenant God.



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4. WHY DID JEROBOAM ESTABLISH NEW WORSHIP CENTERS?

Jeroboam feared that if his people continued traveling to Jerusalem for worship, their loyalty might return to Rehoboam. He established golden calves at Bethel and Dan and created an alternative priesthood and festival system (1 Kings 12:26-33). Political insecurity produced religious compromise. Later kings are repeatedly measured against “the sins of Jeroboam.”

5. DID JUDAH REMAIN FAITHFUL BECAUSE IT HAD THE TEMPLE?

No. Judah possessed Jerusalem, the temple, the Davidic line, priests, and repeated prophetic warning. Yet Judah also practiced idolatry and injustice. Some kings led genuine reforms; others promoted terrible evil. Spiritual privilege did not guarantee spiritual faithfulness.

6. WHERE DO AHAB AND JEZEBEL FIT?

Ahab ruled the Northern Kingdom and married Jezebel, a Sidonian princess. Their reign aggressively promoted Baal worship and opposed the Lord's prophets (1 Kings 16:29-34; 18-19; 21). Elijah's ministry unfolded in this setting. The consequences also crossed the border through royal alliances.

Series Connection

3Nails Study #214 - Athaliah unfolds within this larger history. Athaliah was connected to Ahab's dynasty and carried its destructive influence into Judah.

7. WHICH PROPHETS SPOKE TO THE TWO KINGDOMS?

To Israel: Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and others confronted idolatry, injustice, false security, and covenant unfaithfulness. **To Judah:** Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and others warned Jerusalem while also announcing hope. Prophets were not merely predictors; they called God's people back to covenant faithfulness.

8. A SIMPLE TIMELINE

Timeline at a Glance

UNITED KINGDOM - Saul → David → Solomon - roughly 100 years

DIVISION - about 930 BC - Rehoboam / Jeroboam

NORTHERN ISRAEL - roughly 200 years → Samaria falls to Assyria, 722/721 BC

JUDAH - roughly 345 years after division → Jerusalem falls to Babylon, 586 BC

EXILE - life under foreign empires

RETURN AND RESTORATION - Cyrus → Zerubbabel → Ezra → Nehemiah

PROMISE STILL AWAITS FULFILLMENT - faithful Davidic King + transformed hearts → Jesus



9. WAS THE NORTHERN KINGDOM SIMPLY WORSE THAN JUDAH?

Israel never had a king whom Kings presents as doing right in the Lord's sight in the sustained Davidic sense. Its state-sponsored worship departed from Jerusalem from the beginning. Yet Judah's longer survival must not be mistaken for innocence. Jeremiah later pictured Israel and Judah as two unfaithful sisters and said Judah had seen what happened to Israel but still acted treacherously (Jeremiah 3:6-11).

10. HOW DOES HOSEA PICTURE ISRAEL'S UNFAITHFULNESS?

Hosea's marriage became a painful prophetic sign of Israel's covenant betrayal (Hosea 1-3). Idolatry was not merely breaking an abstract rule; it was spiritual unfaithfulness toward the God who had loved and covenanted with His people. Yet Hosea also announced God's call to return and His willingness to heal and love freely (Hosea 14:1-4).

Memory Anchor

Greater spiritual privilege creates greater responsibility, not automatic spiritual safety.

11. WHEN DID THE NORTHERN KINGDOM FALL?

Samaria fell to Assyria in approximately **722/721 BC** after a prolonged siege (2 Kings 17:1-6). The two-year notation reflects the difficulty of correlating biblical regnal chronology with Assyrian records and determining exactly which event is being dated - the siege, capture, or final administrative takeover. The important historical point is clear: Assyria ended the Northern Kingdom in the late eighth century BC.

12. WHY DID ISRAEL FALL?

2 Kings 17 gives a theological interpretation: the people feared other gods, adopted the practices of surrounding nations, built high places, served idols, rejected God's warnings, and persisted in covenant rebellion (2 Kings 17:7-23). Assyria was the historical conqueror; Scripture also presents the exile as divine judgment.

13. WHO WERE THE RESETTLED PEOPLES, AND WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH SAMARITANS?

After Israel's fall, the Assyrians deported some inhabitants and brought peoples from other regions into the cities of Samaria (2 Kings 17:24-41). The resulting population and religious history became part of the long background to later Samaritan identity. It is too simple to say Samaritans appeared in one step in 2 Kings 17. Their identity developed over centuries through population continuity, resettlement, religious development, political conflict, and competing claims about the proper place of worship. This background helps explain John 4, the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, and the Gospel's movement into Samaria in Acts 8.



14. WERE THE TEN TRIBES COMPLETELY LOST?

The phrase “ten lost tribes” can suggest that every northern Israelite vanished from biblical history. Scripture is more complicated. People from northern tribes had moved into Judah before and after the division (2 Chronicles 11:13-17; 15:9). Hezekiah later invited people from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun, and other areas to Passover (2 Chronicles 30). Josiah's Passover included “all Judah and Israel” present (2 Chronicles 35:17-18). Ezra 6:17 offered twelve goats for the twelve tribes, and Luke identifies Anna as being from Asher (Luke 2:36).

Assyria devastated and dispersed the Northern Kingdom, but Scripture does not support confident modern claims that particular contemporary peoples can simply be identified as the “lost tribes” without evidence.

15. HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN THE DIVISION?

God had announced judgment through Ahijah, yet Rehoboam freely acted with arrogance and Jeroboam later chose idolatrous worship. Biblical sovereignty does not turn human sin into obedience. Scripture can affirm God's rule over history while still holding rulers accountable for their decisions.

16. WHY DID JUDAH LAST LONGER?

Judah retained the Davidic dynasty, Jerusalem, and the temple, and experienced periods of genuine reform under kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah. God also preserved Judah in faithfulness to His promises to David. But delay of judgment was mercy, not proof that Judah was righteous enough to escape accountability.

17. WHAT HAPPENED UNDER HEZEKIAH AND JOSIAH?

Hezekiah trusted the Lord during the Assyrian crisis and led significant reform (2 Kings 18-20). Josiah rediscovered the Book of the Law, humbled himself, renewed covenant commitment, and removed widespread idolatry (2 Kings 22-23). Their reforms mattered greatly, but neither king could permanently transform the hearts of the nation.

18. WHY IS “BAD ISRAEL, GOOD JUDAH” THE WRONG SUMMARY?

Judah had faithful kings Israel did not have, but Judah also had kings such as Ahaz and Manasseh and eventually repeated many of the same sins. Jeremiah's two-sisters image is intentionally unsettling: seeing Israel judged should have led Judah to repentance, yet Judah did not truly return with her whole heart (Jeremiah 3:6-11).



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PART TWO WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

19. WHAT IS THE THEOLOGICAL PURPOSE OF KINGS?

Kings is more than a political chronicle. It repeatedly evaluates rulers by covenant faithfulness, worship, response to God's Word, and relationship to David. The book explains why exile happened without suggesting God had failed. Human kings failed; God's warnings proved true; His covenant purposes continued.

20. HOW DO KINGS AND CHRONICLES PORTRAY MANASSEH?

2 Kings 21 emphasizes Manasseh's extraordinary wickedness and presents his reign as a major reason judgment on Judah became unavoidable. 2 Chronicles 33 includes the same evil but also records that, after being taken captive, Manasseh humbled himself, prayed, was restored, and attempted reforms. The accounts are not opposites: Kings emphasizes Judah's path toward judgment; Chronicles highlights repentance and restoration. Different biblical books may select different details for different theological purposes without contradicting one another.

Biblical Literacy Note

Read parallel biblical accounts for their distinct emphases before assuming a difference is a contradiction.

21. WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO ISRAEL'S TRIBES AFTER ASSYRIA?

Assyrian deportation was severe, but ancient deportations did not necessarily remove every resident. Biblical evidence shows continued tribal identity and movement between north and south. The New Testament itself still knows tribal language. The biblical story moves toward the gathering of God's people, not toward speculative modern genealogies.

22. HOW CAN GOD USE PAGAN EMPIRES AND STILL JUDGE THEM?

The prophets can describe Assyria or Babylon as instruments within God's judgment while also condemning those empires for arrogance, violence, and evil (Isaiah 10:5-19; Habakkuk 1-2). God's use of an agent does not mean He approves the agent's motives or methods. Human rulers remain morally accountable.



23. WHY DID JUDAH FINALLY FALL?

Despite warnings, reforms, and repeated mercy, Judah returned to idolatry, injustice, covenant breaking, and rejection of God's messengers. Babylon captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, ended the visible Davidic monarchy, and carried many people into exile in 586 BC (2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21).

24. DOES GOD STILL JUDGE NATIONS THROUGH OTHER NATIONS TODAY?

Scripture clearly interprets Assyria and Babylon as instruments of judgment in particular covenant-historical settings because God revealed that interpretation through His prophets. Christians today do not possess prophetic authority to declare that a particular war, natural disaster, election result, epidemic, terrorist attack, or national tragedy is God's specific judgment on a modern nation unless Scripture itself gives that interpretation.

Pastoral Safeguard

God is sovereign over nations and history. That truth does not authorize Christians to confidently label particular modern tragedies as specific acts of divine judgment when God has not revealed that conclusion.

25. WHAT DID EXILE REVEAL ABOUT THE DEEPEST PROBLEM?

The deepest problem was not merely a divided map, bad foreign policy, or the absence of a strong king. Israel and Judah repeatedly showed that external privilege could not create inward faithfulness. Jeremiah promised a **new covenant** in which God would write His law on His people's hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Ezekiel promised a **new heart and new spirit**, replacing the heart of stone and enabling God's people to walk in His ways (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

The historical failure of the kingdoms therefore creates longing not simply for political reunification, but for heart transformation.

26. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER EXILE - RETURN AND RESTORATION?

Babylon did not have the final word. After Persia conquered Babylon, King Cyrus permitted exiles to return and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). Zerubbabel helped lead an early return and the temple was eventually rebuilt (Ezra 3-6). Ezra later came to teach God's Law and address covenant faithfulness (Ezra 7-10). Nehemiah led the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and joined Ezra in renewed attention to God's Word (Nehemiah 1-8).

The return was genuine restoration, but it was not the Bible's final resolution. The people were back in the land, but the great promises of an everlasting righteous King and complete heart renewal were still awaiting fulfillment.



27. DID EXILE CANCEL THE PROMISE TO DAVID?

No. God had promised David an enduring house and kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The fall of Jerusalem made that promise look humanly impossible, but the prophets continued to look toward a righteous Davidic ruler (Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23-24). The visible throne disappeared; the promise remained.

28. WHAT DOES THIS HISTORY TEACH ABOUT PROVIDENCE?

God worked through faithful kings, foolish kings, prophets, invasions, exile, foreign rulers, and return. That does not make every human action good. Providence means evil and failure cannot place history outside God's ultimate rule. The proper response is neither fatalism nor speculation, but faithful obedience to what God has revealed.

NORTHERN KINGDOM AND JUDAH IN THE BIGGER BIBLICAL STORY

Creation → covenant → Israel → kingship → division → prophetic warning → Assyrian judgment → Babylonian exile → Persian return → continued waiting → Jesus, Son of David → new covenant → one people gathered in Christ.

The divided kingdoms expose the limits of political power and external religion. Israel had kings; Judah had the Davidic dynasty and temple; both still needed transformed hearts. The prophets therefore look beyond national repair toward God's own saving work.

HOW DOES THIS STORY POINT TO JESUS?

Jesus is not merely another improved king in the sequence. He is the promised Son of David whose kingdom does not end (Luke 1:32-33). He inaugurates the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20), bears sin, gives the Holy Spirit, and gathers people from every nation into one reconciled people. The divided kingdom shows why a faithful King is needed; exile shows the seriousness of sin; return shows God's faithfulness; the prophets show that restoration ultimately requires a new heart.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- 1. Do not confuse spiritual privilege with spiritual safety.** Access to Scripture, churches, Christian history, or faithful leaders increases responsibility.
- 2. Take idolatry seriously.** Israel repeatedly trusted substitutes for God - political security, alliances, wealth, and false worship.
- 3. Listen when Scripture corrects simplistic categories.** "Bad Israel, good Judah" is too easy. The Bible tells the truth about both.
- 4. Receive warning as mercy.** God sent prophets before judgment. Correction is an invitation to return.



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5. Let repentance remain possible. Manasseh shows that terrible sin does not place a repentant sinner beyond God's mercy, even though consequences may remain.

6. Trust God when circumstances appear to threaten His promises. Exile looked like the end of David's kingdom. God had not forgotten.

7. Be cautious about declaring God's judgment on modern events. Biblical prophets could identify Assyria and Babylon because God revealed it. Christians should not claim revelation God has not given.

8. Look beyond external reform to the heart. Better leadership matters, but only God can create the new heart His people ultimately need.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think the Bible spends so much time explaining the failure of Israel's and Judah's kings?
2. What made Jeroboam's worship system politically attractive but spiritually disastrous?
3. How can spiritual privilege become a source of false security?
4. Why is Jeremiah's "two unfaithful sisters" picture important for comparing Israel and Judah?
5. What does Hosea's marriage metaphor teach about the personal nature of covenant unfaithfulness?
6. What do Hezekiah, Josiah, and Manasseh teach about reform, repentance, and the limits of human leadership?
7. How can God remain sovereign while wicked rulers and empires remain responsible for evil?
8. Why does the Bible move from the problem of failed kingdoms toward promises of a new heart?
9. What was restored after the exile, and what was still missing?
10. How does the Davidic promise help connect this history to Jesus?
11. Why should Christians be cautious about calling a modern war, disaster, epidemic, election, or tragedy God's specific judgment?

REVIEW AND RETENTION

1. Who ruled after Solomon? Rehoboam in Judah and Jeroboam in the northern kingdom.
2. What were the two kingdoms called? Israel in the north and Judah in the south.
3. Where were their capitals? Israel eventually centered in Samaria; Judah in Jerusalem.
4. About how long did the united monarchy last? Roughly 100 years.
5. About how long did Israel last after division? Roughly 200 years.
6. When did Samaria fall? Approximately 722/721 BC.
7. When did Jerusalem fall to Babylon? 586 BC.
8. Why are both 722 and 721 used? Ancient Assyrian and biblical chronological data can be correlated in more than one precise way.
9. Were the northern tribes completely erased? No; Scripture preserves evidence of continuity and movement.
10. Central lesson? Both kingdoms needed more than political repair - they needed faithful hearts and the faithful King God promised.



FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

- The kingdom divided, but God's covenant purposes did not.
- Israel and Judah were politically divided, but both remained accountable to the same covenant God.
- Greater spiritual privilege creates greater responsibility, not automatic spiritual safety.
- Hosea shows that idolatry is covenant betrayal, not merely rule-breaking.
- Assyria scattered the Northern Kingdom, but Scripture does not support careless "lost tribes" speculation.
- Different biblical books can emphasize different parts of the same history without contradiction.
- God may use wicked nations within His purposes without approving their wickedness.
- Christians should not confidently label modern tragedies as God's specific judgment without revelation from God.
- Exile revealed that God's people needed more than a restored nation - they needed a new heart.
- Return was real but incomplete; God's people were still waiting for the promised King.
- Jesus is the faithful Son of David and mediator of the new covenant.

SCRIPTURE READING PATH

1 Kings 11:1-13 - Solomon's unfaithfulness and announced judgment
1 Kings 12 - The kingdom divides; Jeroboam establishes alternative worship
1 Kings 16:29-34; 18 - Ahab, Jezebel, Baal, and Elijah
Hosea 1-3; 14:1-4 - Israel's covenant unfaithfulness and God's call to return
2 Kings 17 - Fall of Samaria, exile, and Assyrian resettlement
2 Chronicles 30; 35:17-18 - Evidence of continued northern participation
2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33 - Manasseh in Kings and Chronicles
2 Kings 22-23 - Josiah's reform
2 Kings 24-25 - Fall of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile
Jeremiah 3:6-11 - Israel and Judah as two unfaithful sisters
Jeremiah 31:31-34 - Promise of the new covenant
Ezekiel 36:24-28 - New heart and new spirit
Ezra 1-6 - Cyrus, return, and rebuilding the temple
Nehemiah 1-8 - Rebuilding Jerusalem and renewed attention to God's Word
Luke 1:32-33; 22:20 - Jesus, David's promised King and the new covenant

FINAL SUMMARY

After Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria; Judah later fell to Babylon. The story is not "bad Israel and good Judah." Both kingdoms reveal the seriousness of covenant unfaithfulness and the inability of political structures, religious privilege, or even seasons of reform to create lasting heart obedience. God judged sin, preserved a remnant, brought His people back from exile, and kept His promise to David alive. The prophets looked beyond return from Babylon toward a new covenant, a new heart, and a righteous King. That hope reaches its fulfillment in Jesus - the faithful Son of David who does what Israel's kings could never do and brings His people home to God.

Closing Memory Anchor

The divided kingdoms show the failure of human faithfulness. The Gospel reveals the faithfulness of the King God promised - Jesus.