

CIVIL WAR AND CAPTIVITY

Message #9
BIBLE SURVEY

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In our survey of the Bible, we have noticed some very interesting things about the history of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. You recall after they came out of the land of Egypt, they came very swiftly into Palestine after the forty years of wandering in the wilderness and also very swiftly into sin and defection from their God. In His mercy, the Lord raised up judges to try and lead them in the right paths, but each time after the judge died, the children of Israel rejected the teaching and leading of these judges. Then they decided they wanted a king. And so God gave them a king which He had predicted long ago that they would want. The monarchy came into being over the land of Israel with Saul, the first king, followed by David, who was God's ideal king, and after whom our Lord Jesus is called the "son of David," and after David, Solomon. And in these three men the monarchy arose, developed, and became established and powerful in the land of Israel.

We come today to a portion of the history of the people which is not very pretty--a part which involves a division of the kingdom--civil war, and with that, eventually the captivity for both the northern and southern parts of the kingdom. This is a period of Israel's history which is very sordid but a period which teaches us that God eventually demands punishment for the sins of the people in spite of the longsuffering that He may have toward them.

In I Kings 12, where our story begins today, we see the reason why the kingdom was divided. After the death of Solomon, there came to the throne of the people of Israel a king called Rehoboam. Rehoboam acted very unwisely right from the beginning of his reign. This is the reason why the kingdom eventually was divided. Rehoboam was waited on very early in his reign by a congregation of people who were led by Jeroboam. We read in I Kings 12:3 these words, "Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." We don't often think of Solomon's reign as involving bad things but it did. Solomon himself, we saw, sent into idolatry because of the many wives that he married and Solomon did some things to the people which were not appreciated or accepted by them. For one thing, he imposed taxes upon them. For another thing, he drafted a labor corps in order to build the temple and now when his son comes to the throne, the people were asking for some relief from this kind of oppression by the government.

So under the leadership of Jeroboam, they come to King Rehoboam and ask that the yoke that Solomon had put upon them be made lighter. So the king said to them, "Depart yet for three days, and then come to me. And the people departed." Then the kings took counsel with his counselors and he asked first of the older men who had counseled his father Solomon. How do ye advise that I answer this people? And the older men spake to him saying, "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and will serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever." The old men gave good counsel to the young king. They said, "If you do good to them and treat them right, they in turn will treat you right." But the king did not take their counsel (vs. 8) "But he forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with

him, and which stood before him. And he said unto them--what counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men. . . said, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people. . .saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins," meaning "I will do even harsher things to you than my father Solomon did." "And now whereas my father did laden you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." So the people came back the third day under Jeroboam and Rehoboam said to them exactly what the young men had counseled him to do. Now you can imagine the reaction to this kind of a response to their requests. The people under Jeroboam were greatly disheartened; they revolted against the king and this was the separation of the ten tribes under King Jeroboam--the ten tribes to the north who are called Israel and the two tribes which continued in the south under king Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.

As we follow the history of the northern kingdom, that is of Israel, we find a number of very interesting kings, all of whom did wicked in the sight of the Lord, but perhaps the most well known to most people is King Ahab.

Ahab's story you will find recorded in the sixteenth chapter of I Kings, when we discover the reason why Ahab was such a wicked king. In I Kings 16:31, we read this concerning Ahab, "It came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam. . . that he took to wife Jezebel . . . and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he had built in Samaria." Ahab's evil, sinful and wicked reign was aided and abetted by the fact that he took the wrong wife. Not only did he take the wrong wife but as is inevitably the case, with the wife, he took also her religion. And furthermore he not only took the religion but he elevated the religion of Jezebel and worshipped Baal in the northern kingdom of Israel and made all Jerusalem groves unto Baal. Here is one of the reasons why Ahab was such a wicked king. It shows once again the importance of a good wife and when one marries the wrong person, inevitably the person's religion also becomes a part of the home. We have seen this before, that when Solomon took his foreign wives he also took their idols and their gods with them. It is an inevitable thing. This is one of the reasons for the downfall of Ahab.

The northern kingdom of Israel after the succession of a number of kings, finally was taken into captivity by the kingdom of Assyria. This happened about 721 B.C. and this then concludes the history of the northern kingdom after the division under Jeroboam.

God allowed the Assyrians to take the people of Israel into captivity because of their continuous wickedness in His sight and finally after much long suffering this occurred.

When the city of Samaria was captured in 721, there were taken about 27,000 captives into Assyria. There were many of the people of Israel who remained in the land of Palestine and intermarried with the heathen who were transplanted into the land. So in this way, either by captivity or by intermarriage, the kingdom was put to nothing and the end of the

history of Israel is recorded. In II kings 17:23 we read about this captivity. "The Lord removes Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land into Assyria unto this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon. . .and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." So by captivity and by intermarriage, the kingdom was dispersed.

In the southern kingdom, we have a succession of kings--some good and some bad and some of them are well-known, but most not so. Hezekiah stands out as one of the better kings of the southern kingdom of Judah because of the revival which he brought to pass in the land. You will find a record of this in II Kings 18.

Finally the sin of Judah came up into God's attention so that He could not any longer suffer them and He brought them into captivity as well as the kingdom in the north. Judah's captivity was accomplished by Babylon and God brought them into captivity for seventy years before He finally released them. The reason for the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom and for that length of time is told us in the last chapter of II Chronicles. In II Chronicles 36, God said that He would bring them into captivity for "threescore and ten years" because for 490 years the people of Judah had refused to keep the sabbatical year for the land. Once every seven years they were supposed to let the land lie idle and for four hundred and ninety years they had not done this. So God said, "You owe me seventy years and I will require this at your hand on the behalf of the land and I will see to it that I get it by taking you captive out of the land of Palestine and into Babylon for seventy years." And so God did this (II Chronicles 36:21) "To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years."

Undoubtedly the outstanding lesson of this period is that although God is long suffering, patient, kind and merciful in all His dealings with His people, repeated sin and repeated warnings from the prophets, inevitably must bring judgment from the hand of God. One only wonders how long God can deal with nations who refuse to acknowledge Him. He brought these nations into captivity and God is still on the throne of His world running things according to His own plan and purposes. It is our place to acknowledge His authority and to submit to His rule.