

FROM SOLOMON TO EZRA

The two names that appear in this learning package, Solomon and Ezra, are separated in history by almost 600 years. That is a lot of time to cover in one learning package. We will simply do an overview of this period in biblical history, to see how God was still at work to accomplish His purposes and promises to His people. We will make a chart (Exercise Sheet #1) to help us focus on this time in history. Make sure you have the chart in front of you [pause]

You have just completed a study of the three kings, Saul, David and Solomon. In the year 922 B.C. Solomon died. One of his sons, Rehoboam, came to Shechem to be made king. But the people wanted to know for sure who this young man was that was going to rule over them. So they asked him if he would lighten the heavy burden placed upon them by Solomon. In counsel with the older men of the kingdom, Rehoboam learned that he should do this, but Rehoboam preferred to listen to the young men of the kingdom. Following their advice, he said that he would add to the country's burden. Because of this, there was a revolt in the land, and *Rehoboam* was left to reign over the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin, while *Jeroboam* became king over the 10 tribes of the northern part of the Kingdom. The northern kingdom was known as the kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom as the kingdom of Judah. This was the year 922 B.C. On the chart, write the name of each kingdom and the first king to rule those tribes. [pause]

The history of God's people in the years of the divided kingdom is far from flattering. Let's start by looking at the northern kingdom, or *Israel*. In order to maintain his hold on power, Jeroboam felt it necessary to keep people from going to the temple in Jerusalem, which had been the worship centre of the nation. He set up two places of worship at *Dan* and at *Bethel*. Here he introduced the Canaanite *calf worship and the worship of Baal*. In Scripture, Jeroboam is known as the "man who made Israel sin". Mark the names of the worship centres on your chart [pause]

As the people of the north forgot the True God, corruption, idolatry and injustice spread throughout the land. Each king who came to the throne seemed worse than the one before, and the people followed the example of their kings. The worst of these kings was *Ahab*, who with his wife, Jezebel, seemed determined to wipe out any worship of Yahweh from the land. It was during the time of Ahab that Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of Israel, was sent by God to call the northern kingdom to repentance. We will be looking at the ministry of Elijah and his successor, Elisha, in one of our performance objectives.

Even though prophet after prophet was sent to call the people to repentance, they still rejected the Lord and served idols. Finally, in 722 B.C., during the reign of *Hoshea*, God allowed the *Assyrians* to conquer Israel, and to take many of its people into captivity. Place this information in the appropriate spot in the chart. [pause]

The southern kingdom of *Judah* was blessed in having more righteous rulers. Yes, there were the times when the kings led the people into idolatry, but there were also those who brought religious reform to the land. The best of them was *Hezekiah*. He destroyed idols and the temples where people worshipped these idols. Because of his faithfulness, God spared Judah when the kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. The Assyrian armies came south and conquered Israel but allowed Judah to govern itself as a vassal state. That is, Judah had to pay a large sum of money for the privilege of governing itself.

Unfortunately, Hezekiah was followed by the worst king of Judah, *Manasseh*. But there would be another good king, named *Josiah*. He was a boy of 8 years when he became king, and a reform of the worship practices came into existence during this time. We will learn more about Josiah in Objective # 4. Make sure you have included the appropriate information on the chart for the Southern Kingdom. [pause]

But even in Judah, the people fell away from God, and so, in the year 586 B.C, the Kingdom of Judah also came to an end. The *Babylonian Empire* had conquered the Assyrian Empire and the armies came into Israel and moved south through Judah. They brought back to Babylon all the leaders and teachers, doctors and those people who might cause a rebellion against their rule. This was called the Exile, or the Babylonian Captivity and it lasted for 70 years. Don't forget to include *Babylon* on the chart!

One of the individuals who was taken from Judah to Babylon was Daniel. You probably know something about Daniel, but will be learning more about him in Objective # 5.. During the time of Daniel the land of Israel was not governed by the leaders of either Israel or Judah and for about fifty years these leaders

lived in Babylon in exile, serving the king and the people of Babylon.

In the year 538 BC. the Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire. Cyrus, the king of Persia, allowed the people of Judah who wanted to return to Jerusalem to do so. They rebuilt the temple and the walls of the city. Nehemiah and Ezra were instrumental in this effort.

The books of the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, deal with the history of this period. Again and again, God sent His messengers to point people to their sinful worship of idols and call them to repentance. If they did, God promised that He would bless and restore them. Unfortunately, the messages of the prophets were often ignored, and as a result, God brought judgment on His people - a judgment that would teach them the terrible consequences of sin, and enable them to understand the gracious love that God has for those who trust in Him.

PS. One more thing about this period. Some Jews were left behind in the Northern kingdom when Assyria conquered Israel. These people intermarried with non-Jews who were moved into this area. They were called Samaritans and were to be considered outcasts later on by Ezra and Nehemiah. More on this in the New Testament.