

# Division of the 12 Tribes

## 1 Kings 12-13

### Key Bible Texts

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### Key Bible Verse(s)

“And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord: therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake unto him.” (1 Kings 13:26)

## Background to the Study

**Chapter 12 marks a pivotal moment in the history of Israel.** Because King Solomon angered God (1 Kings 11:9–11), the united kingdom was divided after his death. For David’s sake (1 Kings 11:12; 1 Chronicles 17:13), God delayed this judgment and left Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, with only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. These two tribes were often regarded as one due to their shared border, with Jerusalem — the seat of government — located within Judah.

Rehoboam travelled about 35 miles north to Shechem to be crowned, likely to gain the support of the northern tribes. However, longstanding tribal tensions, especially between Judah in the south and Ephraim in the north, remained unresolved. Despite the Law of Moses requiring all men to visit the Temple in Jerusalem three times a year, Jeroboam feared losing the loyalty of the northern tribes. To counter this, he established rival worship centres at Bethel and Dan — Bethel being just ten miles north of Jerusalem and Dan at the northernmost edge of Israel.

The ten northern tribes — Ephraim, Manasseh, Dan, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Issachar, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali — rejected Rehoboam’s rule and formed the kingdom of Israel, appointing Jeroboam as king and establishing Samaria as their capital. This fulfilled the prophecy delivered by Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29–39).

Though Jeroboam had the potential to become the founder of a lasting dynasty, as God promised to “build thee a sure house” like David’s, he led Israel into sin. He instituted golden calf worship to prevent the people from returning to Jerusalem and potentially realigning with Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:26–27). This “sin of Jeroboam” became a pattern for all nineteen kings of Israel, none of whom were righteous. Ultimately, the kingdom was conquered by Assyria and its people exiled.

Jeroboam defied God's law by appointing non-Levites as priests (Numbers 3:10–12) and even performing priestly duties himself (1 Kings 12:31–33; 13:1). A prophecy in 1 Kings 13:2 foretold the destruction of his altar by King Josiah of Judah — fulfilled 300 years later (2 Kings 23:15–18). Three miracles confirmed the prophet's message: the altar split, Jeroboam's hand was paralyzed and then restored. Still, Jeroboam refused to repent.

A final sign of divine judgment came when a lion killed the disobedient prophet yet left both his body and the donkey unharmed — a striking display of God's control, as lions were a real and feared threat in Israel at the time.

## TESTIMONIES FROM OUR DAY

*I still remember getting my first big paycheck. Instantly, my mind raced with questions: Should I go out to lunch with friends or buy a pizza? Should I get a new video game or maybe a stereo? For the first time, I had the freedom to make financial decisions — but I wasn't ready for the responsibility.*

*Thankfully, my mother, wise and practical, tried to guide me. She encouraged me to save for something meaningful — a car. Since one of my main reasons for working was to gain independence, this made sense. But saving wasn't nearly as fun as spending. I ignored her advice and made a string of impulsive purchases that left me with nothing of real value.*

*Over time, I came to appreciate her wisdom. I changed my habits — and yes, I eventually got that car! The experience taught me a lasting truth: while it may seem easier to please ourselves in the moment, wise counsel leads to far better outcomes.*

*Rehoboam faced a similar moment of decision in 1 Kings 12:6–11. When he became king, he asked the elders who had served his father Solomon for advice. But he didn't like what they said. So he turned to his peers, who told him what he wanted to hear — and he followed them instead. Why did Rehoboam reject wisdom in favour of comfort? What might have happened if he had listened? His choice led to a divided kingdom and generations of conflict.*

*We face these choices too. Will we seek out and listen to godly wisdom — even when it challenges us? Or will we follow our own desires and live with the consequences? Thankfully, God has given us wise guidance in His Word, and He surrounds us with mature believers who can help us walk in truth.*

*Above all, we must learn to seek and follow the Lord's counsel. When was the last time you genuinely asked God for direction — and waited to hear His answer? His wisdom never leads us astray.*

## A Closer Look

### Question 1

How did Rehoboam know the “young men” from whom he took counsel? The nations of Israel and Judah were divided, partly because Rehoboam listened to the advice of the young men and gave a rough reply when the people asked him to lighten their yoke (1 Kings 12:1-16). Compare the advice of the old men in 1 Kings 12:7 to the advice of the young men in 1 Kings 12:10-11, and explain why the advice of the old men was superior.

### Question 2

What is our responsibility to our elders in the Church today?

### Question 3

Through Ahijah the prophet, God told Jeroboam that he would establish his house if Jeroboam would be obedient and keep God’s commandments (1 Kings 11:38). Read 1 Kings 12:26-33 to see Jeroboam’s response. Why did Jeroboam forsake God and set up golden calf idols in the towns of Bethel and Dan?

### Question 4

Three miracles were performed by the prophet of Judah (1 Kings 13:1-6), yet Jeroboam did not turn from his idolatry (1 Kings 13:33,34). Why do you think Jeroboam persisted in his disobedience even after seeing the miracles? Compare this to the reaction of unbelievers today when they observe God at work.

### Question 5

The prophet of Judah knew how important it was to obey God’s instructions (1 Kings 13:7-10), and yet he was persuaded to disobey by the old prophet of Bethel. What arguments did the old prophet use to foster disobedience in the prophet of Judah? (See 1 Kings 13:15-19.) How might similar arguments be presented to tempt us to disobey God’s commands today?

### Question 6

Is the prophet of Judah’s disobedience any more or less excusable than the disobedience of King Jeroboam? Explain your answer. Perhaps you know someone who would tempt you to disobey God’s Word. What could help you resist that temptation? Let us not fit God’s Word to our wants.

## Take Home

God has provided us with a wealth of spiritual knowledge. Let us use every resource He has given so we can be assured of every blessing He has for us. Let us also allow God’s Word to make us fit for His kingdom!