

Lesson 24: The Kingdom Divided

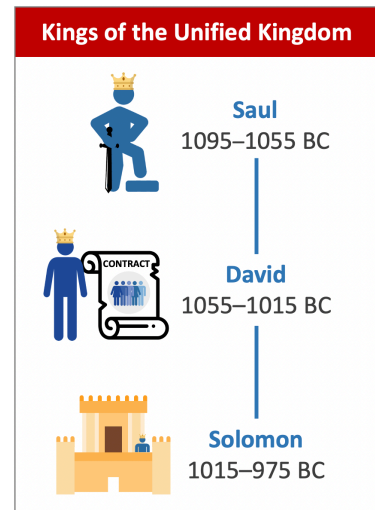
Previously...

Saul, the first human king of Israel, rejected God's rules and lived selfishly based on his own ambitions.

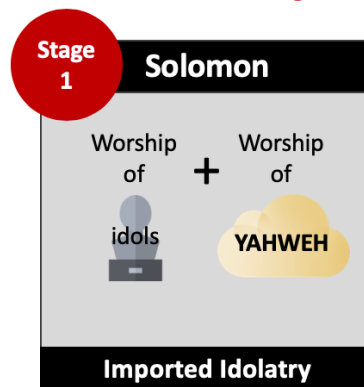
David, the second king, was upheld by God as a model king because he followed God with his whole heart, and was teachable and repentant when he sinned.

God made Solomon, the third king, the wisest man on earth. His reign was the golden era for Israel.

However, Solomon did not obey God fully. Against God's law for kings, Solomon had 1,000 women and many of them were pagans. It was through trying to please his pagan wives that Solomon led Israel into spiritual rot. He introduced Israel to the worship of idols side by side with the worship of Yahweh!



How Israel became Paganised



So God told him that his descendants would no longer rule the unified Israel.

1 Kings 11:9–13

⁹ The LORD was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰ He had warned Solomon specifically about worshipping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the LORD's command. ¹¹ So now the LORD said to him, "Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my decrees, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. ¹² But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son. ¹³ And even so, I will not take away the entire kingdom; I will let him be king of one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, my chosen city."

Saul, David and Solomon were the only kings who ruled the unified kingdom of Israel.

Right after that, Yahweh tore the kingdom into two. This started the time of the divided kingdom in Israel.

What happened during this time?

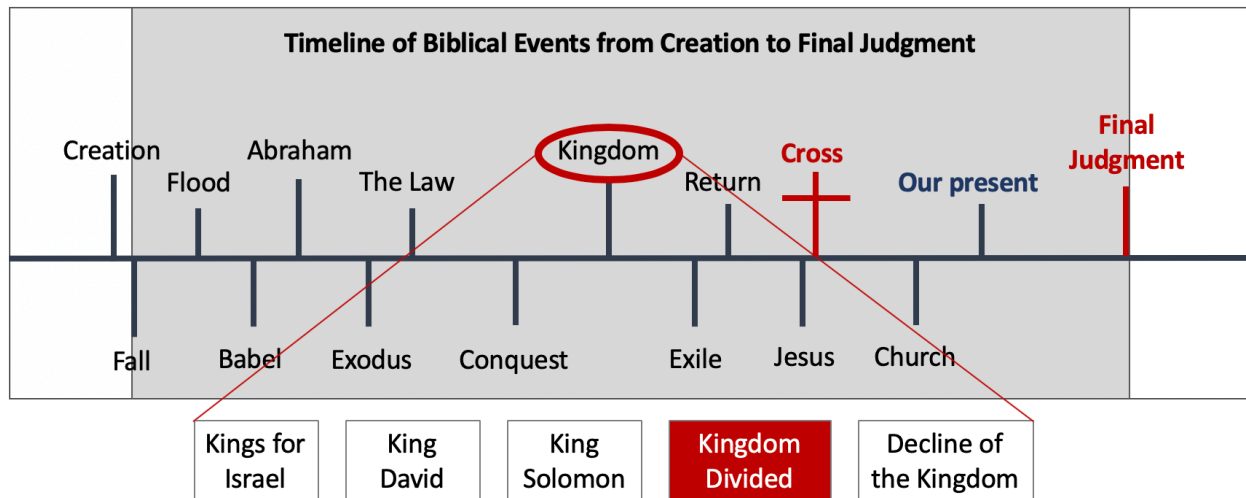
The people of Israel became more and more paganised.

We will specifically examine the roles that three kings, Rehoboam, Jeroboam and Ahab played in leading the nation of Israel into total rejection of God.

(Turn to the end of the notes for the chart of the kings.)

Kingdom of God	
Based on GRACE God would save man	
Election	
	God chose Abraham
	God saved Israel
	God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law National anthem Temple worship Feasts & festivals
	Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
	Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unified kingdom Divided kingdom

Grey shows paganisation



The Revolt of the Ten Tribes

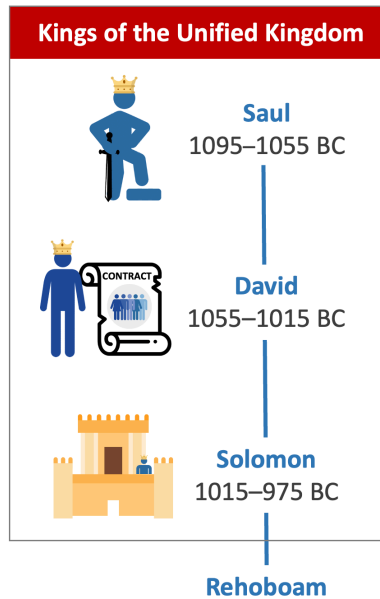




1. The Ten Tribes Reject the Davidic Dynasty

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, should have ruled all 12 tribes of Israel, as Solomon and David did.

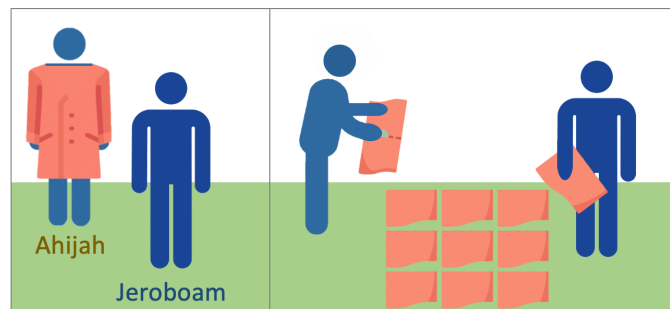
What should have happened



But instead, God gave ten tribes to Jeroboam I. Jeroboam was a very capable official in Solomon's government. He was in charge of part of the work force. God sent Ahijah the prophet to tell Jeroboam what God was about to do.

1 Kings 11:29–31, 37–38

²⁹ One day as Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh met him along the way. Ahijah was wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone in a field, ³⁰ and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹ Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten of these pieces, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and I will give ten of the tribes to you!' ³⁷ And I will place you on the throne of Israel, and you will rule over all that your heart desires. ³⁸ If you listen to what I tell you and follow my ways and do whatever I consider to be right, and if you obey my decrees and commands, as my servant David did, then I will always be with you. I will establish an enduring dynasty for you as I did for David, and I will give Israel to you.



When King Solomon found out what Yahweh had told Jeroboam, instead of repenting of his sins or accepting God's judgment on him, he tried to kill Jeroboam. This was the typical behaviour of pagan kings trying to preserve their power. Recall how Saul had also refused to accept God's judgment on him and tried to kill David. Now Solomon was trying to do the same thing! So Jeroboam fled to Egypt and stayed there until Solomon died.

After Solomon's death, as Rehoboam was to be crowned king over the 12 tribes, Jeroboam and all Israel came to Rehoboam and asked him to relax the heavy taxation and labour that they had suffered under Solomon's rule. When the people first demanded a human king, God had warned them through the prophet Samuel that the king would take advantage of them.

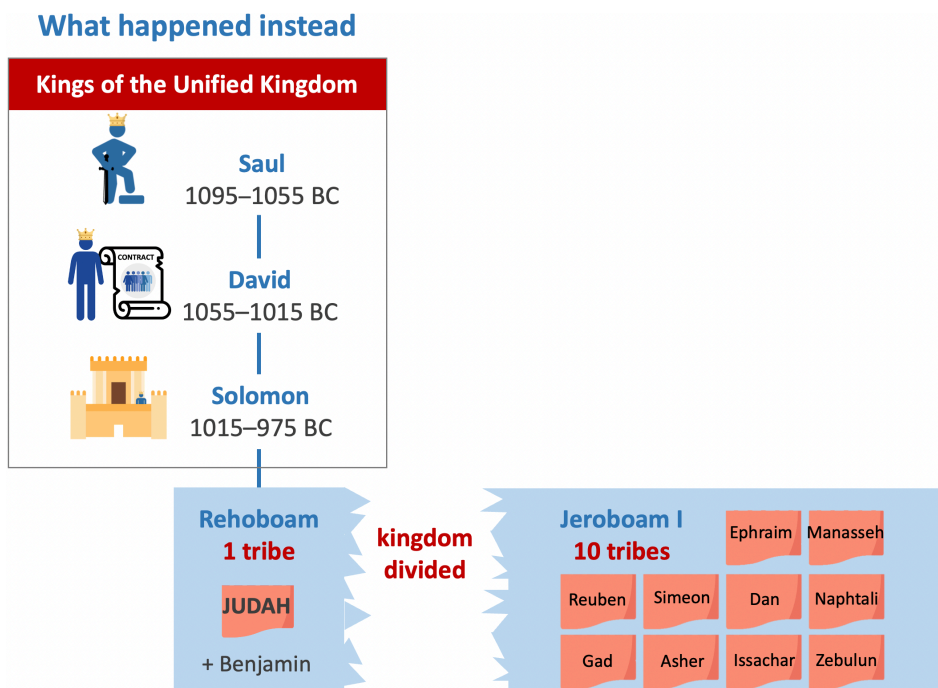
1 Samuel 8:14–18

¹⁴ He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. ¹⁷ He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you."

And this was exactly what happened under Solomon's rule: he laid crushing taxes on the people. So the people asked Rehoboam to lighten their load.

But Rehoboam was an incredibly stupid king. Instead of listening to good advice from senior advisors, he listened to his foolish young friends and increased the taxes and burden on the people instead! (1 Kings 12:1–15.)

The people were angry and 10 tribes rebelled against the house of David. They chose Jeroboam as their king. Only the tribe of Judah, Rehoboam's tribe, remained with him.



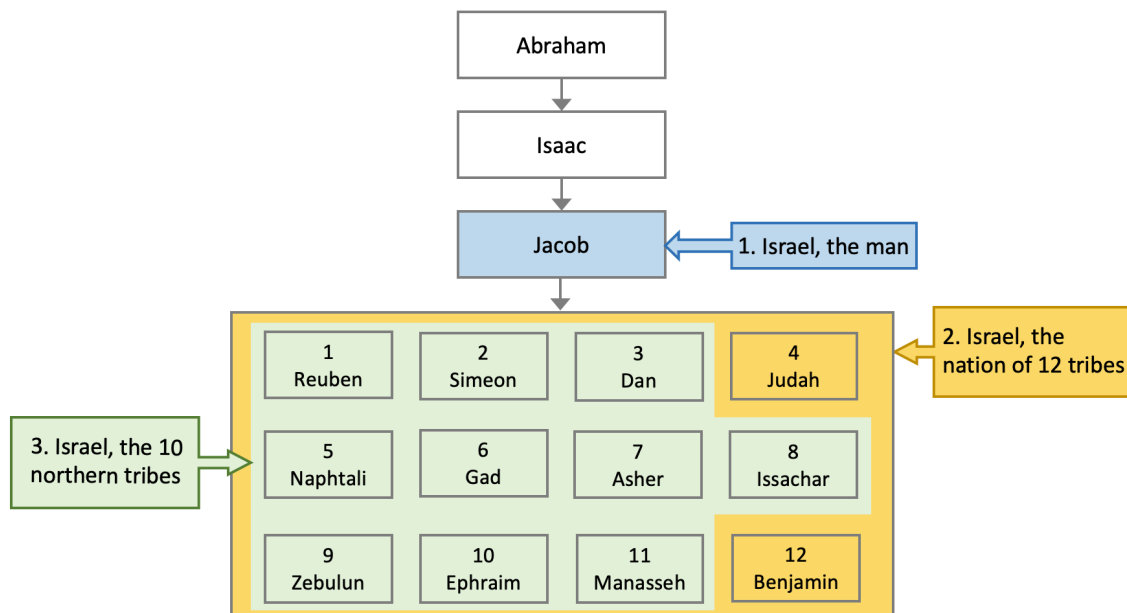
God had told Solomon that He would leave his son one tribe (1 Kings 11:13) but God also told Jeroboam he would be given 10 tribes (1 Kings 11:31).

Is there a contradiction between the two passages? No.

The one tribe that God left to Rehoboam was Judah, Rehoboam's own tribe. Benjamin was a very small tribe that followed Judah (1 Kings 12:16–24). However, together, they were collectively called "Judah". (The Levites also remained loyal to Judah. Because their role was to serve in the Temple, they were not usually considered a tribe.)

From this point on, the name "Israel" often refers to these 10 tribes.

Note: The name "Israel" meant different things at different times so it's important to understand the context.



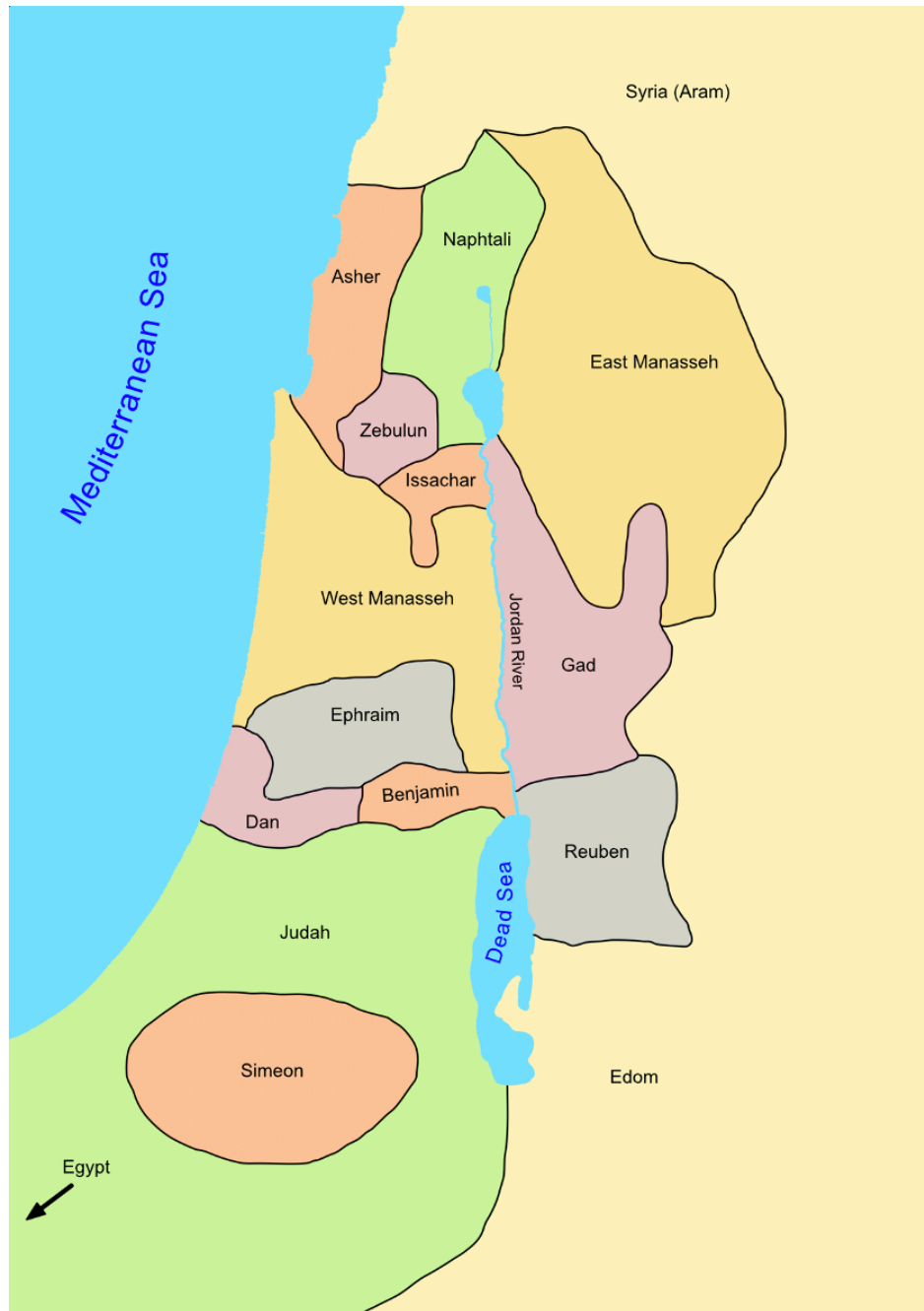
Joseph's tribe was divided into two: Ephraim and Manasseh. Because of Levi's special priestly role, they were often not counted as a tribe. Hence there are still 12 tribes of Israel.

1. **Israel, the man:** Originally, God changed the name of Abraham's grandson Jacob to Israel. It was from his 12 sons that the 12 tribes of Israel were named.
2. **Israel the whole nation:** Then when Jacob's descendants grew into a nation, as a group, they were known as "Israel".
3. **Israel, the 10 northern tribes:** When the 10 tribes rebelled against the Davidic dynasty, they were called "Israel".

The other two tribes became known as "Judah".

Because of where they were located:

- “Israel” also came to be known as the “northern kingdom” and
- “Judah” came to be known as the “southern kingdom”.



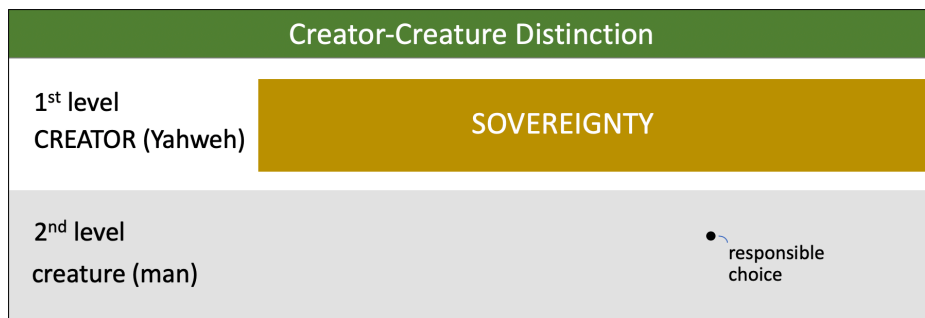
[Note: Even though the tribe of Simeon was given land in southern Judah (Joshua 19:1–9), later, many Simeonites migrated north to Ephraim and Manasseh. Simeon became part of the northern kingdom (see also 2 Chronicles 15:9 where believing Simeonites in the north migrated back to Judah)].

Importantly, the Bible says that while people have freedom of choice to do what they want, God has sovereignty. He works over and above the will of people to cause His promises and warnings to be fulfilled. This is what the Bible says about Rehoboam:

1 Kings 12:15

So the king paid no attention to the people. This turn of events was the will of the LORD, for it fulfilled the LORD’s message to Jeroboam son of Nebat through the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh.

So did Rehoboam have free will in this situation? Yes. Does God have sovereignty in this situation? Yes. Both are true. God is totally different and separate from man. God is totally sovereign over all His creation. He is at one level of being and man is on another. He is infinite and man is finite. He knows all things and understands all things.



As limited creatures, we may not know how He does it, but the Bible wants us to understand that Yahweh does exercise complete sovereignty while giving mankind real freedom of choice. It is God’s ability to do this that gives us security that He can and will keep all the promises He makes.



2. The Ten Tribes Reject The Jerusalem Temple

Jeroboam’s rule of the northern kingdom was a total disaster. He caused Israel to sin greatly, more than Solomon ever did! Here is how it happened. When God told Jeroboam he would be king over 10 tribes, God made him a conditional promise:

1 Kings 11:38

If you listen to what I tell you and follow my ways and do whatever I consider to be right, and if you obey my decrees and commands, as my servant David did, then I will always be with you. I will establish an enduring dynasty for you as I did for David, and I will give Israel to you.

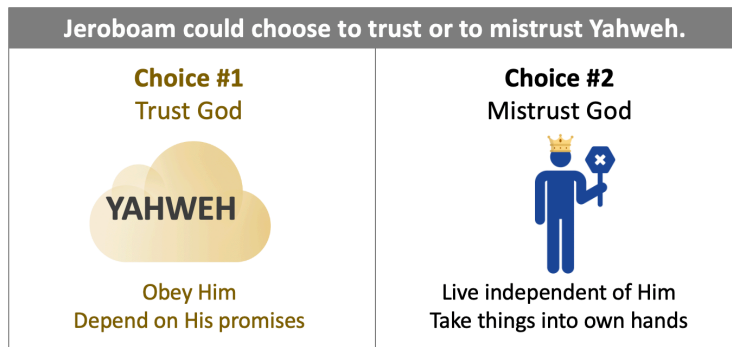
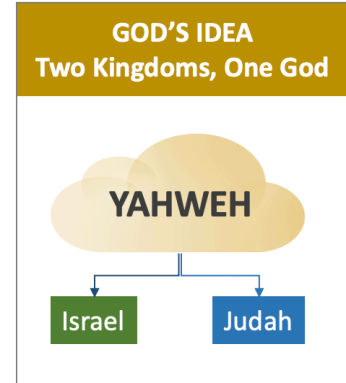


CONDITIONAL PROMISE	
<p>IF Jeroboam obeys</p> <p>THEN Jeroboam’s dynasty will be established forever</p>	<p>IF Jeroboam rebels</p> <p>THEN God will take the kingdom away from him</p>

God’s instructions to Jeroboam were very simple: “If you listen and obey, I will secure your dynasty.” What Yahweh was saying was that even though there were now two kingdoms, there was still to be one God over both of them.

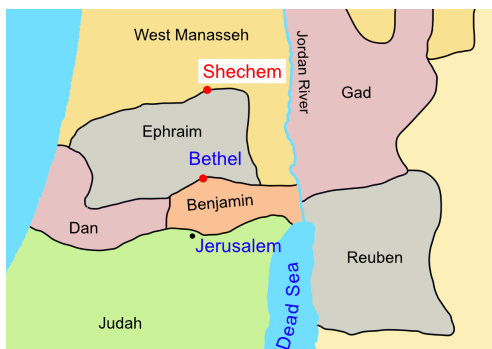
Jeroboam did not need any “secrets” to successful leadership. He just had to read and obey God’s Word.

Instead of having faith in Yahweh and trusting in His promise, Jeroboam chose unbelief. He chose to believe that God was either lying or not capable of keeping His promises.



1 Kings 12:25–33

²⁵ Jeroboam then built up the city of Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and it became his capital. Later he went and built up the town of Peniel. ²⁶ Jeroboam thought to himself, “Unless I am careful, the kingdom will return to the dynasty of David. ²⁷ When these people go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the Temple of the LORD, they will again give their allegiance to King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill me and make him their king instead.”



Commentary

Jeroboam’s actions showed he did not believe a word that Yahweh said to him.

Because Solomon had tried to kill him earlier, now Jeroboam feared that Rehoboam would try to kill him too. He didn’t consider how he could obey God as David had done and trust Yahweh to secure his kingdom.

Instead, he was so worried that he would lose his new position, that **he immediately took matters into his own hands** and set about trying to secure his own kingdom by human methods!

²⁸ So on the advice of his counselors, the king made two gold calves. He said to the people, “It is too much trouble for you to worship in Jerusalem. Look, Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!”

²⁹ He placed these calf idols in Bethel and in Dan—at either end of his kingdom. ³⁰ But this became a great sin, for the people worshiped the idols, traveling as far north as Dan to worship the one there.

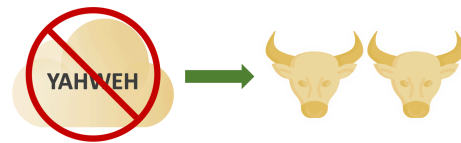


Then Jeroboam proceeded into foolish and rebellious acts.

1. **He did not get advice from the Word of God.** Instead of relying on Scriptures for wisdom as all of Israel’s kings were told, he consulted ungodly people and received anti-God advice.



2. **Jeroboam created another god for the people to worship.** Jeroboam replaced Yahweh the true God of Israel with two golden calves!



3. **He rejected Yahweh’s temple in Jerusalem.** God told the people that three times a year, everyone was supposed worship Him together (Deuteronomy 16:16). The place was Jerusalem, where Solomon had built the Temple for God.

But Jeroboam was so afraid that people would worship God there and defect to the southern kingdom that he decided to create his own temples!



He deliberately built two, one in the northern end of his kingdom (Dan) and one near the southern end (Bethel) so that Israelites would have no reason to go to Jerusalem! He created a false religion!

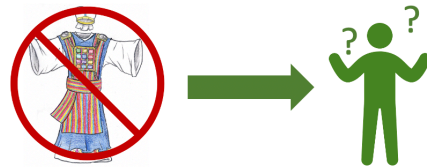
³¹ Jeroboam also erected buildings at the pagan shrines and ordained priests from the common people—those who were not from the priestly tribe of Levi.

³² And Jeroboam instituted a religious festival in Bethel, held on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in imitation of the annual Festival of Shelters in Judah. There at Bethel he himself offered sacrifices to the calves he had made, and he appointed priests for the pagan shrines he had made.

³³ So on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a day that he himself had designated, Jeroboam offered sacrifices on the altar at Bethel. He instituted a religious festival for Israel, and he went up to the altar to burn incense.

4. **Jeroboam appointed priests who were not Levites.** God had appointed only men from the tribe of Levi to be priests before Him. They were to teach the people the Word of God.

But Jeroboam did not want the Levites to teach people God's Word. He was afraid that since the Levites were leading worship for Judah, his people would be swayed to return to Judah. Then he would lose his security, citizens and power. So he replaced the Levites with ordinary citizens.



He also did whatever he wanted. He himself took on the role of a priest by offering sacrifices himself!



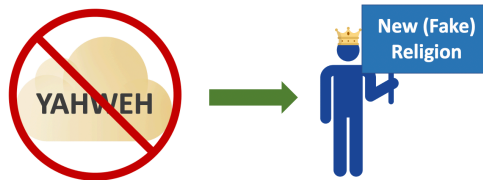
5. **He invented his own religious calendar by creating his own feast days.**



Because Jeroboam didn't trust God's words, he busied himself and set about securing his own leadership by inventing a new state religion! Jeroboam used his authority as ruler to corrupt the true worship of Yahweh. Abusing his governmental power, he took biblical words, vocabulary and practices to make it seem like it was the worship of Yahweh, but it was not! The ESV translation says this clearly: Jeroboam made up this whole fake religion from his faithless heart.

1 Kings 12:33 (ESV)

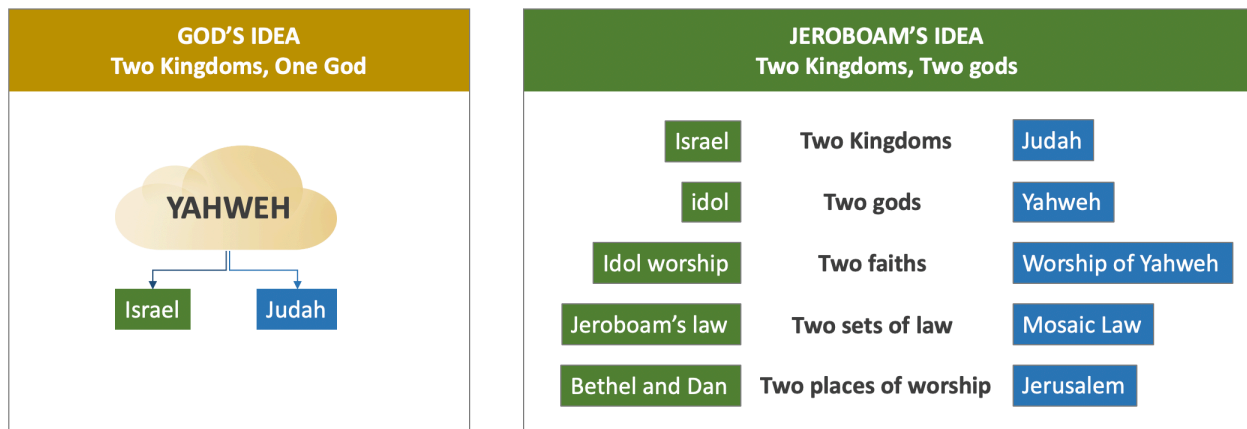
He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.



So great were the “sins of Jeroboam” that the Bible repeats this phrase 18 times in the books of 1 and 2 Kings!

God's plan was two kingdoms, one faith.

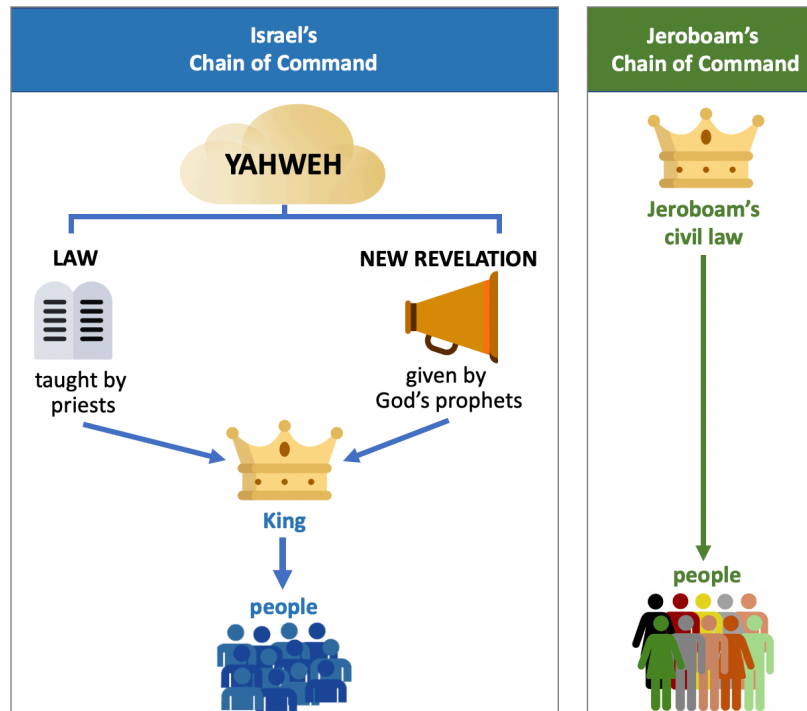
Jeroboam made it two kingdoms, two gods, two faiths, two sets of laws and two sets of places to worship.



Moreover, God's instruction was for civil government in Israel to follow the Word of God.

Jeroboam exalted civil law above the Word of God.

This structurally destroyed society and its consequences went on for generations.



This is what God said He would do:

1 Kings 14:16

He will abandon Israel because Jeroboam sinned and made Israel sin along with him.

The prophets remaining in the north kept silent

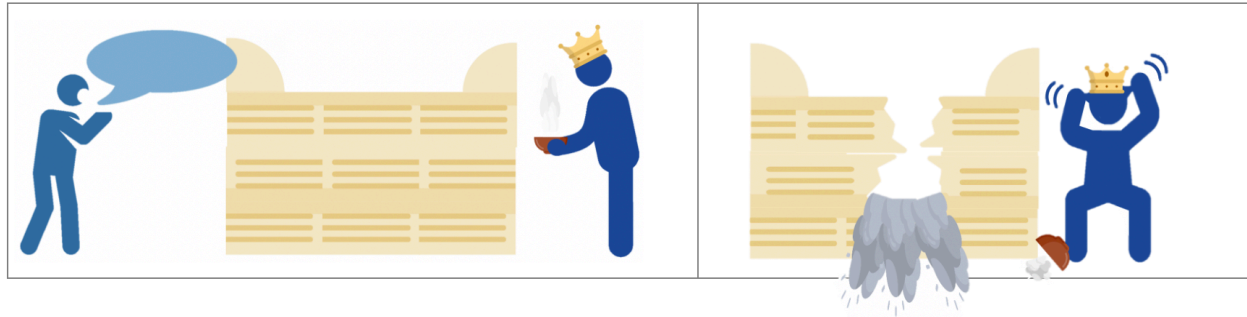
While Jeroboam was inventing this whole new religion, it appears that the remaining prophets of God in the northern kingdom kept silent. It didn't seem like they were doing their job by challenging Jeroboam or urging the people to repent. So God sent a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah to prophesy judgment.



1 Kings 13:1–5

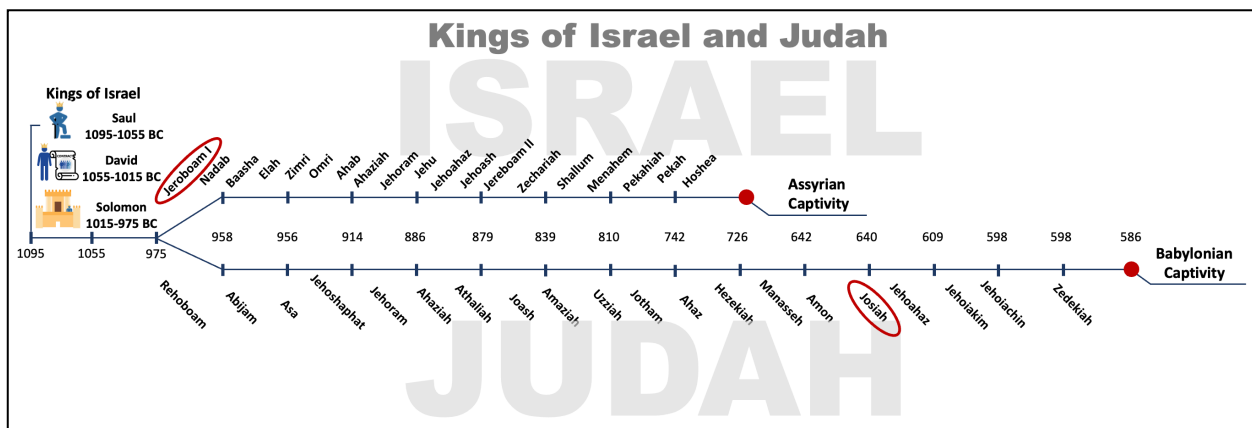
¹ At the LORD'S command, a man of God from Judah went to Bethel, arriving there just as Jeroboam was approaching the altar to burn incense. ² Then at the LORD'S command, he shouted, "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: A child named Josiah will be born into the dynasty of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests from the pagan shrines who come here to burn incense, and human bones will be burned on you."

³ That same day the man of God gave a sign to prove his message. He said, "The LORD has promised to give this sign: This altar will split apart, and its ashes will be poured out on the ground." ⁴ When King Jeroboam heard the man of God speaking against the altar at Bethel, he pointed at him and shouted, "Seize that man!" But instantly the king's hand became paralyzed in that position, and he couldn't pull it back. ⁵ At the same time a wide crack appeared in the altar, and the ashes poured out, just as the man of God had predicted in his message from the LORD.



The Prophecy (Future)	The sign to guarantee the Prophecy (Immediate)
King Josiah will sacrifice pagan priests on the altar and burn human bones on them.	The altar will split apart and ashes will be poured out.

Who is this King Josiah? When was he coming? King Josiah was a king of Judah who lived 290 years later!



But as God had guaranteed, Josiah did exactly as Yahweh said he would.

2 Kings 23:15–16a, 19–20

¹⁵ The king also tore down the altar at Bethel—the pagan shrine that Jeroboam son of Nebat had made when he caused Israel to sin. He burned down the shrine and ground it to dust, and he burned the Asherah pole.

¹⁶ Then Josiah turned around and noticed several tombs in the side of the hill. He ordered that the bones be brought out, and he burned them on the altar at Bethel to desecrate it. (This happened just as the LORD had promised through the man of God when Jeroboam stood beside the altar at the festival.)

¹⁹ Then Josiah demolished all the buildings at the pagan shrines in the towns of Samaria, just as he had done at Bethel. They had been built by the various kings of Israel and had

made the LORD very angry. ²⁰ He executed the priests of the pagan shrines on their own altars, and he burned human bones on the altars to desecrate them. Finally, he returned to Jerusalem.

God's Word never fails. It may take some time for it to be fulfilled, but His words are always true and always reliable.

As for Jeroboam, he caused the northern kingdom of Israel to start off very badly.

Are the words of man or angel more important than the Word of God?

Instead of obeying the Word of God, Jeroboam regarded the words of man more highly.

And in 1 Kings 13:11–34, the prophet from Judah whom God sent to prophesy the message of doom to Jeroboam, regarded the words of an “angel” more highly. God told this southern prophet to deliver His message and then return home without stopping to eat or drink. The prophet was doing exactly what God told him until an old prophet from the north lied to him.

1 Kings 13:18

But the old prophet answered, “I am a prophet, too, just as you are. And an angel gave me this command from the LORD: ‘Bring him home with you so he can have something to eat and drink.’” But the old man was lying to him.

Because of the old man's lie, the prophet disobeyed God and was later killed by a lion (1 Kings 13:24). The prophet died because he valued the words of an “angel” more highly than the word he received directly from God.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul said that if anyone has a message that is different from God's Word, that person should be cursed.

Galatians 1:8

Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you.



Many people like the sensational. The Word of God, the Bible, is not enough for them. They are intrigued by messages from angels, heaven, spirits, dreams, out-of-body experiences, etc. These hold more weight in their minds than the established and available Word of God.

But God says that nothing should be more important than His revealed Word.

In the New Testament, in the event known as the Transfiguration, God allowed the apostles Peter, James and John to see a glorified Jesus on the mountain speaking to Moses and the Old Testament prophet Elijah (Matthew 17:1–6).

After that, Peter wrote about this experience, saying that rather than trusting in spectacular experiences like seeing Jesus with Moses and Elijah, we should trust the written Word of God even more!

2 Peter 1:16–21 (NIV)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

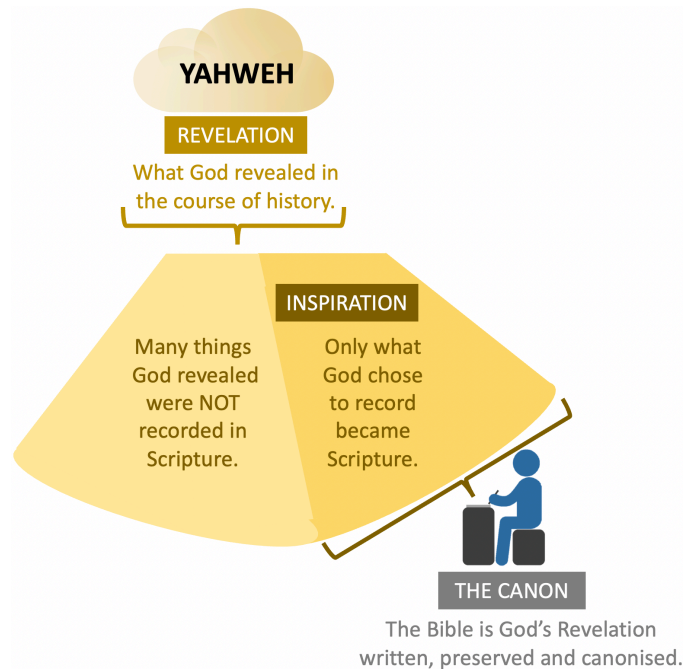
¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.



Trust in the written Word of God more than in experiences

When the Bible was not yet completed, God spoke to the prophets and they wrote the Bible. That was their key job.

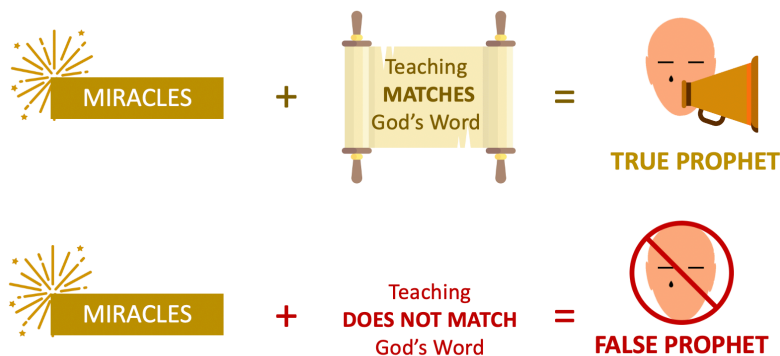


And God gave the people very clear instructions on how to identify false prophets versus true prophets.

1. Their teaching must be consistent with the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 13:1–3

¹ Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles, ² and the predicted signs or miracles occur. If they then say, ‘Come, let us worship other gods’—gods you have not known before— ³ do not listen to them. The LORD your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul.

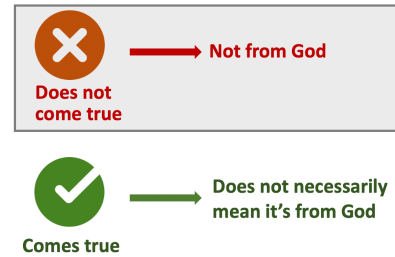


This passage says we cannot use miracles or signs to test for real prophets. The real test is what the prophet is teaching. We are not to use miracles or signs as a test, even if the miracles are real and the signs are fulfilled. This is because the Bible has many warnings that the devil can also perform miracles and signs.

2. What the prophet predicts must come true.

Deuteronomy 18:22

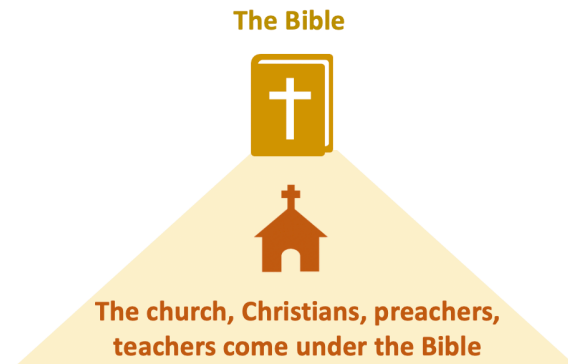
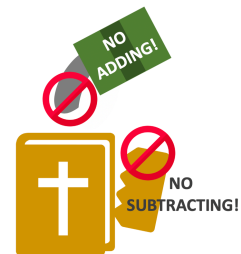
If the prophet speaks in the LORD's name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the LORD did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared.



If what the prophet says **does not** happen, then he is a false prophet. Take note that the Bible does not say that when a prophecy is fulfilled, it must be from God. It is when it **does not happen**, that it is definitely not from God.

The problem with false prophets was so serious that God imposed the death penalty on false prophets (Deuteronomy 18:20). Why? Because the Word of God is what Yahweh wants His people to live on. If people played around with the Word of God, they would mess up their lives and the life of the whole nation. Jeroboam did just that. He messed up the life of the whole northern kingdom.

Once the Bible was completed, there was no longer a need for any more prophets. Instead, God wants us to value most highly His words in the Bible. The church, Christians, preachers, angels or other spirits are not allowed to add to the Bible or change it. Not even if they perform miracles and signs and wonders.



For us as believers, when we study the Bible, we need to continually ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand and also to confirm what we are learning from the Bible.





It was the Holy Spirit who wrote the Bible and this same Spirit was given to teach us how to understand it.



3. The Ten Tribes Reject Yahweh Himself

While Jeroboam was a bad king, later there came another who was even worse: King Ahab.

How Israel became Paganised

Solomon	Jeroboam	Ahab
<p>Worship of idols + Worship of YAHWEH</p>	<p> Rejected Davidic Dynasty</p> <p> Rejected Jerusalem Temple</p>	<p> Rejected God</p> <p> Replaced God with idols</p>
Imported Idolatry	Invented false religion	Changed national religion

1 Kings 16:30–33

³⁰ But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD's sight, even more than any of the kings before him. ³¹ And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam, he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal. ³² First Ahab built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. ³³ Then he set up an Asherah pole. He did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.

King Ahab continued Jeroboam's wicked ways. But he did more. Abusing his authority as ruler, he changed Israel's God. He banned Yahweh from His own kingdom and replaced Him with Baal.

He was helped by his extremely wicked wife Jezebel, the daughter of a pagan king-priest of a Canaanite religion, the very people God had told the Israelites to destroy.

Now Baalism was the official state religion of Israel! Any Israelite loyal to Yahweh would now be considered disloyal to the state!



Yahweh’s Response to Israel’s Rejection



A. Cursings

Israel was not just any other pagan nation. They were God’s people. They were supposed to represent Him to the whole world (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 43:10–13).

God told them that they would be blessed if they obeyed Him and cursed if they rebelled.

 Blessings for keeping the covenant	 Cursings for breaking the covenant
Leviticus 26:1–13 (also Deuteronomy 28:1–14)	Leviticus 26:14–46 (also Deuteronomy 28:15–68)
<p>Blessings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic prosperity, good weather and cooperative nature (v4–5) • Military success and peace (v6–8) • Population growth (v9) • God’s continued presence with them (v11–12) 	<p>5 Stages of disciplines or cursings:</p> <p>Stage 1: Disease and sickness (physical and psychological), military defeat, economic disaster (v14–17)</p> <p>Stage 2: Famine (v18–20)</p> <p>Stage 3: Death of children and livestock, population decrease (v21–22)</p> <p>Stage 4: Starvation, epidemics, crushing military defeat (v23–26)</p> <p>Stage 5: Cannibalism, death, enemy invasion, exile, terror and psychological problems, God’s presence removed from them (v27–39)</p>

So God started His cursings upon Israel as He had promised in the Sinaitic Covenant (Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

The goal was to discipline His own people and cause them to turn back to Him, the true God.

Ahab and the people would now suffer the curse of drought and military invasion. God sent His prophet Elijah to Ahab to announce the beginning of the drought (1 Kings 17:1).

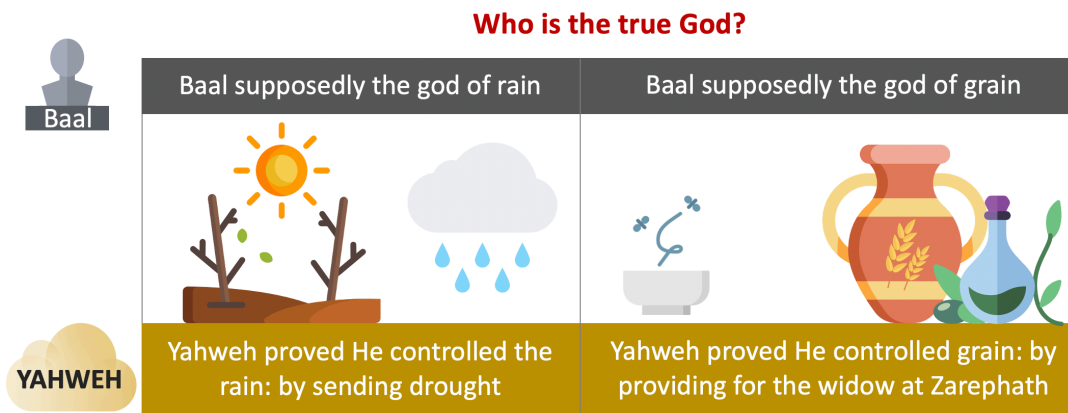


B. Yahweh proves He is the real God

Using the drought, God was not just cursing Israel. He was making an unmistakeable point: He is God and Baal is not.

Baal was supposed to be the god of the rain. By stopping the rain, God was telling the Israelites that Baal was useless. It was Yahweh who was in charge of rain, not Baal.

Then God sent Elijah to a widow who lived in a place called Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8–16). Zarephath was part of Sidon and was supposedly Baal’s home ground. Besides being the god of rain and fertility, Baal worshippers also believed he provided grain. If a god was strong anywhere, it would be in his home base, but Baal was once again useless to provide grain. It was Yahweh who miraculously provided the widow with a jar of flour and a jug of oil that did not run out as long as there was this drought.



But Yahweh wasn’t done. He was going to publicly ridicule the belief in Baal (1 Kings 18:20–40). The people had to choose between the real God or dead idols. Elijah and Ahab met.

1 Kings 18:17–21

¹⁷ When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, “So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?”

¹⁸ “I have made no trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead. ¹⁹ Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel.” ²⁰ So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, “How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!” But the people were completely silent.

Mount Carmel was part of a range of mountains that Baal worshippers believed was the seat, or centre, of Baal’s power. Elijah, who was just a single prophet of Yahweh, was challenging 850 prophets of the idols on their home ground.

The challenge was to see which god would answer their prophet’s call by sending fire down from heaven to burn up an animal sacrifice. No matter how much the false prophets called and cried out to Baal, nothing happened.

Then it was Elijah's turn. Elijah reminded Yahweh of His covenant with Abraham and because of that covenant, he dared to ask God to show Himself to the people, that there might be national repentance.



1 Kings 18:36–39

³⁶ At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. ³⁷ O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself." ³⁸ Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!"



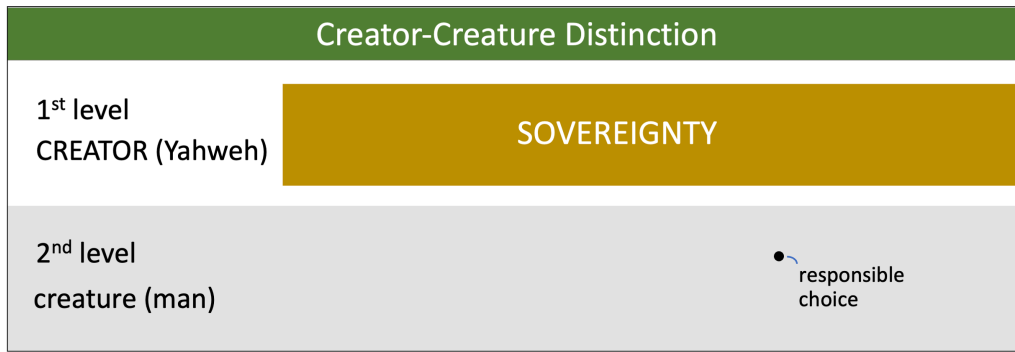
God proved very publicly once again in the sight of all Israel and the false prophets that He is the one true God, Yahweh.



Elijah prayed that the people would know that Yahweh is God and then turn to Him. He wanted them to have an internal change of heart (or a "circumcision of the heart"), a heart that loved and worshipped Yahweh.



Why did Yahweh use such an elaborate show to prove He is God? Because all true changes in the Bible happen when people see and understand more clearly who God really is. The root of sin often starts from misunderstanding God and His character. The Israelites themselves did not fully comprehend how infinite Yahweh is and how ridiculous worshipping a man-made idol as a god was. So God showed them.



NOT 1st level and **NOT** 2nd level

Lifeless, breathless, dead idols of gold, silver and wood, made with human hands









Following God’s laws, Elijah called for all the false prophets to be killed (1 Kings 18:40).

Deuteronomy 13:5

The false prophets or visionaries who try to lead you astray must be put to death, for they encourage rebellion against the LORD your God, who redeemed you from slavery and brought you out of the land of Egypt. Since they try to lead you astray from the way the LORD your God commanded you to live, you must put them to death. In this way you will purge the evil from among you.

Yahweh continued to demonstrate He is the true God

Throughout the reigns of King Ahab and his sons, Yahweh used both the prophets Elijah and Elisha after him to show Israel who the true God is. Just as Yahweh proved that the Egyptian gods were false during the Exodus, He systematically showed that Baal was not a god at all.

 Baal was thought to be:	 Yahweh showed through Elijah and Elisha that:	Bible Reference
God of lightning	 He is God of lightning.	1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:9–12
Lord of rain	 He is God of rain.	1 Kings 18:41–45
Lord of agriculture	 He is God of oil and grain even in the land of Baal.	1 Kings 17:8–16
Lord of life	 He is God of life who gives children.	2 Kings 4:8–17
Lord of healing	 He is God who can heal directly through His prophets.	1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:18–37

Ahab's response to Yahweh's show of proof

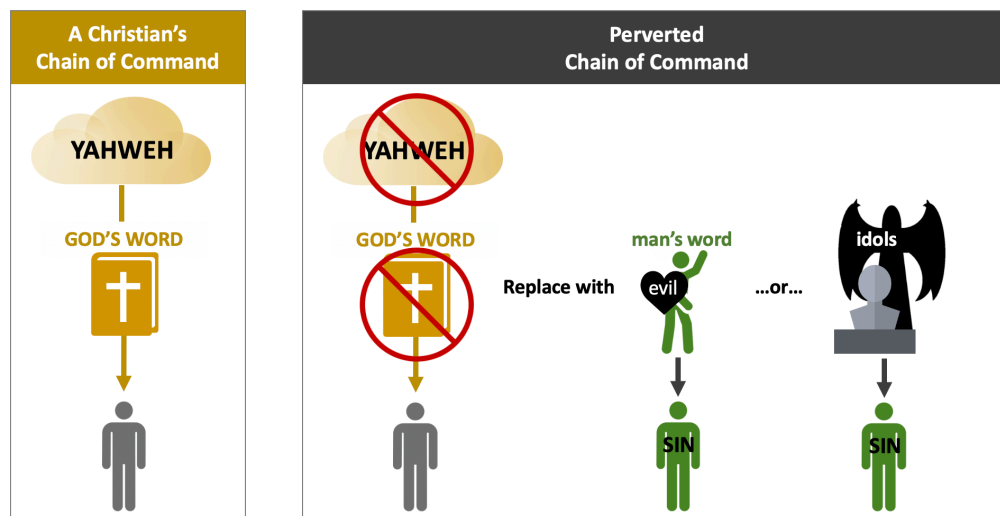
Despite God's proof of who He is, Ahab and Jezebel didn't repent. Israel's king was supposed to submit to God as the sovereign king. But because Ahab ignored the Word of God, the state had become the god. The state defined right and wrong, good and evil. And the state could do whatever it wanted.

This showed itself with the incident of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1–24). In Joshua and Judges, we saw that God gave the Israelites land. These books recorded the real estate deeds that each tribe and family had been given. Under God's law, the people had this land as their inheritance. They were not allowed to sell it (Numbers 36:7; Ezekiel 46:18).














But Ahab wanted his neighbour Naboth's vineyard. Following Mosaic law, Naboth refused to sell. Ahab threw a tantrum. So Queen Jezebel plotted Naboth's murder and confiscated his land. God, furious with Ahab and Jezebel, sent Elijah to announce that Ahab would die where Naboth was killed, his dynasty would end, and Jezebel would be eaten by dogs.

Whenever God's Word is ignored, man will replace it with (i) "man's word" or (ii) false idols. The problem with "man's word" is that man's heart is evil. The problem with idols is that they are from the devil. So when either "man's word" or idols are followed, sin comes along.



King Solomon, King Jeroboam and King Ahab all led Israel to become paganised. When these kings tried to solve problems with human methods, they failed. One king's sins built on the previous king's sins.

How God’s Own Nation Became Paganised

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man	
 Babel  Egypt  Canaan God’s restraining hand on the Pagan Kingdom of Man	Election	
		God chose Abraham
		God saved Israel
		God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
		Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
		Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified kingdom ▪ Divided kingdom
	Israel and Judah turned against God: Paganised—unbelievers	Few believers
	 Brought in man’s ideas	
	 Made the king and state all-powerful	
	 Worshipped idols	

Grey shows paganisation

God continued disciplining Israel with wave after wave of cursings (as laid out in the Sinaitic Covenant) to encourage them to repent. But the northern kingdom never repented and never recovered. And there was constant fighting over the throne. The average length of time a northern king reigned was just 12.5 years. Finally, after 200 years and nine different dynasties, God wiped them out completely in 721 BC. We will learn more about this in a later lesson.

Northern Kingdom of Israel: 9 different dynasties								
1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th
1. Jeroboam I	3. Baasha	5. Zimri	6. Omri	10. Jehu	15. Shallum	16. Menahem	18. Pekah	19. Hoshea
2. Nadab	4. Elah		7. Ahab	11. Jehoahaz		17. Pekahiah		
			8. Ahaziah	12. Jehoash				
			9. Jehoram	13. Jeroboam II				
				14. Zechariah				

What happened in the southern kingdom, Judah?

Unlike the north, where sin brought many changes in dynasties, God kept His promise to David. God's covenant to David was secure. There was only one dynasty throughout the duration of the southern kingdom: David's.

And the south had more good kings than the north and was more stable.

The average reign of a king in Judah was about 20 years.

However, while the south was far more stable than the north, they too continued to decline from their original state of worship of Yahweh when David was king.

Eventually, after about 400 years in existence, God also wiped out the southern kingdom in 586 BC.

We will also discuss this more in a later lesson.



Sanctification Lessons from God's Disciplining of Israel

When we look at King David's life and compare it with the kings that came after him, we see they had very different approaches to handling life and problems. God gave David a good evaluation of his life. Most of the other kings received bad evaluations from God. What are some of the lessons we can learn for our own lives as we grow spiritually?

1. Prefer the Word of God over the "word of man".

God's instructions for the kings was that they were to read the Word of God every day of their lives. This was to keep God's good laws fresh in their minds so that it would guide their daily living and decision making.

David kept God's Word close to his heart for most of his life. The Bible did not record Rehoboam ever focusing on the Word of God. In fact, Rehoboam preferred the words of his human friends and advisors over God's Word.

This is the same with our own lives: our sins normally start when we prefer the word of men over the Word of God. Many times, we take this further by preferring our own word versus the Word of God. We choose to be the one in charge, we determine good and evil, right and wrong and we interpret the Bible however we want because it is “me first” and then the Bible. This is how sin normally begins. We would be less likely to fall if we prioritise God’s Word in our lives.

Which do we prefer? What is our ultimate authority?



2. Don't doubt God's promises by taking things into our own hands.

Jeroboam did not trust God's promise to secure his dynasty. He immediately set about with his human schemes to try and secure it for himself. In comparison, David believed God's promise to give him the kingdom after Saul. He trusted God so much that he did not try to kill Saul even though Saul was trying to assassinate him. He left God's promises for God to fulfil in God's own way.

When we read God's promises in the Bible, do we feel a need to “help God out”? For example, when God promised us eternal life if we put our trust in Him, do we truly believe that? Do we acknowledge that God will give it to us because it is His promise and He is always true to His Word?



Many people say they believe that, but they also believe they have to do good works to get or keep eternal life. They are using human thinking and human schemes to “earn” their way into heaven. This does not honour God. It insults Him. It goes against God’s promises. If we do good works, it should be out of love and gratitude to God, not to earn our way to eternal life or keep our place in heaven.

3. Walk by faith by considering the great things God has done for us.

Everyone goes through challenges, problems and suffering in life. King David chose to walk with God through each and every situation. Many of the psalms are his songs as he cried out to Yahweh. The other kings we studied today did not turn to Yahweh at all. This was the advice the prophet Samuel gave to the people in his farewell address:

1 Samuel 12:24

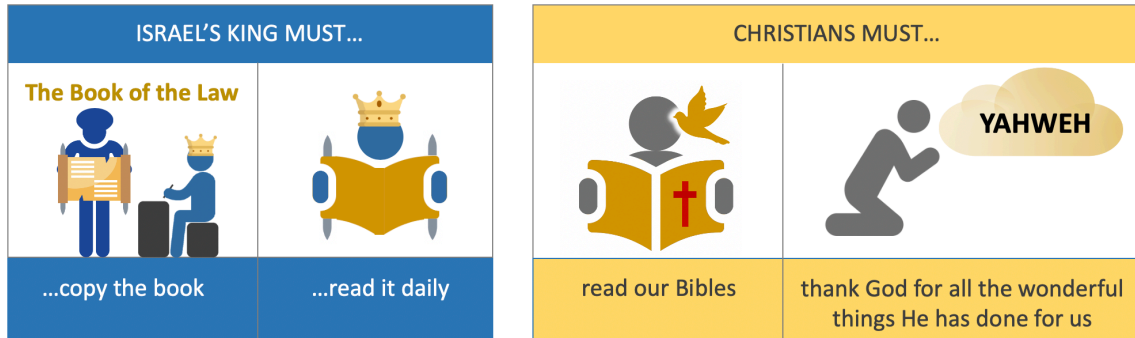
But be sure to fear the LORD and faithfully serve him. Think of all the wonderful things he has done for you.

- **Question:** How are we supposed to fear Yahweh and serve Him faithfully?
- **Answer:** Think of all the wonderful things He has done for us.
- **Question:** And how do we know what wonderful things Yahweh has done for us? Where do we go to find out about all the wonderful things God has done?
- **Answer:** The Bible.

We cannot live by faith in God if we do not spend time finding out and thinking about what great things He has done for us. Our faith must have content.



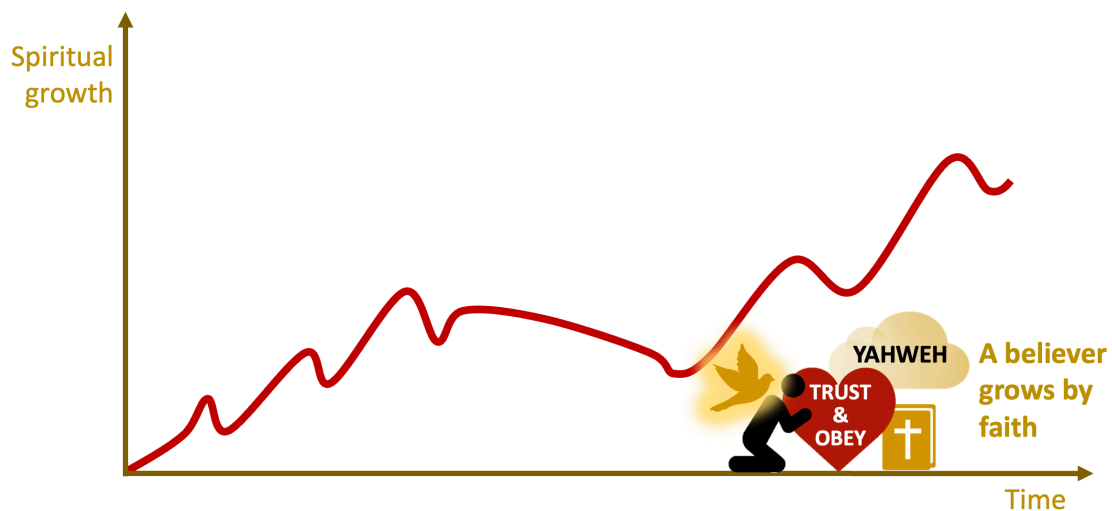
We have to know Yahweh’s history, because God’s history is our own history. Our focus should be the character and person of our God and Saviour. That is how we become more loyal and grateful to the one true God who loved us and saved us.



Interestingly, Samuel did not say, “Think of all the wonderful things you *feel* in your heart.” This is because Samuel does not want us to focus on our subjective feelings that change from day to day. He wants us to look objectively at the facts of history. Knowing what God said and did and how faithful He was in history will grow our faith and our trust in Him. We cannot build faith on feelings.

We have to live the Christian life by faith. We believe that Yahweh is our Creator. He is all-powerful, all-loving and He has a perfect plan for the world and for us. Does this mean that we will know all the details of His plan? Though the Bible reveals much of God’s plan, He has not told us every single last detail.

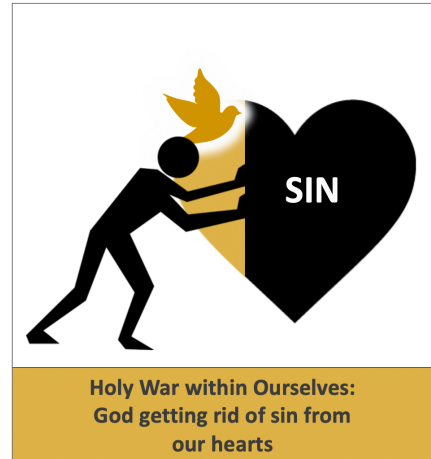
Then how does it help us even if we know that He has a plan but we don’t know the details? We trust His character and His methods. There is ultimately a loving reason why things are happening the way that they are. When we believe that, we will be able to cope with life.



4. Ask God to help us clean out the junk in our lives.

The problem in Israel started with the sins of Solomon. When Jeroboam became king, he did not clear out Solomon's sins, but he added his own. The next king did the same thing. No one dealt decisively with the accumulated sin. They kept it, played with it, grew it, compromised but never got rid of it. Finally the whole kingdom collapsed.

Is there sin in our life that we are hiding and secretly playing with? It will never stay small. It will grow and magnify, just like it did in Israel. We need to ask God to help us clean out our junk, so it would not cause destruction in our lives.



Are we able to “stop sinning” on our own?

When Solomon decided he could solve his own problems, he stopped submitting to God's will. He tried to get security via his international marriages, his standing army and he tried to kill Jeroboam. He became a mad man, sinful and murderous. It is not enough to just say to Solomon, “Stop it.” He would not have been able to do it. Mankind cannot stop sinning on their own. It is like an addiction.

We cannot independently get rid of our sin because our hearts are full of evil. And God will not let us get rid of our sin without Him because we will become proud and say, “I did it, I got rid of sin by my sheer willpower.” God will not allow that because it builds even more pride in us. And pride in man always excludes God. It always elevates mankind to think that we are at the level of God. And a life independent of God always leads to death.

We should instead take King David's example. When he was praying to God after his sin with Bathsheba, this is what he said:

Psalm 51:7–10

- ⁷ Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
now let me rejoice.
- ⁹ Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God.
Renew a loyal spirit within me.

David asked and trusted God to throw out his junk and to create a clean heart in him. We should do the same.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. In our daily lives, how do we know when we are relying on the Word of God or the “words of man” (“words of man” is the advice of others or our own thinking)? What can we do to check ourselves?
2. Rehoboam had two sets of counsellors and he listened to the wrong ones. Who are the counsellors in our lives? Who do we take advice from? How do we know who we should listen to?
3. In an attempt to protect his kingdom, Jeroboam decided to do things his way even though God promised to preserve his dynasty if he would simply be obedient. How do we act to preserve our life? Are we trusting in God and being obedient to His Word? Or are we doing things our own way? How can we examine our lives regularly so that we know?



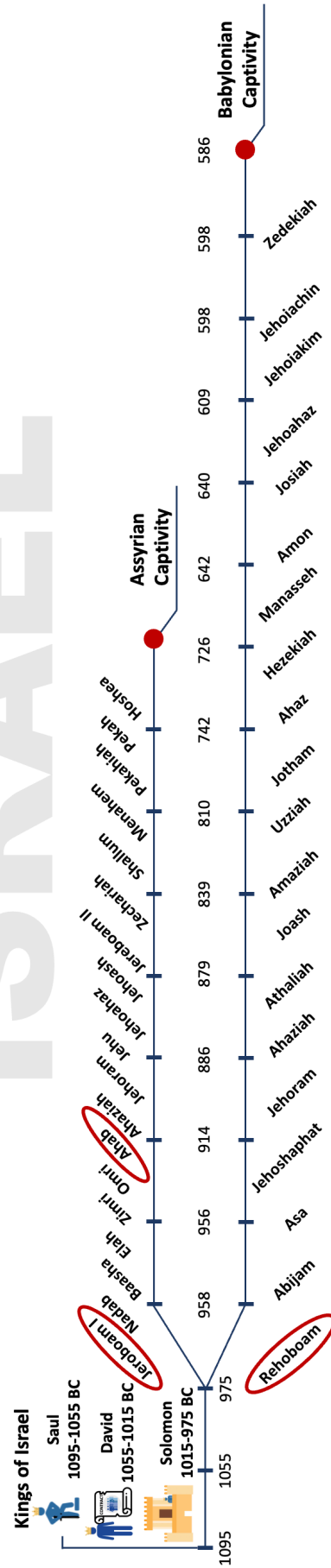
Pre-reading for next lesson: Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah 1, Hosea 4, Micah 6

Endnote

Page 10: The illustration “High Priest Vestments” © 2016 Bojan Teodosijevic. Used by permission.

Kings of Israel and Judah

ISRAEL JUDAH



Timeline is not to scale.

This timeline is based on: Floyd Nolen Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*. Master Books, 2005.