

Key Background To Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah And Habakkuk

In 931 B.C., the nation of Israel divided into two nations:

- the northern nation of Israel comprising of ten of the tribes of Israel. These were the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Asher and Naphtali.
- The southern nation of Judah. This comprises of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Judah was the tribe of Kings David and Solomon. Benjamin was the tribe of King Saul.

1 Kings 11:26-40 records that God divided the nation of Israel in this way because Solomon had led all the twelve tribes of Israel in worshipping wicked pagan gods and goddesses. Read in 1 Kings 11:30-34 what God told the prophet Ahijah to do in relation to this matter: *“Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel’ ‘Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you (but he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), because they have forsaken Me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the people of Ammon, and have not walked in My ways to do what is right in My eyes and keep My statutes and My judgments, as did his father David. However I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes.’”*

The worship of Chemosh and Milcom involved human sacrifice and Ashtoreth orgies and temple prostitution.

The northern nation of Israel

Despite being called by God, King Jeroboam I of Israel compromised with wickedness by setting up a modified contemporary religion which involved worshipping the Lord and two golden calf idols. 1 Kings 12:26-33 records: *“And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.’ Therefore the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not the*

sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.”

In response, God sent a prophet to Bethel to rebuke King Jeroboam and the majority of the people of the northern tribes of Israel for compromising about this new religion (see 1 Kings 13:1-10). God performed two amazing miracles through this prophet which Jeroboam saw and experienced (see 1 Kings 13:3-6). But despite this, Jeroboam did not turn from his evil behaviour but continued to promote and popularise his relevant amended form of the worship of the Lord. 1 Kings 13:33 records: *“After this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests from every class of people for the high places; whoever wished, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places.”*

Then one of Jeroboam’s sons became sick. In response, this compromising hypocrite sent his wife to Ahijah, God’s prophet to see what would happen to the boy (see I Kings 14:2-4). After she arrived at Ahijah’s house at Shloh, Ahijah told her God was going to punish Jeroboam for what he had done. 1 Kings 14:7-11 and 15-16 records: *“Go, tell Jeroboam, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you ruler over My people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you; and yet you have not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only what was right in My eyes; but you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back – therefore behold! I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; and I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field; for the Lord has spoken it”...For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the Lord to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.”*

Here was God’s first warning to the ten northern tribes of Israel about being conquered by the Assyrians and beyond the Euphrates River into exile. But Jeroboam and most of the Israelites chose to ignore this initial warning from God.

All of the following kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were wicked, ungodly compromisers who tried to follow the contemporary customs of the surrounding pagan nations who mixed the worship of many gods and goddesses together. These Israelite kings and most of the people mixed the worship of the Lord with the worship of many other religions. These kings were Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash (Joash), Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea (see 1 Kings Chapter 15 to 2 Kings Chapter 15 and 2 Kings Chapter 17).

During the 800's B.C., God sent the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah and other unnamed prophets to minister to the northern kingdom of Israel which comprised ten of the tribes of Israel (see 1 Kings 17:1-13:21). This occurred during the reigns of Kings Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz and Jehoash. Then during the 700's B.C., God commanded the prophets Jonah, Oded, Amos, Micah and Hosea to minister to the northern kingdom of Israel (see 2 Kings 14:23-25, 2 Chronicles 28:9-11, the Books of Amos, Micah and Hosea). This occurred during the time of the reign of King Jeroboam II to that of King Hosea. Hosea was ruling the northern nation of Israel when the Assyrians conquered them and took them into exile.

So from about 931 B.C. when the northern kingdom of Israel was formed till 722 B.C. when the Assyrians conquered them, all of Israel's kings and most of its people refused to listen to God's prophets and continued to practice a compromising paganised form of worshipping the Lord. This is for just over 200 years in total. 2 Kings 17:5-23 records: *"Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree; and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations had done whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, 'You shall not do this thing.'" Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, namely every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.' Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should do like them. So they left the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. The Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. For the*

children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.”

The southern nation of Judah

Note that 2 Kings 17:19 above record that the southern nation of Judah followed the example set by the northern kingdom of Israel: ***“Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight.”***

Jeremiah 3:6-8 and Ezekiel 23:1-49 also refer to the fact that the nation of Judah copied the philosophies and customs of the people from the kingdom of Israel.

The southern kingdom of Judah experienced some periods of limited revival, reform and repentance under the reigns of Asa (reigned 911-870 B.C. ¹), Jehoshaphat (reigned about 870 or 873-848 B.C. ²), Joash while Jehoiada was high priest (reigned 835-796 B.C. ³), Uzziah (792-740 B.C. ⁴), Hezekiah (715-686 B.C. ⁵) and Josiah (640-609 B.C. ⁶).

Despite these limited periods of spiritual revival, reform and turning to God, the nation of Judah still had many people in it during the period 931 to 586 B.C. who followed compromising mixtures of the worship of the Lord with other pagan religions, philosophies and customs. These backslidden Judeans believed that their form of worshipping God was more *contemporary* and *relevant*.

Even during the reign of godly King Jotham, 2 Chronicles 27:2 records: ***“...But still the people acted corruptly.”***

These are the main prophets who called the nation of Judah to repent and to turn from their sins to God during the mid and late 800's, the 700's, the 600's and early 500's B.C.

1. Elijah in the mid 800's B.C. (see 2 Chronicles 21:12-15).
2. Joel in the late 800's B.C.
3. Isaiah and Micah in the late 800's and early 600's B.C.
4. Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk in the late 600's B.C. and Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the early 500's B.C.

Despite having limited periods of revival, spiritual renewal and reform, the nation of Judah compromised greatly with pagan philosophies, beliefs and customs during the 700's, 600's and early 500's B.C. Things became so bad that in the end, God handed the Judeans into the hands of the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. 2 Chronicles 36:14-21 records: ***“Moreover all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He***

¹ 1 Kings 15:9-24 and 2 Chronicles 14:1-16:14.

² 2 Chronicles 17:1-21.

³ 2 Chronicles 24:1-27.

⁴ 2 Chronicles 26:1-23.

⁵ 2 Chronicles 29:1-32:23.

⁶ 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27.

had consecrated in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His word, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

Relevance to today

What happened to the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah is very similar to what has happened throughout Europe, Britain, the United States and other so-called “Christian” countries over the last few centuries:

1. Some of the supposedly “Christian” countries have been like the northern nation of Israel in that they have never experienced any large-scale national revival and godly reform. Instead they have had a godly small minority of believers mixed in with a large majority of compromising wicked religious hypocrites who in name claim to worship God.
2. Others of these countries like Britain, the United States, Australia New Zealand, Germany and Sweden have experienced revivals and godly reform like the ancient nation of Judah. But despite this, the moral standards and commitment of most of the people of these modern nations to God have declined greatly.

This is why the nominally “Christian” nations of Europe, Britain, the U.S., Australia New Zealand and so on may be heading towards a period of God’s judgment.

The recent rise in terrorism may be one of God’s first warnings. This is because note how the following verses showed God raised up adversaries or terrorists against the backsliding Israelites and Judeans:

1. 1 Kings 11:14 and 23-25 records: *“Now the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was a descendant of the king in Edom...And God raised up another adversary against him, Rezon the son of Eliadah, who had fled from his lord, Hadadezer king of Zobah. So he gathered men to him and became captain over a band of raiders, when David killed those of Zobah. And they went to Damascus and dwelt there, and reigned in Damascus. He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon (besides the trouble that Hadad caused); and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.”*

2. 1 Chronicles 5:25-26 states: *“And they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers, and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh into captivity. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan to this day.”*
3. 2 Chronicles 21:12-19 records: *“And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says the Lord God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father’s household, who were better than yourself, behold, the Lord will strike your people with a serious affliction – your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you will become very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day. Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who were near the Ethiopians. And they came up into Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions that were found in the kings house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. After all this the Lord struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness; so he died in severe pain. And his people made no burning for him like the burning for his fathers.”*