



Understanding Israel -

# the Kingdom Splits

by Tim Kelley

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There are at least 203 times the phrase “God of Israel” is used in the Bible – practically all of them in the Old Testament. Yet there’s not a single instance of the term “God of the Gentiles” anywhere in the Bible. Never-the-less, most Christians consider themselves to be Gentiles, and very few actually know who the Israelites are. Doesn’t it seem strange that most Christians can define a Gentile, but cannot define an Israelite? It’s my hope that by the end of this series of studies, we have a really good handle on who is Israel.

To bring us up to speed, we’ve seen that Israel is a nation of people formed because of a promise YHVH made to Abraham. That promise included a blessing and a birthright. The blessing has been commonly understood to be the line of rulers beginning with King David and culminating in Messiah Yeshua while the birthright is the tremendous number of offspring that would come through the loins of Abraham, especially the descendants of Joseph. We’ve also seen that there’s been a partial fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham in the persons of King David and King Solomon when they reigned over a united Israel and brought to this tiny nation a 70 – 80 year period of greatness that some believe has never been matched. With that background, we’ll continue our study into Israel, concentrating on the split of the kingdom and the purpose of the split. As we continue in this study we will begin to understand who Israel is today.

Because of the way we were created, some people, or peoples, can do some things better than other people or peoples. For instance, the German people are known to be very good engineers and designers, especially when it comes to mechanical things – cars, tanks, airplanes, etc... while on the other hand, their neighbors, the French, are quite laid back and excel in the arts and horticulture. This is, of course, a broad generalization, but it serves to show that various cultures have their own strengths and weaknesses. Usually, a person with certain strengths, when matched to another with different strengths, can become a union that will work together and produce much. This is the general design for marriage between a man and a woman.

YHVH, of course, is the Master Designer, and He gave the son’s of Jacob certain characteristics that would cause them to play out their various roles in His Master Plan. When the various traits of the tribes are pulling together, as in the case of David’s and Solomon’s Kingdom, great things were accomplished with the result being that other nations were drawn to Israel and her God. But what if they’re split apart? What if YHVH decided to take a united kingdom, the greatest, most industrious, and most Holy people on the face of the earth, make two separate nations from them, and then send them off in different directions? How could His purpose then be fulfilled? That is the Mystery of the Kingdom. You might even call it *the Mystery of the Gospel*. With what we’ve learned so far, we’re going to begin to see and understand that Great Mystery.

The mystery portion of Israel’s history began shortly after the death of King Solomon, and will end near the end of the Messianic Kingdom which is yet to come. Toward the end of Solomon’s reign he began to take on more and more foreign wives and worship their gods as if they were the God of Abraham. Remember, this is the man who had been given more wisdom than any man up to his day . . . and

whose wisdom has only been surpassed by Yeshua himself. Yet, he seemed to forget that his and his descendants hold on the throne over all Israel was dependant on obedience to the God of Israel. At the dedication of the Temple, just seven years after David died, Solomon recalled what his father had said -

**ESV 1 Kings 8:25** Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.'

Solomon did not walk as his father David had, and as a result lost the Kingship over all Israel, for himself and his descendants. This is what YHVH told him –

**ESV 1 Kings 11:11-13** "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. <sup>12</sup> Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup> However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen."

In addition, YHVH began to bring adversaries up against Solomon, one of them being Jeroboam the Ephraimite. Toward the end of his life Solomon appointed Jeroboam, one of his leading officers, as the officer over the forced labor. Now this was not just another group of Gentile slaves he was put over. He was put over the forced labor of the House of Joseph. This act planted the seeds of a rebellion – a rebellion inspired by YHVH. Here's the story -

**NKJ 1 Kings 11:26-28** Then Solomon's servant, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite from Zereda, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also rebelled against the king. <sup>27</sup> And this is what caused him to rebel against the king: Solomon had built the Millo and repaired the damages to the City of David his father. <sup>28</sup> The man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor; and Solomon, seeing that the young man was industrious, made him the officer over all the labor force<sup>1</sup> of the house of Joseph.

What's going on here is not too clear, but it appears that God was lowering Israel's hedge of protection during Solomon's latter years. Other nations were beginning to challenge Solomon's kingdom, and this required him to secure his defenses by rebuilding walls and a fortress around the City of David, the location of his palace. `Just speculating, but I would believe that Solomon was probably a little low on cash by this time in his life, and thus was not able to hire men to do the work of rebuilding the walls. Therefore, Solomon drafted Hebrew slaves from the House of Joseph (Ephraimites) and, probably against his will, put Jeroboam over them. Not only was this prohibited by the Torah<sup>2</sup>, it probably infuriated

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word for labor force is *cebel* {say-bel} ( סבל ) and means burden. This word is only used two other times, one of them being the "burdens of the Egyptians (Psalm 81:6).

<sup>2</sup> **NKJ** Leviticus 25:39 ' And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.

Jeroboam seeing his own brothers being treated like slaves and Solomon primarily looking out for himself. Thus when the prophet Ahijah met him on the road and revealed YHVH's plans to him, it was poetic justice.

We know the story . . . Ahijah rent his NEW garment<sup>3</sup> into twelve pieces and gave ten pieces to Jeroboam, thus showing him that YHVH was making Jeroboam King over Israel and Solomon's son, Rehoboam would be King over Judah and Levi. God offered to establish in Jeroboam a secure line of successors just as He had done for David<sup>4</sup>. This, of course, would require obedience to God's ways, and we know that did not happen.

After Solomon died, Rehoboam, heir to the throne, traveled to Shechem where he was planning on being anointed King over all Israel, just as his father was. Apparently Solomon had not passed on the news to Rehoboam that God had given Israel away – Rehoboam would only rein over two tribes. Whatever the case, Rehoboam was planning on all Israel serving him just as they had done his father, and he was probably taken back by what he faced – Israel was not just going to submit to Rehoboam without conditions.

Though Israel's willingness to remain part of the kingdom was contrary to God's plan, the story shows that Israel did not prompt the division of the kingdom. The people of Israel, the northern tribes, offered to serve Rehoboam just as they had his father if Rehoboam would lighten their burden, but instead of making it lighter, in his arrogance Rehoboam said he would make their yoke heavier, thus greatly oppressing the northern tribes. It appears YHVH had hardened Rehoboam's heart. The scripture says -

**ESV 1 Kings 12:15** So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

So Israel basically told Rehoboam to go home. They were no longer going to honor the descendants of David as King. Soon thereafter, Rehoboam assembled an army of 180,000 men to attack Israel in an attempt to bring them back under his rule, but YHVH sent word to him not to do so saying –

**ESV 1 Kings 12:24** "You shall not go up or fight against your relatives the people of Israel. Every man return to his home, for this thing is from Me."

So now Israel is divided again. Out of fear that Israel would return to Judah, Jeroboam set up a religious system much like the one given to Israel at Mount Sinai. The problem, of course, is that it was not the system YHVH had set up. It was a counterfeit designed to make the people think they were worshipping the god of their fathers. It had priests, sacrifices, altars, and festivals – just like they had been given before . . . except they were different.

Let's take a moment to notice what Jeroboam did. Doing so will give us some insight into indentifying the modern-day northern tribes. First off, he set up golden calves in two different cities within the northern tribes and called them the "gods which brought you up from the land of Egypt." He also made priests from any of the tribes, thus rejecting the priesthood of Aaron. He then moved the fall festival to

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<sup>3</sup> YHVH was doing a new thing. By dividing the kingdom, he was beginning the process by which all mankind would eventually serve YHVH

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 11:38

the eighth month instead of the seventh. All this was designed to keep the people from wanting to associate with the proper worship that had been centered in Jerusalem.

In the same way, Rehoboam continued in his father's later-year footsteps, building alters and idols to other gods throughout the land of Judah. He even introduced temple prostitutes into the religious system<sup>5</sup>, and possibly into the Temple as well.

Thus Israel began a trajectory towards failure and captivity, just as had been prophesied 400 years earlier by Moses. In many vain attempts to rescue them from themselves, YHVH sent prophets to both the northern and southern tribes.

At this point I want to talk about a key word used in prophecy that will help us to understand who various prophecies are being directed to. The last time we talked about the terms "House of Israel" and "House of Judah" and how these terms referred to either the northern tribes, the ones who became known as the *Lost Ten Tribes*, or they applied to Judah, the southern tribes. Now I want to introduce another term – *Ephraim*.

Ephraim was the second-born son of Joseph by his Egyptian wife. Just before Joseph's father, Jacob, died, Jacob blessed Joseph's sons raising them to the status equal tribes. We know very little about Ephraim other than the prophecy that his children would become a "fullness of the Gentiles". This alone would cause us to be interested in what became of him. We do know this – his descendants become one of the larger tribes in Israel and some of Israel's most prominent leaders descended from him. Joshua, Moses' assistant, was an Ephraimite, just as was Samuel the prophet. After the death of Solomon, Jeroboam, another Ephraimite became king over the northern 10 tribes.

What's most important to understand about Ephraim is that scripture uses the term *Ephraim* to refer to the northern tribes as a whole. Just as Judah refers to the southern tribes - Judah, Levi, and Benjamin – the term Ephraim is synonymous with the terms House of Joseph as well as the term Israel, especially when we find the terms *Ephraim and Judah* in the same passage or the same story. For example, in Isaiah 7 we find Ephraim conspiring with Syria to attack Judah. This passage, a prophecy for Judah, which includes the prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah, clearly shows Ephraim opposed to Judah.

**ESV Isaiah 7:17** The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah - the king of Assyria."

Later in Isaiah, he prophecies of the millennial kingdom, a time when YHWH will again reach out to gather Israel from all the places they've been scattered. This time he shows that the contention between Ephraim and Judah will cease, just as it did temporarily during the reign of King David.

**ESV Isaiah 11:10-13** <sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples- of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. <sup>11</sup> In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people. . . <sup>12</sup> He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. <sup>13</sup> The jealousy of Ephraim

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 14:24 – see Strong's 6945 (  $\Psi\tau\eta$  ) qadesh – a male temple prostitute

shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.

One final passage helps illustrate the Yah's concern for Ephraim, the people of the northern tribes. This end-time prophecy speaks of the time when Ephraim repents and turns back to the ways of the God of Abraham –

**ESV Jeremiah 31:8-9** <sup>8</sup> Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. <sup>9</sup> With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Here, God speaks of Ephraim as His firstborn. This is consistent with scripture because we know that Joseph gained firstborn status because of Reuben's sin with Jacob's concubine, and we also know that Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph's sons, stand in for Joseph among the tribes of Israel. Because Ephraim was elevated above his brother, he holds the place and the responsibility of the firstborn.

The term Ephraim appears in many other passages in the Tanakh, but the place it's found the most is in the book of Hosea. Hosea, more than any other prophet, directs his warnings almost exclusively to Ephraim. Because Hosea's prophecies are key to understanding the mystery of the gospel, we'll save discussion of this book till next time.

Understanding that in scripture and in end-time prophecy Ephraim represents the northern tribes provides us with another key to unlocking some of the miss-understood passages of Paul in the New Testament.