

Lesson 1: Kingdom of Israel Divided

Arrogance, injustice, and lust for power cause division.



🎯 Study at a Glance: The 5 W's

- **WHO?** King Solomon (whose divided heart started the fracture), his son Rehoboam (whose pride widened it), Jeroboam son of Nebat (who led the breakaway), the ten northern tribes of Israel, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the prophet Shemaiah — and over all of it, the LORD God of Israel, who is both Judge and Sovereign.
- **WHAT?** The tearing apart of the united kingdom of Israel into two rival nations: the Northern Kingdom (Israel, ten tribes, under Jeroboam) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah, under Rehoboam).
- **WHEN?** Right after Solomon's forty-year reign, around 931 B.C., at the very beginning of Rehoboam's rule — a single coronation that became a catastrophe.
- **WHERE?** Shechem, where Rehoboam went to be crowned and where the nation split; Jerusalem, the capital of Judah; and Egypt, where Jeroboam had taken refuge under Pharaoh until Solomon's death.
- **WHY?** Because Solomon's heart was turned from God through idolatrous marriages, because Rehoboam chose harsh power over humble service, and because God — who had forewarned the disobedience — judged it, keeping His word even as He kept a remnant of grace.

Introduction

Imagine a beautiful home strong, well-built, the envy of the neighborhood that develops one small, hidden crack in the foundation. Nobody sees it at first. The walls still stand, the rooms still shine. But inside the structure, something has shifted. Over time that one crack becomes a fault line, and one day the whole house splits in two. The kingdom of Israel was that house. Under Solomon it reached its golden age, wealth, wisdom, worship, and world reputation. But underneath, a crack was forming in the foundation of Solomon's heart. By the time his son Rehoboam sat on the throne, the fault line ran through the whole nation, and the kingdom tore apart. This lesson follows that crack from the heart of one king to the heartbreak of a nation and asks the question none of us can escape: what is dividing my own heart, my home, and my church?

Key Terms — The Word Search Technique

Before we open the text, let's learn a simple tool for studying any passage: a "word search" (word study). Here is the method in its simplest form, using the word "clave" in 1 Kings 11:2 as our example.

- 1. Select the word.** Pick a word in the verse that seems important. Here: "Solomon clave unto these in love" (1 Kings 11:2). What does "clave" mean?
- 2. Find the original word.** Use a concordance or Bible app to find the Hebrew (or Greek) word and its reference number. "clave" = the Hebrew *dābaq* (Strong's H1692), meaning to cling, cleave, stick close.
- 3. Read the immediate context.** What is happening here? Solomon "clung" in love to the very foreign women God had warned would turn his heart (v. 2). He clung to the wrong thing.
- 4. Trace the word through Scripture.** See how God uses the same word elsewhere. *Dābaq* is used for a husband cleaving to his wife (Gen 2:24), for Ruth cleaving to Naomi (Ruth 1:14), and — most beautifully — for the soul cleaving to God: "my soul followeth hard after [cleaves to] thee" (Ps 63:8).
- 5. Compare and apply.** Same word, different clinging. Clinging is God's design for marriage, for loyalty, for devotion to Him. Solomon took that holy instinct and clung to what God had forbidden — and it broke his heart and his nation. What am I clinging to?

That is the whole method: Select → Find the original → Read the context → Trace it through Scripture → Apply. We will use this tool in each section.

Transition into Section 1: Every collapse has a starting point, and Israel's did not begin with Rehoboam. It began one compromise at a time in Solomon's heart — a heart that started whole but ended divided. In Section 1 we see how a great king's divided affections became God's reason for dividing the kingdom

Section 1: Why the Kingdom Was Divided

1 Kings 11:1–13

Word Search for This Section — "perfect" (*shālēm*, H8003)

In verse 4 we read that Solomon's "heart was not perfect with the Lord his God." The Hebrew word is *shālēm* — whole, complete, undivided, at peace. God had asked for a whole heart; Solomon gave Him a fractured one. The same word appears when Solomon himself prayed that the people's hearts might be "perfect" toward God (1 Kings 8:61), and in the report of later kings whose hearts were or were not "perfect" with the Lord (1 Kings 15:3, 14). The lesson is sobering: what we cling to (*dābaq*) shapes whether our heart is whole (*shālēm*) before God. A heart cannot be perfect toward the Lord while it is clinging to His rivals.

Discussion Questions

1. *(Text/Exegesis)* In 1 Kings 11:2, 4, and 9 the same phrase keeps recurring: Solomon's heart was "turned" away. What was the specific thing that turned his heart, and why do you think God names the foreign women rather than simply saying "Solomon sinned"?
2. *(Application)* God appeared to Solomon twice and still his heart drifted (vv. 9–10). If spiritual experiences don't guarantee faithfulness, what does? Where in your life have you seen a "twice-blessed" heart slowly turn?

Transition to Section 2: Solomon's divided heart planted the seed; his son Rehoboam's pride watered it until the kingdom split. In Section 2 the spotlight moves to a young king at a crossroads — given the counsel that could have saved the kingdom, and choosing instead the path that lost it.

Section 2: King Rehoboam's Folly

1 Kings 11:42–12:14

Word Search for This Section — "chastise" (yāsar, H3256)

In verse 11 Rehoboam threatens, "my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." The Hebrew word *yāsar* means to discipline, correct, train, instruct — the same root behind the word for "instruction/discipline." God Himself uses it: "as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee" (Deut 8:5); "if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him" (2 Sam 7:14); "blessed is the man whom thou chastenest" (Ps 94:12); and wisdom's call to "chasten thy son" (Prov 19:18; 29:17). Rehoboam took a word meant for loving correction and turned it into cruelty. Discipline in God's hand heals; in the hand of arrogance it wounds. (New Testament echo: Heb 12:5–6 and Rev 3:19 pick up the same truth — "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.")

Discussion Questions

1. *(Text/Exegesis)* Rehoboam had two sets of counselors — the old men (v. 7) and the young men (v. 10). What did each counsel, and what does it tell us about the kind of advice Rehoboam was actually looking for?

2. *(Reflection)* The old men’s counsel was, “be a servant... and speak good words to them” (v. 7). How does this overturn the world’s (and the church’s) view of leadership? Where have you seen power used as a club instead of a towel?

Transition to Section 3: *Rehoboam’s folly set the match; the people’s response lit the fire. In Section 3 the kingdom officially fractures, a man is stoned, an army is gathered, and a prophet speaks the one word that stops a civil war. Watch here for the word that holds the whole crisis together — return.*

Section 3: King Rehoboam’s Loss

1 Kings 12:16–24

Word Search for This Section — “return” (shuv, H7725)

Verse 24 is the pivot: God sends the prophet Shemaiah to tell Rehoboam and Judah, “return every man to his house: for this thing is from me.” The Hebrew word *shuv* means to turn back, return, turn — and it is one of Scripture’s richest words for repentance and restoration. God uses it to call His people back: “return unto the LORD thy God” (Deut 30:2); “turn ye even to me” (Joel 2:12); “return, O backsliding children” (Jer 3:12; Hos 14:1–2); and “if my people... turn from their wicked ways” (2 Chron 7:14). Here God uses it to stop a war: do not fight your brethren — return home, because this division is My doing. Even in judgment, God is still calling people back. (New Testament picture: the prodigal “came to himself” and returned home — Luke 15.)

Discussion Questions

1. *(Text/Exegesis)* In verse 15 we are told the people “hearkened not” and that this “was from the LORD, that he might perform his word.” How do you hold together human responsibility (Rehoboam’s arrogance, the people’s rebellion) with God’s sovereignty (it was “from the LORD”)?

2. *(Application)* God told a king with 180,000 soldiers to turn around and go home because the division was His doing (vv. 22–24). When has God told you to lay down a fight you were sure you were right to win — and what did obedience cost you?

Closing: Bringing It All Together

The kingdom of Israel did not fall in a day. It fell the way every fall happens — one divided heart at a time. Solomon's heart was not perfect (shālēm) toward God because it was clinging (dābaq) to the wrong loves. Rehoboam took the discipline (yāsar) God designed for love and wielded it as a weapon. And only when a prophet said one word — return (shuv) — did the bloodshed stop. The whole tragedy is captured in four words: a heart that would not cling to God, a leader who would not serve, a people who would not turn — and a God who, even in judgment, kept calling them home.

So as you leave this class, do not leave the question behind. Ask yourself:

- What have I been clinging to that is slowly turning my heart from God?
- Is my heart whole — shālēm — toward Him, or is it divided among rivals?
- In my home, my ministry, my relationships — am I leading like Rehoboam with a whip, or like Christ with a towel?
- Is there a fight God is telling me to lay down and return from today?

One Word to take home: *return*. The same God who said to a warring king, “return every man to his house,” is saying to you — come back home to Me. Whatever has divided your heart, your home, or your worship, the Father is still standing with His arms open, calling His people back. Don't let the crack become a fault line. Bring the whole heart home.