

#### WEEK 4: GOD'S NATION SPLINTERED BY SIN

Route for this week:

1. Getting Your Bearings: Kingdoms of Israel and Judah
2. Northern Tribes Revolt (1 Kings 12:1-33)
3. Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 16:29-17:24)
4. Jonah Runs from God (Jonah 1:1-2:10)
5. Death of a Nation (2 Kings 17:1-23)
6. Joash Repairs the Temple (2 Chronicles 24:1-27)
7. Branch from David's Line (Isaiah 11:1-16)

#### SUMMARY

The seeds of Israel's idolatry finally take root, and as a result God's judgment falls on the nation in the form of a revolt and division of the kingdom into two rival nations: Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. God had promised David that his descendants would reign over God's people forever, and that promise still stands through the kings of Judah, who come from David's family and who sometimes lead the people back to faithfulness to God in his Temple. But the nation of Israel builds its own shrines and ignores God's Temple; their kings are uninterested in serving the God of Abraham. God sends many prophets to call both nations back to himself, but most people in both Israel and Judah largely ignore and even persecute them. Sadly, Israel is destroyed and the people are dispersed throughout the world by the mighty Assyrians. Judah makes some attempts at reform, but their ongoing wickedness and idolatry make their exile in judgment inevitable. Despite God's judgment, his promises remain inviolable. He promises that a Branch will grow from David's line and will bring God's people home—a Messiah who gives God's people hope.

#### DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Almost immediately upon breaking away from Judah, the king of the northern tribes of Israel builds two golden calves and sets up shrines for his people to worship instead of going to the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25-33). This sin went on to plague the northern kingdom throughout its entire history (2 Kings 17:5-23). Why do you think Jeroboam did this to begin with? How did having such a religious heritage affect later generations of the nation of Israel?

2. God sent many prophets to his people in order to call them back to himself. Elijah, for one, had a powerful ministry that included dramatic miracles (e.g., 1 Kings 17:8-24; 18:20-39) but left the prophet drained and discouraged (1 Kings 19:1-10). Why didn't Elijah's miracles and message from God have a lasting impact on the people? What do you think about Elijah's response, and God's response to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-18)?

3. Josiah was one of the few kings of Judah to lead reforms to bring God's people back to the Lord. When a lost copy of the Law was discovered (2 Chronicles 34:14-18), Josiah consulted the prophets (34:19-28) and then acted on their advice, reading the Law to the people, removing all the idols from the land, and restoring proper worship (34:29-35:19). How does Josiah's response provide hope for God's people? Why do you think this restoration wasn't enough to bring Judah back to God permanently?

4. The prophet Isaiah had a long ministry with God's people. He saw some of the reforms in Judah, and he saw many kings and people who ignored God and worshipped idols. But God gave Isaiah a vision of a future hope that was able to sustain the faithful within God's people (a "remnant") through even the darkest times. How do you think his visions of future hope (e.g., Isaiah 40:1-11; 44; 21-28; 49:8-21; 55:1-13) were received by those suffering in the lead-up to the exile? How can they give you hope today?

#### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. God's people were splintered into rival nations because of idolatry, but the rivalry was often intense because of simple jealousies between these neighboring people. God wanted his people to be unified as one people, serving him together. Do you see rivalries or poor relationships between Christians today due to denominational, racial, or cultural differences? How can we overcome those differences to be a unified Church today?
2. Often when we are dealing with ongoing sin in our lives, God will send people or circumstances that are meant to show us where we are wrong and how to return to godly living. How can you pay closer attention for these "prophets," and ensure that you listen to what God is saying through them?



