

1 Kings 12:1-33

Rehoboam, Jeroboam and a Kingdom Divided

Solomon had died, and out of all his 1,000 wives and concubines, only one son is recorded - Rehoboam (**1 Chronicles 3:10**).

Jeroboam had fled to Egypt when Solomon tried to hunt him down. Now he was called back by the elders of Israel to participate in the choice of a new king. Rehoboam was assumed to be the heir, and the previous chapter says he "reigned in his stead."

But the royal succession was always a dangerous time. Solomon himself had to be anointed through the intervention of Bathsheba and Nathan before Adonijah could claim the throne (**1 Kings 1**)

1 Kings 12:1 - "And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king."

Since it is not recorded that Solomon had formally designated Rehoboam as his successor, the situation was fluid. Rehoboam had to travel to Shechem, a central location - instead of having the elders of the tribes gather in Jerusalem, his own territory.

"all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king" - The understanding was that, just as the elders of the tribes had offered the kingship to David in Hebron, now they would offer it to Rehoboam. He was in effect submitted to their decision.

But Jeroboam had returned and was part of the negotiating team of elders from the 10 northern tribes.

The cause of Jeroboam's resistance to Solomon reappears in their discussion.

1 Kings 12:4 - "Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee."

They weren't asking to be freed from service, just that the burden of taxation and labor would be made lighter.

1 Kings 12:9-10 - "And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever."

This was wise counsel for any leader. It is reflected in Jesus, who "took upon him the form of a servant" (**Philippians 2:7**):

- **Mark 9:35** - "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."

- **Mark 10:45** - "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."

Jesus, who was rightful king of Israel and King of Kings of all, was first a servant of all.

Rehoboam rejected this advice. It offended his pride.

1 Kings 12:8 - "But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter?"

Notice that he wasn't comparing or weighing the merits of their opinion against the previous one. He had already rejected it.

1 Kings 12:10-11 - "And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

The young men saw this as a classic, chauvinistic pissing contest - who was the more macho?

The path of compromise, consensus, cooperation or dialogue was rejected. It would make Rehoboam look weak and not in control. It became a game of political chicken. Who would back down?

Wisdom in judgment - which had been Solomon's original claim to fame - was now out the window.

1 Kings 12:15 - "Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat."

We are reminded here that the stubbornness of Rehoboam was God's doing as much as his own pride. Like with Pharaoh, God was hardening his heart to carry out His plan.

Divorce into Two Kingdoms

The assembly dissolved:

1 Kings 12:16 - "So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the

people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents."

When Rehoboam tried to exert his authority by sending out his minister of tribute and forced labor, the people stoned him to death. Rehoboam had to flee back to Jerusalem.

1 Kings 12:19-20 - "So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only."

Rehoboam immediately assembled troops to attack and put down the rebellion, but was warned by a prophet - Shemala, the man of God:

1 Kings 12:24 - "Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD."

So far, Rehoboam seems like the bad guy in this story.

But Jeroboam, trying to consolidate his rule, realized that Jerusalem and the Temple were crucial to all the people's worship. Sin offerings, trespass offerings, burnt offerings, peace offerings all happened there. All males were required to gather in Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage feasts.

Rashi explains that during Temple gatherings Rehoboam would be seated, which was the prerogative of the Davidic king, while Jeroboam would have to remain standing. And on the Jubilee year, the king would read from the Torah, while Jeroboam would merely listen "like the rest of the people and I will, therefore, find myself degraded."

1 Kings 12:27 - "If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah."

Two Golden Calves

So Jeroboam himself confers with his advisors, and gets terrible counsel:

1 Kings 12:28-29 - "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan."

This was the same phrase used by Aaron when he made the golden calf. Bethel meant

"house of God" and already a revered site.

Dan had been a place of worship because of the teraphim of Micah there (see **Judges 17-18**). One Jewish tradition says Micah was responsible for the original golden calf. Moses had retrieved Joseph's coffin from the Nile by throwing a splinter with the words "come up ox" (comparing Joseph to an ox) into the river in the wilderness, and Micah retrieved the splinter after this, and threw it into the fire which Aaron had cast the gold into, causing a golden calf to come out. (Tanḥuma, Yelammedenu 1,100) Dan was the former Laish, and later the site of temples to Pan in what became Caesarea Phillipi, referred to as the "gates of hell" (**Matthew 16:13-18**).

The worship based in two places made it more "convenient" for the people, whereas the northern tribes usually had a long journey to go to Jerusalem.

Besides creating an alternative to the worship center of the Temple, he built a "house of high places" and altars and created a class of pseudo-Levites to be priests.

1 Kings 12:31 - "And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi."

Not only that, but Jeroboam established a new feast, meant to mimic the feast of Tabernacles, coming a month after that feast's normal time.

This was all done to discourage people from journeying to Jerusalem to continue religious observances at the Temple

Will Worship

Man's ideas of how to worship God opposed to God's ideas

The church at Colossae was troubled by a heretical movement that was a mixture of Judaism, asceticism, and proto-Gnosticism.

Colossians 2:23 - "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility [falsely motivated], and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh"

"will-worship" = *ethelothreskeia* - from ethelo, "to will," and *threskeia*, which has to do with "religious worship."

To "will" in this context meant it was "self-chosen," self-contrived, self-created and arbitrary. A do-it-yourself religion.

John Calvin called this worship one "which men choose for themselves at their own option, without authority from God"

True service to God is in harmony with the will of God, "good and acceptable and perfect" (**Romans 12:1-2**)

To the heretics at Colossae their ideas probably seemed right, it seemed this was what God would want.

In the same way, Jeroboam and the people of the 10 tribes maybe felt that making these idols would give Yahweh more reality, serve as a tactile touchpoint for people's faith. You could come up with all kinds of excuses and reasonings.

But there was the glaring opposition to idols commanded by God in the Torah. and in Psalms like **Psalms 115**.

Where have we seen this before? It is reminiscent of those days of Israel's judges when every man did what was right "in his own eyes" (**Judges 17:6**)

- **John 4:24** - "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Bitter Fruit

Jeroboam and his followers were rejecting the truth that had been presented to them.

So the outcome of Solomon's decline of faith in his old age and the proliferation of idolatry among his wives was a long-lasting national disaster. The kingdom split in two. Idolatry was officially established as the religion of 10 of the 12 tribes.

And both kingdoms were ruled by foolish and prideful men who rejected wisdom. For the next two centuries, even the occasional "good" kings would neglect to destroy all the high places where idolatry took place.

Finally God would first direct Assyria to invade and take the 10 northern tribes into captivity, where they disappeared from history. Later Babylon would destroy the Temple and Jerusalem and carry the remaining people into exile.

But throughout this time, God would raise up prophets to continually try to call the people back to repentance and faith.

The books of the prophets have to be understood within the context of this tension between the societal idolatry, the prophetic call to repent, and the hope of the coming Messiah.

That's where we're going next in our Bible studies for the coming year.