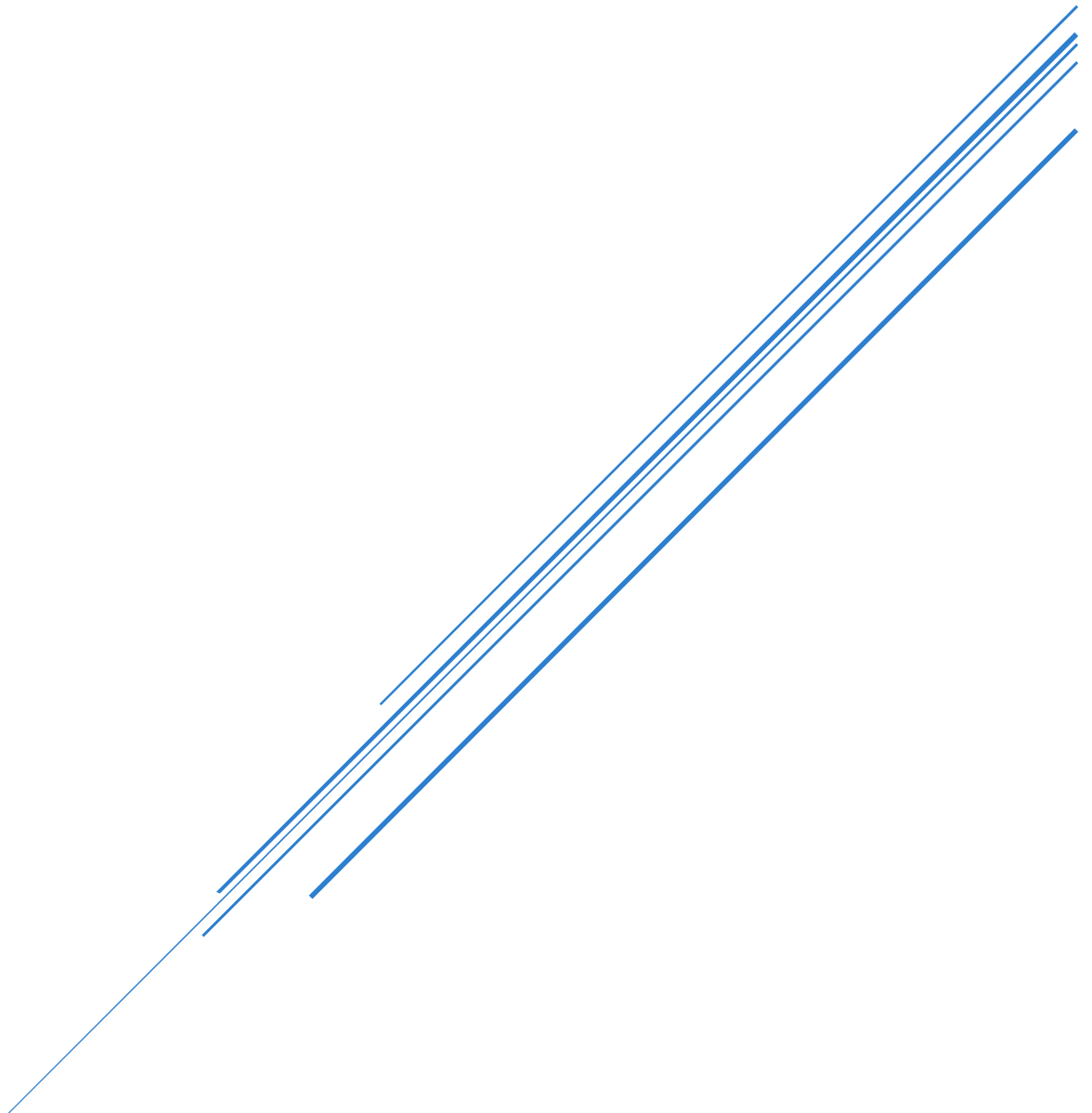


THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding God's story, Jesus' importance, and our place in God's kingdom plan



Lesson 107- The Kingdom of Israel Divides

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Israel Divides

1 Kings 12

Rehoboam's Foolish Decision

1 Kings 12:1-15

Jeroboam and Israel assembled before Rehoboam asking if he would lighten the labor load on them. Their complaint was that Solomon was harsh on them, and they request Rehoboam be kinder than Solomon. Rehoboam deliberates on the matter for three days. He first asks the wise elders of Israel, who advise him to lighten the workload. If he did so, Israel would serve him loyally forever. However, Rehoboam listened to his personal friends instead. They advised the king to be even harsher than Solomon.

After three days, Jeroboam and Israel assembled before Rehoboam for his response. He responded “harshly” (v. 13). He ignored the wise advice of the elders. and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!” (v.14).

Verse 15 is important. So the king did not listen to the people; because it was a turn of events from the Lord, in order to establish His word which the Lord spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. This verse demonstrates God's Providence at work, like we have seen many times before.

How do you think God ensures His will is carried out, while at the same time, Rehoboam seems to have made a free-will choice?

Israel Rebels against Rehoboam

1 Kings 12:16-19

The people of Israel rebel against Rehoboam by claiming they have no share with David any longer. They return to their own homes throughout Israel saying, “Now look after your own house, David!” By this they mean they no longer follow the reign of David's royal sons. To use our terminology, this declaration was a type of Declaration of Independence. These Israelites had declared their formal break from the united government of Israel, led by the kings out of Judah.

“But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them” (v.17). From this point on in the Old Testament, the terms *Israel* and *Judah* become somewhat technical terms. No longer does the word *Israel* always refer to the entire people of Israel. Rather, the term *Israel* will refer to the 10 tribes (all except Judah and Benjamin), while the term *Judah* will refer to the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This is how the kingdom divides.

In verse 17, it seems the author means that people from the 10 Northern tribes were living in some of the cities throughout Judah’s territory. Rehoboam attempted to exert his rule over them, despite their verbal declaration of independence. Rehoboam sent a task master, Adoram, to force them into labor. However, they rebelled and killed Adoram. This forced Rehoboam to escape Jerusalem since he feared the revolt would come to his palace as well.

The author of 1 Kings gives us this formal summary statement on what happened. “So Israel has broken with the house of David to this day” (v.19). The turn of events thus far is that the 10 Northern tribes declared their intent to no longer follow Rehoboam. Rehoboam attempted to forcibly rule over those Israelites who remained in Judah. Those Israelites in Judah killed an official of Rehoboam’s government, thus signaling their violent break from Judah’s rule.

Israel Declares Jeroboam King

1 Kings 12:20-24

Israel has formally broken away from Judah’s government. Now they need to form their own government. Per the prophecy of God, Jeroboam is declared king by the 10 Northern tribes. In verse 21, Rehoboam rallies an army from Judah and Benjamin of 180,000 chosen warriors. Civil war has been declared and ready to start. However, God intervenes.

But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, “Tell Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and the rest of the people, saying, ‘This is what the Lord says: “You shall not go up nor fight against your relatives the sons of Israel; return, every man to his house, for this thing has come from Me.” ’ ” So they listened to the word of the Lord, and returned to go their way in accordance with the word of the Lord. (vv. 22-24)

What did God mean by, “This thing has come from Me?”

This marks a major turning point in the Bible’s storyline. The united kingdom of Israel is no more. From this point on in the Old Testament, there are two kingly lines, two governmental administrations, and God deals with these two kingdoms separately. The books of 1 & 2 Kings follow more closely the kings of Israel (10 Northern tribes) while the books of 1 & 2 Chronicles trace the history of the kings of Judah. Prophets are sent to both kingdoms as needed.

God loves and cares for both kingdoms, but nonetheless, the kingdom is divided because Solomon broke the covenant with God. God keeps His promise to David by ensuring David's house always has Judah. Judah keeps the Temple at Jerusalem, the Ark, and is the seat of the priesthood. Judah is the tribe through which Christ comes. Even amid God's discipline, He is merciful.

Rehoboam Fortifies his Kingdom

2 Chronicles 11:5-12

Rehoboam acts wisely in some regards, not fully though. He builds several military defensive garrisons throughout Judah and Benjamin. He put officers in charge throughout the districts. He enhanced his military defense budget and provided more armor and weapons to the garrisons. "So he held Judah and Benjamin" (v. 12).

Rehoboam Retains the Priests

2 Chronicles 11:13-17

The Levites and the priests joined Rehoboam's kingdom. This was not so much out of loyalty to Judah but rather because Jeroboam kicked them out of his kingdom. Verse 14 says the Levites left their lands and all went to Judah and Jerusalem. Because Jeroboam "excluded them from serving as priests to the Lord" (v.14). Jeroboam established his own priests, built his own high places, and crafted his own idols (satyrs and calves).

In fact, verses 16 and 17 explain that those throughout all Israel who loved the true God, Yahweh, they left for Judah. "Those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD God of Israel followed them to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam the son of Solomon for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years" (vv. 16, 17).

The author points out with these verses a repetitive theme throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles. The divided kingdom also becomes divided spiritually. In the next section we explore Jeroboam's spiritual rebellion and why he kicked the Levites out of his kingdom.

Jeroboam's Wickedness

1 Kings 12:25-33

In true fashion of a king who is afraid to lose his power, Jeroboam fears Israel will stop following him, over one particular concern. He becomes afraid that if Israel continues to travel to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh at the Temple, eventually they will turn their hearts back to

Rehoboam and want to kill Jeroboam. His “wise” solution is to craft idols for Israel to worship in some of their central cities, so they no longer travel to Jerusalem.

“So the king consulted, and he made two golden calves; and he said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” (v.28) This sounds like what Aaron told Israel after he made the golden calf idols at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 32:4).

Verses 30-33 explain that Jeroboam effectively replicated the religious elements of the Law of Moses and adapted them for his own kingdom. He made houses of worship on high places. He appointed his own priests who were not Levites. He instituted feasts for religious worship to mimic the feasts of the Law that Judah follows. He set up altars for burnt sacrifices. He burned incense on the altar at Bethel. The author points out Jeroboam set up the dates for festivals and the religious elements according to his own desires. He did not consult God at any point. Jeroboam led Israel away from God and into idolatry.

Rehoboam’s Wickedness

2 Chronicles 11:18-23

This section records the wives and concubines Rehoboam collected. While he did not amass the amount his father Solomon did, he still followed in Solomon’s footsteps and built for himself a substantial royal harem. He took 80 wives and 60 concubines. He fathered 28 sons and 60 daughters. Rehoboam favored his son Abijah and placed him as a chief officer over the other sons who took part in the government’s administration. Rehoboam intended to make Abijah king after him. His sons became district officers, what we might call governors.

2 Chronicles 12:1-16

Rehoboam acted wisely for a few years, unfortunately it did not last. After Rehoboam established the strength of his kingdom, he and Israel with him, “abandoned the Law of the Lord” (v.1). God raised up Shishak, king of Egypt, to come out against Rehoboam and Judah as punishment. Shishak captured the defensive garrisons in Judah and made his way to Jerusalem.

God’s Merciful Punishment

2 Chronicles 12:1-8

God sent the prophet Shemaiah to Rehoboam who had gathered with his princes at Jerusalem. Shemaiah declared God’s message: This is what the LORD says: ‘You have abandoned Me, so I also have abandoned you to Shishak’” (v.5). God told Rehoboam why this imminent attack was happening. In response, Rehoboam and his sons “humbled themselves and said, ‘The Lord is righteous’” (v.6).

When the Lord saw that they had humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves, so I will not destroy them; and I will grant them a little deliverance, and My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem by means of Shishak. But they will become his slaves, so that they may learn the difference between My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.” (vv.7-8)

God still punishes them, but He relents from handing out the full weight of His discipline. Rather than destroy Rehoboam and his princes, God lets them remain. However, they will serve as subjects to the government of Egypt for a time.

What do you think God meant in verse 8? “That they may learn the difference between My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.”?

Egypt Plunders Judah

2 Chronicles 12:9-11

Shishak did not destroy Jerusalem, per God’s plan, but he plundered its resources. He plundered the treasures of the king’s palace, the treasures of the Temple, and the golden shields Solomon made. Rehoboam and Shishak worked out an agreement requiring Judah to pay tribute to Egypt. Many scholars believe it is assumed that Rehoboam paid off Shishak to leave Judah alone with the large tribute of Solomon’s golden furniture and shields.

God Sustains Rehoboam

2 Chronicles 12:12-14

God’s anger turned away from Rehoboam when he humbled himself before God and repented. God also improved conditions in Judah so that the people began to prosper again. Rehoboam became powerful again in Jerusalem and strengthened his reign (v.13).

However, despite God’s kindness, Rehoboam never fully committed to the Lord. “But he did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord” (v.14).

Summary of Rehoboam’s Life

2 Chronicles 12:14-16

The author gives a summary conclusion to Rehoboam’s life. He reigned for 17 years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in God’s sight because he did not seek the Lord from his heart. There

were military conflicts between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually, although we do not have them recorded in the Bible. Rehoboam died and Abijah his favor son took over as king.

Conclusion

The book of 2 Chronicles focuses often on the idea that even though God's people go away into sinful rebellion, if God's people humble themselves and repent of their sins, God always mercifully takes them back. God never abandons His covenant people, despite if they abandon Him.

Do you think God still has this same kind of heart and disposition towards His people in the New Covenant era?

Another theme repeated is that God's love for His people causes Him to punish them.

How can discipline be an act of love?

As we continue in these lessons, we will explore the ups and downs of Israel and Judah. The good and bad kings. Unfortunately, there will be more bad kings than good. Kings and Chronicles show us that earthly kings were not the lasting answer for God's Kingdom people. They long for a true King to come who can shepherd them and keep them faithful to God. We know that Jesus Christ came to be this true King of Kings to shepherd God's people.