

1 KINGS 12: 1 – 24

A HOUSE DIVINELY DIVIDED

INTRO

I hope everyone had a happy Easter. We are now back to our study in 1 Kings. You may recall that we ended last time with the death of Solomon and the end of his reign. It didn't end well. Solomon walked away from his faith in God and bowed to the pagan gods of his wives. This led to a mass apostasy in most of the Israelite people. Solomon started well but faded badly down the home stretch. This pattern is a recurring one and is one reason why the NT warns us and encourages us to finish well.

Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and ¹sin which clings so closely, and ²let us run ³with endurance the race that is ⁴set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, ⁵who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising ⁶the shame, and ⁷is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

As we get familiar with the OT narrative, we see that God's promises are most often accompanied with conditions – namely those of blessing and obedience. The blessings are contingent upon obedience and without obedience, cursing will take place. We seem to think of this as harsh, but how else can God govern His creation? We have covered these recurring verses, so I won't go back to all of them now. But suffice it to say, every king was given the same instructions – write your own copy of the Law, study it and then live and rule by it. Solomon failed in this regard. And we cannot say he failed now and then. What we see is a systemic failure that occurred when he deviated from the Word of God. Things never go well when we deviate from God's Word and His will.

Therefore, the passage we will be looking at today, is actually the falling action from the story of Solomon's life. We are now looking at a story within a larger story. The temptation will be to become myopic (narrowly focused) as we read the first 24 verses of chapter 12. Don't be that guy. Let's read it in its overarching context and see what God has to tell us today.

1Kings 12:1 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ² And as soon as Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. ³ And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ⁴ *m* “Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.” ⁵ He said to them, *n* “Go away for three days, then come again to me.” So the people went away.

Rehoboam was Solomon’s son. He was installed as king of Israel. What he has before him is a mandate from the people. Under Solomon, the kingdom had grown in territory and wealth, but in many ways, it was at the expense of the people. Heavy taxation and forced labor were the norm of the day. As Solomon strayed from God and began to follow the faith of his many foreign wives, he grew more and more harsh with his subjects. Now the people, seeing a new regime in power, wanted Rehoboam to lighten their load.

Jeroboam, you may recall him, we will talk more about him later, was recalled from Egypt since Solomon was dead. Jeroboam, some other movers and shakers, as well as a great many of the common folk, were now seeking relief from their new king. Rehoboam’s answer to their plea was that he needed 3 days to consider things. There is nothing wrong with that. Let’s look at what transpired during this three-day period.

1Kings 12:6 Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, “How do you advise me to answer this people?” ⁷ And they said to

him, “If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.”⁸ But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him.⁹ And he said to them, “What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, ‘Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?’”¹⁰ And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, “Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,’ thus shall you say to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs.¹¹ And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’”

The older men, who served under Solomon had seen what took place as Solomon’s spiritual condition had declined. They advised the new king to lighten the yoke placed upon the people by Solomon. Rehoboam didn’t like what he heard and then turned to his frat buddies for wisdom. These young guys were on a power trip and advised Rehoboam to stand on the gas and increase the yoke placed upon the people. This was not wise. In fact, it was contrary to all the Law commanded. Rehoboam learned nothing from his father’s failures and intended to increase his father’s failures exponentially. After three days, the people, accompanied by Jeroboam, returned to hear what the young king had to say.

***1Kings 12:12** So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, “Come to me again the third day.”¹³ And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him,¹⁴ he spoke to them according to the*

counsel of the young men, saying, ^m“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.”¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people, for ^vit was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which ^qthe LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Rehoboam doled out the bad news with a grin on his face. Underline verse 15 and place it on the shelf for a bit. Let’s look at the response of the people.

***1Kings 12:16** And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. ^rTo your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.” So Israel went to their tents.¹⁷ But Rehoboam reigned over ^sthe people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah.¹⁸ Then King Rehoboam sent ^tAdoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor,¹⁸ and all Israel stoned him to death with stones. And King Rehoboam hurried to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. ^vSo Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.²⁰ And when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. There was none that followed the house of David but ^vthe tribe of Judah only.*

There is a great deal of which to take note in these verses. First of all, as you might expect, the people were not happy with the king’s words. A division instantly takes place – one which we can read over if we are not careful.



Up to this point, Israel has been one unified kingdom. We have become accustomed to referring to it as Israel. But from here on out, we will have to differentiate between two kingdoms. From now on, the designation of “Israel” will specify the 10 northern tribes of the kingdom and “Judah” will be the designated name for the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who are located around Jerusalem. When we get to the NT, this part of the region will be known as Judea and the territory referred to as “Israel” will be known as Samaria and Galilee, respectively. From now on, civil war and strife between the two countries will be the norm, though they will form the occasional alliance when threatened, in the future, by larger nations. What is not said, is that there was most likely already some sort of “natural” break along these tribal lines.

When Rehoboam heard the people threaten to secede from the union, as it were, he did what he said he would do. He sent in his henchmen, Adoram, who headed up the forced labor department, in order to quell the rebellion. Adoram was killed by the people of the

northern territories. Rehoboam then fled south to Jerusalem in order to assemble his army.

Verse 19 is a good example of what is referred to as, “editing.”

. ¹⁹ “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

When we see the phrase, “... to this day.” It shows us that someone, at a later date, has added this phrase, showing that at the time of the editing, this same circumstance prevailed. You wouldn’t write this if you were recording an eyewitness account.

Jeroboam was then installed as king of the northern 10 tribes, now known collectively as “Israel.” The house has now been divided.

1Kings 12:21 ^w When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. ²² But the word of God came to ^xShemaiah the man of God: ²³ “Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the ^yrest of the people, ²⁴ “Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your relatives the people of Israel. Every man return to his home, ^zfor this thing is from me.” So they listened to the word of the LORD and went home again, according to the word of the LORD.

As previously stated, Rehoboam fled south, to the safety of Jerusalem and began to assemble his army. He wanted to unite the country by force. However, the word of God came through Shemaiah, the man of

God, (read prophet) and told the king to stand down. He was not to fight for unification because this whole split came about because it was what God wanted.

This begs the question: Why would God want His nation, His people to split? This seems counter-intuitive when you consider the divine mission of Israel. There is a lot to digest here. Now, let's go back to chapter 11 and see some of the set-up for chapter 12.

1 Kings 11: 29 - 40

²⁹ And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet ^vAhijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. ³⁰ Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, ^vand tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹ And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, ^wI am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes ³² (but ^xhe shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, ^ythe city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), ³³ because they have ^rforsaken me ^zand worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. ³⁴ Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. ³⁵ ^aBut I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand

and will give it to you, ten tribes. ³⁶ Yet to his son ^xI will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have ^ba lamp before me in Jerusalem, ^vthe city where I have chosen to put my name. ³⁷ And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. ³⁸ And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, ^cI will be with you and ^dwill build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. ³⁹ And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.” ⁴⁰ Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, to ^eShishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

Jeroboam worked for King Solomon and we are told that he was an industrious man. He did well. One day, as he was out on the road, Ahijah, the Shilonite, (a prophet from the was from the city of Shiloh) met him and prophesied to Jeroboam. As was common, Ahijah gave Jeroboam an object lesson with the prophesy. He tore Jeroboam’s coat into pieces and gave Jeroboam 10 of those pieces. These 10 pieces signified the northern 10 tribes of Israel. Ahijah went on to say that God would give him these tribes to rule and would leave Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, of the House of David, only Judah and Benjamin. God was leaving a portion of nation of Israel in Rehoboam’s hands in order to fulfill what He, God, promised David.

Also keep in mind what God, through the prophet, explained to Jeroboam. The blessings and curses that went along with obedience or disobedience are stated once again. We can’t let these things slide, especially as they are repeated so often.

But this brings us back to the question of why God would want His kingdom to split. It seems counter-intuitive, especially when we know what God's plans and mission for Israel were. They were to be a kingdom of priests. That is, they were to be the liaison between God and the other nations. They were to be examples, imagers of God. Their government and their culture were to be examples for how life was to be lived a kingdom run by God. In the Gospels, Jesus comes straight out of the gate with the Beatitudes, which are kingdom principles by which we, the children of God are to live. Israel failed in this endeavor. The question is, "Are we also failing in this endeavor?"

The separation of people when they fail to live out the plan of God is not a new idea in scripture. Adam and Eve failed in the garden and the result was exile. Cain slew Abel and was exiled from his family. At Babel, when the people refused to spread out over the land and sought to stay in one place, God changed their languages and forced the issue. He knew that if they were all in one place, speaking one language, there was no limit to the evil they could while living in rebellion against His plan. The result of all this was that God chose a man, Abraham, and from him, God built His own nation, but now they had fallen into the same sin as the surrounding nations. So, what should we expect God to do? If the pattern continues, we should expect some sort of separation. And that is what we see. If things continue on a downward trajectory, we should expect to see exile. If you are familiar with the history of Israel, you know that eventually, they will all be exiled from the land. There is nothing new here.

But we don't usually look at things like God does. God sees the bigger picture. If we were brought in as consultants, most likely we would

have done things differently. But that is the problem. Our solutions to the problems we see are often much different than God's. Our solutions tend to be short-sided. And, as God has now split His own nation, it seems counter-intuitive to what we expect Him to have done. **We think, "God should step in and unify these people. He can't split them up and then allow them to go the way of the world."** But we can't hope to see all the variables as God sees them.

What did God do with Pharaoh? He both hardened Pharaoh's heart, and allowed the natural process of Pharaoh, in his pride, to harden his own heart. Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam are no different. God deals with them the same way. Again, there is nothing new here.

We, as Americans are in the midst of political upheaval. All that has been is being turned upside down. With that in mind, let's try to put ourselves in the shoes of these Israelites. Politically speaking, things make sense. The people are reacting as one would expect them to react. They are rebelling against forced labor and want their freedom. Life in Israel had digressed from the ideal and the plan of God. This is all natural. They are reacting the way people always have. Is that a good thing? Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

But the lessons we have to learn from all this, are that God's ways are above ours.

Rom. 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are **his** judgments and how inscrutable **his ways!**

These are the things make us scratch our heads, or even doubt God. But I want us to think about this: If God always agreed with us, would He be wise and omniscient (all-knowing)?

How many times have we made bad decisions? I make them all the time. **Why should God have to agree with us in order for Him to make sense? If God did things the way humanity thought He should, then we should expect God to be no smarter than man. That would disqualify Him from being God.** No, I want God to be smarter than I am. If He isn't, then we're all in trouble.

We do have the hindsight of the Bible, to see how God was and is working out His plan. And the fact that it moves in ways that are incomprehensible to us only goes to show us that this plan did not come from the mind of man. Once again, it is counter-intuitive to how we fix things. We think of governments fixing things. We think of summits and peace accords – meetings held by the leaders of this world. But if you are a student of history, you can clearly see that none of these meetings ever come to anything? Wars continue. Exploitations continue, despite the meetings and accords of talking heads and pundits.

What are we to take from today's passage? First of all, remember that this comes on the heels of decades of God's will having been set aside for the desires of evil men in power. This coincided with man's (the general public's) desires to do things their own way and also set God's will aside. Once again, there is nothing new here.

What we have to remember is that our ways and God's ways usually diverge at some point. When we look at our own country and try to

make sense of what God is doing, remember that modern politicians and Israelite kings are most of the time, of the same ilk.

What the Israelite people should have done, and what we should do, is trust that God is working something out, knowing what lies in the future. And if the Bible is a pattern from which we are to learn, then things most often get worse before they get better. When we see a nation divided, we wonder what has gone wrong and automatically attempt to unify things. But many times, God divides, in order to reduce the evil. And then there is some sort of reboot.

In the end, we have to trust that God is in control. God is consistent. And in many ways, mankind is consistent – consistently bad!

Imagine working with a group of people to implement a plan. And then imagine them being so dysfunctional that you feel like you are the only adult in the room. That is what God is dealing with here. We have to trust that even in this division of which we are now reading, that God is in control. His ways are above our own. His plan differs from our day to day plans, at least most of the time. Because of that, His solutions differ from ours. But we must have faith that He will get the ball across the goal line.

Who could have ever thought that in order to redeem mankind and eventually the creation, that God would have had to become man, die on a cross, and rise from the dead? That seems counter-intuitive doesn't it?

Let's pray.