

Sunday Evening Message

April 14, 2024

The Split in the Kingdom

Text – 1 Kings 12

Introduction

After the time of Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel will split into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The split kingdom will last a little more than two hundred years from 931 BC until the northern kingdom is taken into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC.

There had been tensions between the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah for a long time. At the beginning of David's reign, only the tribe of Judah recognized him as their king, the northern tribes were loyal to Saul's family. Eventually Israel came around and realized that David was God's choice to be the king over them. But even during the reign of David, there was a rebellion of the northern tribes against David led by David's own son, Absalom. The peace that David was able to reclaim after the rebellion of Absalom and Israel against David and Judah was short lived. Solomon managed to avoid a split for all his forty-year reign, but the natives were getting very restless by the end of his time as king. His servants loved him at the beginning of his time as king when he was using the wisdom that God gave for their good. However, as time went on, Solomon became more focused on pursuing women and wealth, apparently at the expense of the people within the kingdom. When Solomon was dead and Rehoboam, his son, became king, a man named Jeroboam reappeared who was previously forced into exile because Solomon tried to kill him (see 1 Kings 11:26 – 40).

In our text today, the Israelites saw their opportunity to use Jeroboam to make things better for themselves.

I. The First Complication for the New King (vs. 1 – 4)

We do not know much about Rehoboam:

"And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess." (1 Kings 14:21)

Rehoboam was born to Solomon shortly before Solomon became the king, so he was around Solomon in the early years when Solomon was acting wisely. Outside of the unwise decision that Rehoboam makes in the passage we are discussing today, it appears that he did follow God for the first three years of his reign, but according 2 Chronicles 14:1, he eventually forsook God.

Rehoboam does not appear to get a “honeymoon” period. He is immediately confronted with a major problem coming from the northern tribes of Israel.

Shechem was in the northern kingdom. It was in Ephraim. This was the place that Jeroboam was from and was originally placed in charge of by Solomon before he was forced into exile. It was a smart political move for Rehoboam to choose this place for his coronation. One would think that Jerusalem would be the choice, but Rehoboam probably chose Shechem because it was in the heart of the northern territory.

The Israelites from the north call Jeroboam out of exile, presumably to be their representative, and together they confront the new king because they want to see if Rehoboam was willing to make things a little better for them. Their issues had to do with the forced labor and excessive taxes that Solomon was demanding of the people to build his kingdom. Solomon could have run his government with the tariffs that the many surrounding nations were paying him, but it was not enough to satisfy his insatiable desire for wealth and extravagance.

Note – the Israelites did the right thing by approaching the king and attempting to negotiate a peaceful solution first. Rehoboam was unwise to not try to work out a compromise.

II. The Forsaken Counsel of the Old Men (vs. 6 – 8)

Rehoboam asks for advice, which was wise:

"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."
(Proverbs 11:14)

"Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." (Proverbs 15:22)

"For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety."
(Proverbs 24:6)

The old men advise Rehoboam to ease the burden that Solomon had placed on the kingdom. Notice that they tell Rehoboam to serve the people, and in turn, the people will then be loyal to Rehoboam and serve him in a united kingdom.

The king is supposed to serve the people. Wiersbe said:

The people were willing to serve Rehoboam if only he would serve them and make life a bit easier for them. All of God’s truly great leaders had been servants to the people—Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and especially David—but Solomon had chosen to be a celebrity and not a servant, and Rehoboam was following his bad example.¹

Jesus was a servant. He washed the disciple’s feet. He taught His disciples to be servant leaders. Paul taught servant leadership as well, using Jesus as his illustration:

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Responsible*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2002), 90.

"5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11)

Preaching Point – Don't forsake the counsel of older people. Older people are not always wise, and they certainly do not have all the answers to life's problems, but they have lived and experienced a lot more of life than younger people have and have learned some things that will prove to be helpful to the younger generation if they are just willing to listen.

"Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:32)

"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." (Proverbs 16:31)

"1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: 2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. 3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." (Titus 2:1-5)

III. The Foolish Counsel of the young Men (vs. 9 – 15)

The young men give the advice that ultimately causes the kingdom to split. Rehoboam was forty years old at the time. These men were about the same age. They grew up in the time of prosperity underneath Solomon's reign. They did not have to fight for anything as the men of the previous generation did.

The ancient world honored age and maturity, but our modern society worships youth. In our churches, there's a desperate need for generational balance, with the older and younger generations communicating with each other and learning from each other, just like a family (Titus 2:1–8; 1 Tim. 5:1–2).²

*"18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: 20 **That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right***

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Responsible*, "Be" Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2002), 91.

hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." (Deuteronomy 17:18-20)

IV. The Counsel of the Lord (vs. 16 – 24)

With all the counsel that was being asked for by Rehoboam, there was One that he neglected to talk to for advice – God. Rehoboam never prayed to the Lord to see what He would have him do, but as we see in these verses, the Lord will come to him, and give Rehoboam some unsolicited counsel.

The dividing of the kingdom is seen even today as one of the greatest tragedies that ever happened to Israel.

V. The Calves Set Up in the North (vs. 25 – 33)

Jeroboam decided to set up his own idols to worship as he was afraid to allow the people to go back to Jerusalem to worship.

