

I Kings 12: The Kingdom Divides

Rehoboam's Folly (verses 1-15)

God's people had seen their nation grow from an insignificant nation to a regional powerhouse with impressive buildings, many trading partners, and a comfortable standard of living. Things had not always been smooth during power transitions, however. Early in David's reign, he was the king of Judah while the Northern Kingdom united under Saul's son Ish-bosheth. The resultant civil war cost many lives and only ended when Ish-bosheth was assassinated. David also had to contend with Absalom's rebellion later in his reign. Even before David died, Adonijah and Solomon struggled for the throne. The people must have wondered how this transition would go. Rehoboam most likely expected that his coronation would go smoothly and peacefully.

1. **Read verses 1-5.** Read also **Genesis 12:5-7** and **Joshua 24:1, 14-15**. What is the significance of the city of Shechem?

Genesis 12:5-7 ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Joshua 24:1, 14-15 ¹ Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God... ¹⁴ "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

2. See **1 Kings 4:20** for a description of the people's mood in the early days of Solomon's reign. How does it compare to their current mood?
3. **Read verses 6-11.** The elders who had served Solomon offered their advice.
 - a. How does this advice relate to these passages: **Proverbs 15:1** and **Matthew 11:28-30**?

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Matthew 11:28-30 ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

- b. What is Rehoboam's response to this advice?

4. The young men who had grown up in the palace with him urged Rehoboam to increase the burden and to increase the punishment. What might have been the motivation for this advice?

5. Who did Rehoboam NOT go to for advice?

6. **Read verses 12-15.** Does Rehoboam's answer to the people reveal him to be a king who serves or a king who expects to be served?

7. How does this incident show God's faithfulness to His promise to Jeroboam? See **1 Kings 11:30-33** and **1 Kings 12:15**.

The Kingdom is Divided (verses 16-24)

8. **Read verses 16-20.** Why do you suppose the chant recorded in verse 16 is repeated from **2 Samuel 20:1**?

2 Samuel 20:1-2a Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!" ²So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri.

Rehoboam thought he would show the people who was boss, so he sent out Adoniram, whose office of forced labor was not appreciated by the people. They responded by stoning him to death and Rehoboam is forced to flee to Jerusalem. So much for a royal coronation full of pomp and circumstance!

9. Verse 20 can be a little confusing because there are 12 tribes, 10 went with the Northern Kingdom, yet only one tribe (Judah) remained loyal to Rehoboam. Those number don't add up. How do these verses shed more light on this situation?
 - a. See **Genesis 49:5,7**

Genesis 49:5,7 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords....Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

- b. The tribe of Benjamin was divided. Those people living right along the border of Judah remained loyal to Judah while the people who were further north became a part of the Northern Kingdom.

10. Why is it significant that the tribe of Judah remained faithful to Rehoboam, the descendant of David?

11. Read verses 21-24. What wise move does Rehoboam finally make?

The splitting of the kingdom had a number of deleterious effects: skirmishes and even civil wars, and decreased political strength which made each kingdom more vulnerable to shifting geopolitical circumstances in the area. From the Concordia Commentary: “Rehoboam has shown himself to be a spoiled, selfish man and an insensitive, unwise ruler who does not seek guidance from the Lord. This does not bode well for the Southern Kingdom under his rule. Yet the future does not look any brighter for the Northern Kingdom with Jeroboam as king. This man had already “raised a hand against” Solomon...[and] was part of the mob...which murdered Adoniram.”

Jeroboam’s Golden Calves (verses 25-33)

12. As soon as Jeroboam became king, he began to solidify control over the people. He set up his headquarters in Shechem and also fortified Peniel. He was also concerned about religious matters. Why did he set up competing altars in Dan and Bethel (see map)?

13. Jeroboam was worshipping God in ways that were forbidden and contrary to God’s instructions.

God’s Instructions	Jeroboam’s Actions
Worship at the temple in Jerusalem	(v. 29 & 31)
You shall not make for yourself an idol	(v. 28)
The Levites are to perform the priestly duties	(v. 31)
The Feast of Tabernacles was to be celebrated in the 7 th month	(v. 32)

14. How were Jeroboam’s concerns about people wanting to worship as God commanded realized? See **2 Chronicles 11:13-16**.

2 Chronicles 11:13-16 ¹³ And the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to [Rehoboam] from all places where they lived. ¹⁴ For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the Lord, ¹⁵ and he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made. ¹⁶ And those who had set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their fathers.

From the Concordia Commentary: “Jeroboam installed the calves not as objects of worship themselves or as images to receive the entire focus of the people, but as something else. He presented each calf as a pedestal for Yahweh, above which was (supposed to be) the invisible presence of God. In that respect, Jeroboam made the calves as replacements or alternatives for the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem, above which Yahweh dwelt in a special manner....Jeroboam wanted to instill in the people the thought that in Dan and Bethel were authentic Yahweh shrines, Northern Kingdom counterparts to the temple in Jerusalem.

15. According to the following verses, how did God view Jeroboam's actions?

a. **Hosea 8:5-**

b. **1 Kings 15:34** (and many other similar passages)

Hosea 8:5-6 I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel; a craftsman made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

1 Kings 15:34 He [Baasha] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin.

Resources:

- NIV and ESV Study Bibles
 - LifeLight—1 and 2 Kings (CPH)
 - 1 & 2 Kings—God's Word for Today (CPH)
 - Concordia Commentary: 1 Kings 12-22 by Walter A Maier III (CPH)
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