



A KINGDOM DIVIDED | SESSION 3 | DR. RANDY WHITE

THE FINAL WORD ON SOLOMON'S REIGN | 1 KINGS 11:40-43

When Jeroboam was a young man, Solomon the King saw him as **a mighty man of valour: and ...that he was industrious** (1 Kings 11:28). But now that Jeroboam has spoken against the King, **Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam** (1 Kings 11:40, who decides to take exile in Egypt. We are not sure how long Jeroboam was in exile.

After an undisclosed period, Solomon dies and **Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead** (1 Kings 11:43).

This serves as introductory material to chapter 12 and the division of the kingdom.

THE CORONATION OF THE KING | 1 KINGS 12:1

There are a few *curious* matters in this verse that are worthy of noting, for background and context.

First, one wonders why **Rehoboam went to Shechem** when the capital was in Jerusalem and had been for the entire life of almost everyone in the audience (if not all). Further, it seems like the text anticipates this question by *answering the question before it is asked*, saying, **for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king**. That answer, however, presumes some knowledge of the significance of Shechem, which we must investigate.

Shechem goes back to the beginning of the nation's existence in the Promised Land. In Joshua 8:30-35 Joshua gathered the people together between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Garazim (which tower over Shechem) and they had a covenant of blessings and curses. Just before his death, Joshua gave his final farewell address to the nation at Shechem (Josh 24).

But prior to that, Jacob had made his home in Shechem (Gen. 33:18), and much of the Jacob narrative is set in Shechem. Notably, when Joseph went to take care of his brothers, Shechem was the place he went first, later going to Dothan (Genesis 37). Later Shechem became the prominent city of the region of Joseph, in the land of Ephraim.

It appears that this rivalry between Joseph and his brothers is especially prominent with Judah, who is the one who suggests selling Joseph (Gen. 37:26-27). This sets the stage for a future rivalry between the descendants of Judah and Joseph in the future. And while one might think that the division in 1 Kings 12 is new, Scripture teaches otherwise. Consider 1 Samuel 11:8 and 15:4, both of which took place in the days of King Saul, showing the division at least to those days. Later, the first seven years of David's reign were only over the tribe of Judah, only later did the other tribes join in. Then in the days of Absalom's revolt, Sheba, son of Bichri, used this rift against Judah among the tribes to call the tribes to battle - see 2 Samuel 20:1-2. In our story of Jeroboam, that same battle cry is going to be used (1 Kings 12:16).

The divisions of civil war do not typically (if ever) arise quickly. Rather, old rivalries have festered, and then in the right moment someone uses these rivalries to advance their purpose.

In the end, it *looks like* the tribes of Israel were "flexing political muscle" by apparently making the demand that Rehoboam come to Shechem if he was going to be King.

JEROBOAM RISES AGAIN | 1 KINGS 12:2-4

It is important to notice that Jeroboam *leaves exile* and comes back home, immediately (it seems) becoming the *de facto* leader of the non-Judah tribes. This seems to speak of political weakness on Rehoboam's part and the growing political strength on the part of the tribes.

Jeroboam comes, using the language of the oppressed, which was likely an accurate analysis and not simply perceived. He draws a political "line in the sand." If Rehoboam does not make the yoke of service lighter, the people *will not serve him*.

This cannot be taken any other way than a direct threat to Rehoboam's reign, thus a threatened insurrection.

SIGNS OF A WEAK LEADER | 1 KINGS 12:5-19

Verse 5 contains further indication that Rehoboam was in trouble from the beginning. First, he is not able to have a coronation in Jerusalem. Second, he must sit and listen to Jeroboam, who is fresh out of exile. Now, not only displaying his political weakness but also his lack of political courage, he asks for **three days** (v. 5) of contemplation and consultation.

While under some circumstances it is wise to take time to consider a matter, this was not one of them. Jeroboam had just announced that the people would only serve the King if he met their demands. Rather than immediate and decisive action, Rehoboam stalls. This gives time for the enemies of the King to devise a plan and gather their strength. A crisis is a time for swift and decisive decision making.

Verses 6-11 contain the classic story of "old men" vs "young men." The older and wiser men gave what appears to be sound advice. The **young men that were grown up with him** (v. 8) suffered, it seems, from an "ivory tower" sheltered and privileged existence, along with the short-sightedness of youth, that did not allow them to understand the moment, and thus they gave bad advice.

One wonders whether the old men would have given the same advice had Rehoboam been able to glance their way and get quick advice "in the moment" of the demand of the people. I would personally not be surprised if their advice would not have been much stronger at the moment of crisis, but now that Rehoboam has given a three-day break, they recognize that he is gasping for survival, and begging for time is about the best he can do. If this scenario is accurate, then the advice of the young men was not totally incorrect (though perhaps overly harsh), but the *timing* of the advice made it unworkable.

Verses 12-19 contain the remainder of the account, with Rehoboam fleeing to Jerusalem with only Judah remaining loyal.

A NEW KING | 1 KINGS 12:20

Quickly the remaining tribes brought Jeroboam and **made him king over all Israel** with Rehoboam having **but the tribe of Judah only**. Soon (see v. 21) the tribe of Benjamin will join Judah.

A note about the text: The Septuagint is consistent in 1 Kings 11-12 to allot two tribes to the southern Kingdom. For example, 1 Kings 12:20 in the Septuagint says, "none followed the house of David except the tribe of Juda and Benjamin only."¹ Is the Masoretic text incorrect and the Septuagint, correct? Indeed, the Septuagint (LXX) *fits our understanding* and therefore *resolves some issues*, but *is it correct*? A typical academic approach is that the Masoretic Text has become corrupted, but that the LXX is accurate. But is this too convenient since the LXX matches what *later* is reality? Could it be that the Masoretic text is fully accurate and that the LXX *later* revised the text to fit *common lore*? While the "LXX narrative" is well-established in Academia, there is much room for debate as to its veracity.

¹ Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: English Translation* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1870), 3 Kgdms 12:20.