

# **REHOBAM: A FOOLISH FAILURE !**

**(1 Kings 12:1-24; 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 10-12)**

Rehoboam, a son of King Solomon, was born into privilege. His father had been successful in building Israel into a mighty and wealthy nation. Religiously, the glorious, gold-gilded temple had been built in seven years (1 Kings 6:38); it now graced Mount Zion in Jerusalem. (Read of its splendor in 1 Kings 5; 6.) Materially, Solomon had built for himself a splendid palace which took thirteen years to build (1 Kings 7). Politically, Solomon had been extremely powerful. Economically, he had expanded Israel quickly. Commercial trade brought the most valuable imports from all over the world (1 Kings 4:22-28; 9:28; 10:14-27; 2 Chronicles 9:24). The building of the temple, Solomon's own house, a wall around Jerusalem, and cities throughout the land demanded many laborers and extreme taxation on the people. Solomon's reign was so great that the Queen of Sheba, coming to learn of Solomon's wisdom and to view the glory of Israel, proclaimed in awe, "The half was not told me" (1 Kings 10:7)!

Upon Solomon's death, Rehoboam ascended to the throne of Israel at the height of the nation's glory. One might have assumed that Rehoboam would have a reign of peace, continued wealth, and security. However, *one* decision had a devastating impact upon Israel. The people, although blessed abundantly, were tired of being almost enslaved as a work force to build the country. They were disgusted with the extreme taxation for the constant expansion. As soon as Rehoboam was crowned at Shechem (1 Kings 12:1; 2 Chronicles 10:1), the people of Israel came with an impassioned request. Led by Jeroboam, they

pleaded with Rehoboam for relief from the burdensome taxation.

Because of Solomon's idolatry, the prophet Ahijah had prophesied, during Solomon's reign, that Jeroboam would rule ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. He had taken the new cloak that he was wearing and ripped it into twelve pieces, giving Jeroboam ten of the pieces (1 Kings 11:29-31). Upon hearing about this prophecy, Solomon had desired to kill Jeroboam. To escape Solomon's anger, Jeroboam had fled to Egypt (1 Kings 11:40).

After Solomon's death, Jeroboam had returned from Egypt, and the ten tribes (Israel) had quickly turned to him as their leader and spokesman. Jeroboam and all the assembly pleaded for relief from heavy burdens. The request seemed sincere and wise: "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you" (1 Kings 12:4; see 2 Chronicles 10:4). The people's request was simply "Lighten our burden, and we will be submissive to you."

Rehoboam sent the complainants away for three days while he sought advice. He first asked for counsel from the older men who had been with Solomon (perhaps some of Solomon's advisers and princes). Their wise admonition was this: "If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever" (1 Kings 12:7; see 2 Chronicles 10:7). They said, "Show the people kindness, seek to please them, and they will be submissive." Rehoboam then asked for

counsel from the young men who had grown up with him. Their foolish advice was for Rehoboam to say, "My little finger is thicker than my father's loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:10, 11; see 2 Chronicles 10:10, 11).

On the third day, Israel returned to hear Rehoboam's decision. Forsaking the wise counsel of the aged men and adopting the foolish direction from his peers, Rehoboam proclaimed this harsh decree that showed no respect for the people: "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" (1 Kings 12:14; see 2 Chronicles 10:14).

Immediately, the ten tribes, in disbelief, despair, and anger, declared,

What portion do we have in David?  
 We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse;  
 To your tents, O Israel!  
 Now look after your own house, David!  
 (1 Kings 12:16; see 2 Chronicles 10:16).

When Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was

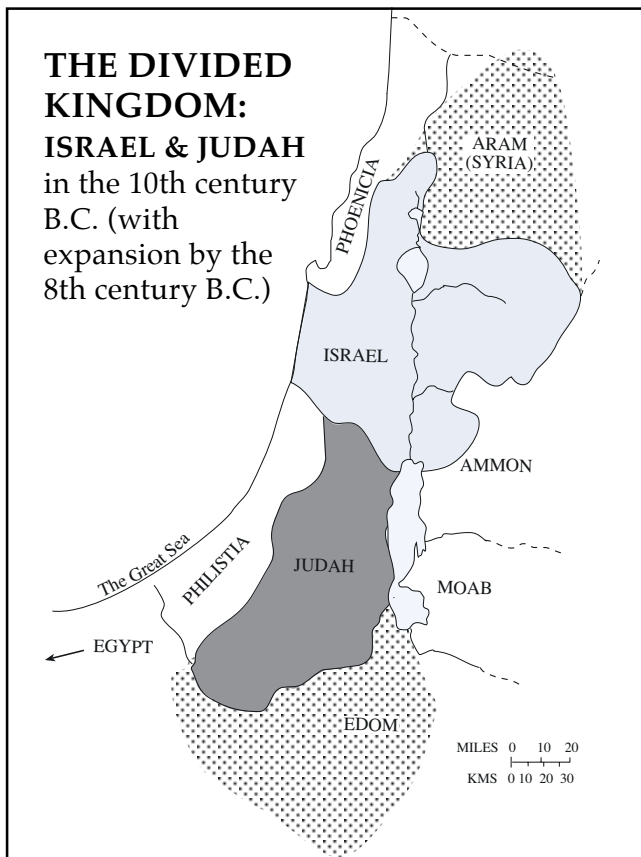
over the forced labor, to tell his decision to the laborers, they stoned him (1 Kings 12:18; 2 Chronicles 10:18). Rehoboam fled to Jerusalem. The people rebelled against Rehoboam and proclaimed Jeroboam king over the ten tribes, which became known as the northern kingdom of "Israel" (1 Kings 12:18–20). Because of Rehoboam's foolishness, Ahijah's prophecy was fulfilled. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah are known as the southern kingdom of "Judah."

Rehoboam prepared to fight the rebels and bring them back under his dominion. He assembled his army for war, but God sent the prophet Shemaiah to him with a declaration: "Thus says the LORD, 'You must not go up and fight against your relatives the sons of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing has come from Me'" (1 Kings 12:24; see 2 Chronicles 11:2–4).

Jeroboam soon led Israel into rebellion against God by establishing idolatry, an unauthorized priesthood, and a new Day of Atonement (1 Kings 12:25–33; 2 Chronicles 11:15, 16). The Levitical priests who loved the Lord fled Israel and returned to Judah (2 Chronicles 11:13, 14). Rehoboam built cities to fortify Judah (2 Chronicles 11:5–12). Unfortunately, Judah did evil and provoked the Lord with idolatry, sodomy, and other abominations (1 Kings 14:22–24). These things occurred because Rehoboam had not "set his heart to seek the Lord" (2 Chronicles 12:14).

Under Rehoboam, Judah was severely weakened and diminished, becoming a target for invasion. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, the king of Egypt, attacked Judah and then Jerusalem. He plundered the temple, taking the treasures of gold back to Egypt. Rehoboam replaced the golden items of the temple with bronze replicas (1 Kings 14:26, 27).

What a pitiful condition: Most of the nation was gone, sin was running rampant, the glorious city was attacked, and the temple was plundered! All of this occurred in five short years! Why did it happen? The prophet Shemaiah met the fearful, defeated Rehoboam with his princes and declared, "Thus says the LORD, 'You have forsaken Me, so I also have forsaken you to Shishak'" (2 Chronicles 12:5). This stern message convicted the hearts of the king and his princes.



They humbled themselves and affirmed, "The LORD is righteous" (2 Chronicles 12:6b), which meant, in essence, "We admit that we deserve the Lord's judgment." Because of their humility and penitence, God declared, ". . . I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some measure of deliverance, and My wrath shall 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" (2 Chronicles 12:7, 8).

Rehoboam reigned in Jerusalem for seventeen years (931–913 B.C.). He died and was succeeded by his son Abijah (1 Kings 14:31; 2 Chronicles 12:16). His life offers us several lessons.

### **LESSON 1: PREPARE YOUR HEART NOW FOR YOUR FUTURE!**

We do not know the opportunities, struggles, or temptations that we will face in the future. People have a tendency to wait until an opportunity arises and then, unprepared, complain, "I wish I could benefit from that opportunity." Many fail miserably when they face struggles or temptations because they have not prepared by strengthening their faith.

Why did Rehoboam fail, allowing the idolatry that resulted in his losing the kingdom and its wealth? These tragedies occurred because the king's heart was not set on doing God's will. How different Rehoboam was from those who served as great men of God! Jehoshaphat had walked in the ways of David, rejecting idolatry and promoting God's Word. He had followed God and removed much sin from Judah because he had "set [his] heart" in his youth (2 Chronicles 19:3). Later, there was Ezra, a priest, scribe, and religious reformer among the returnees from the Babylonian Captivity. He taught God's truths with great respect, and he held the people spellbound for hours as he read God's Word to them, urging them to respect and obey it. He also led God's people to repent of their sins. Why was Ezra such an effective leader? Ezra 7:10 gives the answer: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." Are you preparing your heart now so that God can use you for His glory in the future? Are you setting

your heart to seek God so that you can overcome life's struggles and temptations?

### **LESSON 2: FOOLISH ADVICE CAN BE DESTRUCTIVE!**

If Rehoboam had given heed to the guidance of the wise advisers, he would have retained his whole kingdom, earned tremendous respect from his people, and enjoyed ruling a thriving nation. However, because he listened to the foolish advice of his peers, his people revolted and he lost ten of the twelve tribes. This loss was so unnecessary!

Always seek God's wisdom first! Proverbs 2:2–6 gives wise direction:

Make your ear attentive to wisdom,  
Incline your heart to understanding . . .  
And discover the knowledge of God.  
For the LORD gives wisdom;  
From His mouth come knowledge and  
understanding.

We need to be cautious about the advice we accept. We should respect the advice of mature, wise, godly people!

Does this suggest that young people never have wisdom or give wise advice? No, for sometimes they may. Does this suggest that older people always give good, godly advice? No, for sometimes they may not. Solomon described the elderly: As the body deteriorates and as physical life begins to diminish, the elderly sometimes lose zeal, drive, and perhaps clarity of mind (see Ecclesiastes 12:1–7). Further, if an older person has had negative experiences in life, those experiences may cloud his guidance. Typically, though, mature people give wiser advice. Many ignore or ridicule the wisdom of the aged, but the lesson for us to learn from Rehoboam is "Take care *what* you listen to" (Mark 4:24a; emphasis mine).

### **LESSON 3: BLESSINGS AND PRIVILEGES CAN BE TAKEN AWAY!**

Rehoboam's foolish decision brought Israel's revolt and God's judgment. It is true that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). We should appreciate material blessings but *never* let our happiness or security in life be attached to material things! Possessions are unstable and

uncertain (1 Timothy 6:17). Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Matthew 6:19, 20). The faithful child of God has His promise of blessing:

Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.  
It will be healing to your body  
And refreshment to your bones.  
Honor the LORD from your wealth  
And from the first of all your produce;  
So your barns will be filled with plenty  
And your vats will overflow with new wine  
(Proverbs 3:7–10).

If loss—small or great—occurs, the Christian still has a great reason to live. We can say with Paul, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (Philippians 4:11). Never allow foolish or sinful decisions to bring God’s punishment and the removal of His blessings.

#### **LESSON 4: THOSE IN AUTHORITY MUST RESPECT THE PEOPLE WHO SUBMIT TO THEM!**

Rehoboam’s lack of concern caused his people to revolt. Respect and care for them would have saved his nation and secured their submission. As David neared death, he repeated God’s command: “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Samuel 23:3b; KJV). Solomon gave this wise counsel that his son did not heed: “Loyalty and truth preserve the king and he upholds his throne by righteousness” (Proverbs 20:28). Rulers gain respect and submission when they show respect and care for their people.

The same is true for elders in the Lord’s church. Elders are overseers of the flock; they have no legislative authority to make spiritual laws in the church because Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18; see Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are given some authority, but they are not to use it in an uncaring, dictatorial way. Rather, they are to love the people and truly care for them (see 1 Peter 5:3). The way the apostles addressed the neglect of the Grecian widows in Acts 6 is an example of leaders loving, caring, listening, and promoting peace and growth in

the Lord’s church (Acts 6:1–6).

Husbands are to love their wives “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,” “as their own bodies,” and “even as himself” (Ephesians 5:25–33). What kind of headship is this? It is a loving headship that exhibits such a concern that a man would die for his wife. I have never met a wife who would not want to have such a husband. God never told husbands to make their wives submit to them. He told husbands to love their wives so abundantly that the wives would be *eager* to submit! God’s command for wives is “Be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). What a beautiful concept! How easy it is for a wife to obey this command when she has a truly loving husband!

Rulers, elders, and husbands would do well to learn from the one with all authority—Jesus! He has all authority, but He is a loving head. His love makes it easy for any person of faith to respect Him and submit to Him!

May we always seek wisdom and never make the foolish mistakes of Rehoboam or reap his terrible consequences! Remember, we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7)!

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#### ***A Note from the Editor***

Out of the line of the kings of Judah—from the beginning of the divided kingdom (931 B.C.) to the rule of Jotham (ending in 732 B.C.), 146 years before Judah’s fall—come worthwhile lessons for us in the twenty-first century. Special thanks go out to the preachers who have written for this series. They have illustrated that, in spite of the often sinful lives and poor examples of these kings, God was working and was in control. We read, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction” (Romans 15:4a). We are also seeing this truth in the studies on Isaiah, which will resume after this issue.

Paul’s letter to Philemon holds within it a unique study of interpersonal relationships, with examples of forgiveness of wrongs and encouragement to do what is right. In this letter, God has provided lessons for the church which challenge us to grow and reach out to others.

Eddie Cloer, Editor