

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 7

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

Solomon's reign over a united Israel was promising in the beginning. God granted him the wisdom for which he had asked, and added "riches and honour". He lived in plenty and luxury. His reputation amazed and astounded the kings and rulers of the world and won their admiration. But sadly Solomon left the ways of God when he built shrines for his many wives who worshipped their gods. As a result, the spiritual life of the people was low. They forgot the LORD their God, and cared more for their physical and material needs than for their spiritual needs. When Solomon died, the state of the nation was far from being spiritually, politically and socially stable. The Northern tribes were unhappy and the nation was on the brink of being divided into two.

The state of affairs was such that when Rehoboam began his rule over Israel, he had the difficult task of keeping the nation together. He had lived all his life in the court of his father's palace. Had he learned the reins of good government? Was he

able to keep the nation united? The events in Chapter 12 tell otherwise. It chronicles the events that resulted in the nation being split into two: the Northern kingdom of ten tribes would be known later as Israel and the Southern kingdom of the other two tribes to be known as Judah. This split ushered in the second great period in the history of the Israelites (975 B.C. – 722 B.C.). This period marked the steady and shameful decline of the nation from its once glorious state under King David.

OUTLINE

1. The appeal to Rehoboam for reforms (vv. 1-5);
- 2) The consultations with the advisors (vv. 6-15);
- 3 The aftermath of Rehoboam's decision (vv. 16-24);
- 4) The administrative changes made by Jeroboam, who became the king of the Northern kingdom (vv. 25-33).

COMMENTARY

An Appeal for Reforms – 12:5

As soon as Rehoboam became king, he went to Shechem to be crowned king over all Israel. He easily won recognition as king over Judah. But he needed to be accepted by the tribes in the north who were dissatisfied with conditions under his father's rule. They were unhappy with Solomon's heavy taxation on their resources and with the enforced

labour. So he decided to meet the northern tribes.

The place of meeting was Shechem and Rehoboam hoped that he would be accepted by the people and be made king. Shechem was a suitable choice for the gathering of the northern tribes because it was rich in historical significance. It was here that Abraham, their forefather first worshipped the LORD in the Promised Land.¹ Jacob built an altar there. He also bought a piece of land in Shechem.² The city stood between two mountains, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where Joshua made a covenant with Israel. They were the mountains of blessings and cursings respectively.³ It was also significant because Joseph's tomb and Jacob's well were also located there. Moreover, Shechem, which was in Ephraim, was the geographical centre of the northern tribes. Ephraim was the largest of the ten tribes in the north.

¹ Genesis 12:6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of **Sichem**, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite *was* then in the land.

² Genesis 33:18 And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city. 19 And **he bought a parcel of a field**, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money. 20 And **he erected there an altar**, and called it Elelohe-Israel

³ Joshua 8:33 And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. 34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. (Compare Judges 9:7).

The Ephraimites were proud of their heritage and became the leading tribe of the north. Shechem was also the city where the two evil sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, deceived and slaughtered all the men. However as king it was not politically prudent for Rehoboam to choose or accept Shechem for the meeting. He had to meet with the dissatisfied northern tribes on their turf. Concerning the matter at hand, the people should have come to the king instead.

Jeroboam who earlier fled to Egypt to escape Solomon's attempt to kill him, heard of Rehoboam's coronation and a gathering of the people with the new king in Shechem. Earlier he had been told by God's prophet, Ahijah that God had picked him to rule over the northern tribes (11:29-36). The people of the northern tribes then sent and called for his return for that important meeting. Upon his return, he led all the northern tribes to meet with Rehoboam. They did not present a long list of grievances and complaints. They did not even threaten secession. This means that the break-up of Israel was caused entirely by the reactions of Rehoboam. He has no one to blame but himself.

On behalf of the northern tribes, Jeroboam complained of the harsh labour and heavy taxation that Solomon levied on them. They could no longer endure it. They asked Rehoboam to lighten their burden. This was not an unreasonable demand. They were not demanding for a total abolition of the tax. This had been long

neglected by Solomon, who probably had received such complaints before but had done nothing about it because he was more preoccupied with his large harem of wives and concubines, the building of prestigious projects and pursuit of knowledge. Rehoboam requested for three days to consider the matter and thereafter would make his decision. This was a sensible and wise move, for in a multitude of counsellors there was supposed to be safety (Proverbs 11:14, 24:6). Sadly in this instance it was not so because the multitude he consulted were wicked.

In this incident, we see the sovereignty of God and the truth of human responsibility. Jeroboam had been told by God through a prophecy that he would be the first king of the Northern sector of the divided kingdom. Here we observed that the division was solely due to Rehoboam's bad judgement!

Consultations with Advisors– 12-15

Rehoboam first approached the elderly advisers who had served his father, Solomon during his reign. Their counsel could be interpreted in two ways. The first is based on the assumption that these elders knew of God's requirement for the conduct and character of the king of Israel. Their advice that the king serves the people would therefore be in accordance with the will of God. The biblical model of kingship in accordance with God's word is "servant-hood".⁴ The other is

based on the assumption that the counsel of these elderly men had degenerated into players of political expediency. Their advice to Rehoboam could then be considered ungodly. Their counsel to Rehoboam was for him to "be a servant unto this people this day" and "speak good words to them" and they would serve him forever (v.7). The elderly men could be suggesting to the king, to just for that day, pretend to be submissive to these dissatisfied subjects and to flatter them. When he had won their confidence, he could later make them slaves forever. In this case, they would be leading Rehoboam to engage in dishonest political intrigue which would be disastrous. This author is more inclined to believe the first interpretation of the counsel to be correct and that the elderly advisors were sincere.

Rehoboam next consulted the young men who were his contemporaries. They had grown up with him in the palace and had shared the pleasures of life under his father. The use of the personal pronoun "we" suggests that these young men were his "buddies" (v.9). Their advice was to make his father's yoke even heavier. They told Rehoboam to answer these people blatantly, that his "little finger: would be "thicker than his father's loins; that if his father had chastised them with whips, he would do it with "scorpions". These words speak of pride, arrogance, insolence, and insensitiveness. There is nothing

⁴ Deuteronomy 17:20 **That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren,** and that he turn not aside from the commandment, *to* the right 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.

commendable about the counsel of these young men. Just because one has consulted a multitude of counsellors it does not mean that the decision made would always be good. Here is a clear cut example. Rehoboam was in a fix. Whom should he listen to? How had he been brought up and taught by his father Solomon? What had he learned from his father? Had Solomon spent time to bring up and teach his son? His choice would tell us something of the training that he received in the court of his father's palace. Rehoboam should have used the Word of God to guide him.

The Disastrous and Divided Decision –16-24

On the third day as appointed by Rehoboam, Jeroboam led the people of the Northern tribes to meet with the king. Rehoboam proudly and angrily regurgitated to Jeroboam and the people present what his buddies had coached him to say – *“my father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions”* (v.14). He'd decided to follow the advice of his young men friends who were inexperienced in government. Rehoboam exhibited a lack of intellect, not to speak of discernment He was forty-one years old (1 Kings 14:21)! Perhaps it was like the proverbial saying that he wanted to be the new broom that sweeps clean but turns out to be very hurtful! The decision was not made at the spur-of-the-moment. He'd had three days. He had not seriously thought through the issues and the possible consequences

of his decision. He instead threatened with increased oppression. This is unbecoming of a sovereign king.

The divinely inspired writer gave his explanation that what happened was from the LORD so that His words to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah might be fulfilled (v.15). The cause of the split was God's sovereignty at work in order to fulfil His word. But Rehoboam was solely responsible for the arrogance, pride, and carnality he displayed. If he chose to be foolish, proud and arrogant, he was free to do so. He was responsible for his words and actions. But God could turn the events to fulfil His announced plan and purpose. This truth, that our God is sovereign, is a great encouragement to God's children!

The reaction to Rehoboam's decision by the Northern tribes was instant. They knew and passed the remark that the king was not listening to them. They disclaimed any relations with the South, leaving Judah to exist on its own. *“So Israel departed unto their own tents”* (v.16). The designation “Israel” from then onwards refers to the ten tribes of the North, and Judah refers to the South, which included the tribe of Benjamin. The split was irrevocable.

King Rehoboam tried to restore the kingdom. He made two foolish attempts. In the first attempt he sent Adoram, who was the commissioner of the forced labour under Solomon, to bring about reconciliation. Obviously, Adoram was the wrong choice for the peace mission with the intention to

heal the differences and restore the unity of the nation. The reception of the crowd was clear. They wanted to sever all relations with Rehoboam and Judah. They stoned Adoram to death.

Rehoboam realising the danger to his own life, quickly fled to Jerusalem. The separation was complete. Israel realised that they needed a government. They elected Jeroboam to be their king. The prophecy of Ahijah was thus fulfilled. Rehoboam made a second attempt when he returned to Jerusalem. This time he tried to restore the kingdom through war. He assembled a large army from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin numbering 180,000 chosen warriors to attack Israel. He tried to subjugate the North into submission. But before they could march, God intervened by sending Shemaiah, the man of God. Shemaiah conveyed the message to Rehoboam and to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin with the words "thus saith the LORD" that they should not fight against their brethren in the North, and that what had happened was from God. The people showed their fear of God and hearkened to His word. A civil war which could have resulted in brothers killing brothers was averted.

Jeroboam

the 1st King of Israel--25-33

We do not know why God chose Jeroboam to be the king of Israel. God had told him that he would be king of Israel. God also charged him to keep His commandments and

walk in His ways and to do what was right before Him just like David His servant did. God promised He would build him a sure house just as He would build for David (11:38). Jeroboam in fact, showed no trace of respect for the truth of the faith of his forefathers. In spite of this, the LORD kept His word and promise.

Jeroboam lived in Shechem and made the city the capital of Israel, the Northern kingdom. Further to the east near the river Jordan, he built Penuel, seemingly a fortified city to protect Shechem. Jeroboam in fact, feared that the people of his kingdom might return to David because of their religious obligations to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship the LORD. Jeroboam would not live by faith and depend on the LORD to help him keep his kingdom. He would rather depend on expediency and human ingenuity. He would fail miserably and what he did at the beginning of this new "kingdom" would become the Achilles heel that would destroy all the kings of the North. The golden calves he made had a place in history. The first high priest, Aaron also made them and also declared the same in Exodus Exodus 32:4, "*And he [Aaron] received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*"

He feared that that the people of his kingdom might shift their loyalty to Rehoboam as they returned to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple and would eventually kill him. After

reasoning within himself, he made two bull calves of gold. He could have been fascinated by this idol of a bull-calf which was a popular god of the Egyptians and the Canaanites. He told the Israelites that it would be too much of a hassle for them to make the journey to Jerusalem to worship the LORD. Pointing to the two golden bull calves, he told the people: *“Behold, thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt”* (v.28). He set up one bull-calf in Bethel which was a city not too far north of Jerusalem, and the other bull-calf in Dan, in the northern part at the foot of Mount Hermon. The similarity between his declaration and that of Aaron is unmistakable

Thus the Israelites in the north could go to Dan to worship the LORD and those in the south would not need to travel further south to Jerusalem but to Bethel to worship the LORD. Convenience has always been a very enticing factor in worship. It was true then; it is still true today. Truth and right worship is secondary to one’s convenience. If I can sleep longer in my comfortable bed and walk to a church in 2 minutes, why do I have to wake up one hour earlier and take a 40 minute bus ride to church? It makes no practical sense. The fact that the nearby church is not conservative and is part of the ecumenical movement of the church of the Antichrist often becomes a non-issue with the worshipper who puts convenience as priority!

These erected “high places” of worship would need priests and;

Jeroboam appointed the lowest strata of the people to be priests, not Levites. The reason for this is found in 2 Chronicles 11:13-17, *“And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest’s office unto the LORD: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.”*

Moreover he instituted a new religious festival on the 15th of the 8th month, one month after the Feast of the Tabernacles. In this way he tried to make the people busy with preparing for their festivals so they would not think of making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles. They too had their own religious festival. He himself offered sacrifices in these shrines and altars. These three steps made by Jeroboam were calculated to declare to his own people that we are a sovereign nation not linked to the South any longer. New places of worship, new priests and now holy-days are all visible symbols of independence.

It is clear that Jeroboam rejected the path that God had charged him to follow. He had broken one of the cardinal commandments of God, which declares that man shall not make any graven images in the likeness of anything to represent the LORD God and bow to them and serve them.⁵ He had chosen Bethel and Dan for the worship of the LORD. But the LORD had chosen the Temple in Jerusalem as the place where He would put His Name. This was a syncretistic religion which was rebellion against God. He then instituted his own religious festivals contrary to the festivals which God had ordained. Moreover, he appointed non-Levites to be priests. Jeroboam had personally sinned and led the people away from the LORD their God. Bear in mind that they did not forget the name of the LORD Jehovah for the North still used it in their worship. The difference was that the LORD's Name was uttered in front of the golden calves.

PRACTICAL VALUE

It is sad that Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Under David the nation Israel enjoyed a period of wonderful blessings. David had wealth,

⁵ Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

influence and outstanding talents, but none of these qualities were more precious to him than the fear of God and the honouring of His law. He was not perfect and when he sinned he repented and cried to God for mercy. But now the people of Israel had plunged into the depths of religious apostasy and the kingdom divided into two. Her leaders are to be blamed for the split. Solomon, unlike his father David, cared more for his own pleasure and fame and was insensitive to the suffering of his people caused by his oppressive laws. His son, Rehoboam, was also proud and wicked. He rejected the proposition by his elderly counsellors to adopt God's pattern of a shepherd-king.

The nation was subsequently divided and plunged into idol worship. The people cared more for physical and material things than the spiritual, a direct result of the personal sins of their leaders. The writer of Proverbs declares (14:34): "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach (shame) to any people". The sins of the leaders of a nation, in this case, those of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, led the people into sin and shame. This is a precious lesson to be learned by church leaders. Someone has said that the spirituality of the members of the church cannot rise above that of its leaders! God gives His children a choice to obey or to disobey Him. The path that they choose will lead to blessings or to curses. Jeroboam chose to disobey God and he missed the blessings of God, and he became the model for all the kings that succeeded him. All they did was evil in

the sight of God, and they faced the consequences that led to their captivity and dispersion by Assyrians in 722 B.C.

As seen in this chapter, God intervened in the affairs of men twice. He reveals that He is sovereign and that He is in control of the affairs of men. God’s sovereignty and human responsibility can sometimes be very difficult to understand and accept. It was within the will of God that the nation Israel was torn into two. Yet Rehoboam and Jeroboam were both responsible for their actions. Sometimes, it is best not to try to reconcile God’s sovereignty and man’s free will. Accept it and let God be true and every man a liar. However, this great truth should comfort us and not confuse us. How wonderful to know that when we sin, repent and turn to God, He forgives us. And from the situation He can work His plan and purpose for our good to His praise and glory. We can also take comfort in the knowledge that God is in control of all that is happening to the world today: the economic downturn, global terrorism, the wars and rumours of war, political intrigue among nations, the threat of nuclear war and moral and spiritual decadence. In times like these, the words of the divinely inspired writer of Hebrews are timely: *“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith”*. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 1 Kings 12:1-5; Psalm 133:1-3.

TUESDAY: 1 Kings 12:6-15; Titus 2:1-8; Proverbs 18:21.

WEDNESDAY: 1 Kings 12:16-20; Mark 3:24.

THURSDAY: 1 Kings 12:21-24; Acts 2:22-39, Ephesians 1:9-11.

FRIDAY: 1 Kings 12:25-33; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Philippians 1:29.

Discussion Questions

1. What lessons can we learn about sin and disobedience in this chapter?

2. Rehoboam could have made a better choice and decision than the one he did in regard to the people’s petition. What guidelines or principles would you have adopted if you were in his shoes?

3. Do you think that God caused Rehoboam to reject the people's petition or did Rehoboam did it all on his own? Explain.

4. What four actions did Jeroboam make as recorded in Chapter 12:25-32, and what was his purpose? How would you analyse them from the human point of view and from God's? What practical lessons can we learn from his actions?

5. If you are a true believer of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, what choices would you have to make living under Jeroboam's rule?

6. Why is it that during the third generation a ministry is prone to fall apart? Can it be prevented? How?

7. What approach to leadership is necessary for God's chosen leaders? How did Jesus exemplify this?
