

Week 23
June 7/9
A Kingdom Divided
1 Kings 12

We are a little over 5 months into the 52-week journey to “Know the Bible”. This week is a major turning point in the journey. As a quick review lets start where all journeys begin - at the beginning.

BRIEF REVIEW *(Teachers, you may not want to use all this detail, but it would be good to bring people up to date since we are starting a new era today.)*

The Creation Era took us from Creation to Adam and Eve, to the fall of man as sin entered the world. The journey continued through Noah, the flood and the replenishing of the earth.

The Patriarch Era introduced us to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job. But it was Abraham with whom God made a covenant, a covenant that literally changed history. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, though he did not have any children. It was that covenant that started the journey of God’s people, the nation of Israel. It was Jacob (Abraham’s grandson) whose name was changed by an angel to “ Israel.” It was Jacob’s (Israel’s) sons that became the 12 tribes of Israel.

The Exodus Era introduced us to 400 years of slavery of God’s people. The nation of Israel was in bondage in Egypt for generations. It was during this Era that Moses entered the picture. Though of jewish descent he was raised as a Prince in Egypt. At the age of 40, Moses had to flee after killing an Egyptian and spent the next 40 years of his life in the Midian desert and wilderness. During this time he was married, raised a family and became a shepherd tending the sheep of his father-in-law.

But at the age of 80, Moses encountered God through a burning bush that changed his life forever. It was during this encounter that Moses was called to be the leader and deliverer of the Israelites out of Egypt. Ten plagues followed, the last of which introduced the Passover which continued to be remembered and celebrated all the way to the days of Jesus, and even to this day.

It was also during the Exodus Era that the disobedience of God’s people led to them wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses never got to set foot in the Promised Land

The Conquest Era introduced us to Joshua, Caleb and Rahab. Joshua took over as the leader of the Israelites. It was a challenging but victorious time for God's people as they fought battle after battle to take that which God had promised them. And God was with them every step of the way.

The Judges Era was challenging in different ways. The nation of Israel decided to do what was "*right in their own eyes,*" which never ends well. They got caught up in what is often referred to as the Sin Cycle. They would be close to God and then they would sin and rebel falling away from God. Then, after their disobedience led them further and further from God, they would get so low and depressed that they would cry out to God in confession and repentance. God in His goodness and mercy would hear their cry, forgive them and bless them again. They would get close to God again, for a while, and then the cycle would start over again. It happened almost every 40 years, time and time again.

It was during the Judges Era that Israel, as a nation, decided they wanted an earthly king "*like all the other nations.*" God desired to be their King, but God allowed them to have what they desired rather than what God desired.

The Kingdom Era introduced us to Saul as the first King of Israel. He was the King the people wanted, not the King God wanted. But God allowed the people to have the King they chose, and it didn't go well.

During the Kingdom Era we are introduced to the second King of Israel, David, a man after God's own heart. Though he was God's man, he was not perfect and his imperfection led to family difficulties, adultery, deception, murder, and more. Through it all, David never departed from God and was remorseful and repentant. His journey is well documented as David was responsible for writing 75 of the 150 Psalms we have in our Bible.

David was a King that wanted to serve and please God. His dream and desire were to build a permanent structure, the Temple in Jerusalem for God and the Ark of the Covenant. Because he was a man of war, God did not want David to build the Temple, rather God wanted David's son, Solomon, whose name means peace and who reigned as the third King of Israel to build the Temple. Solomon did build the Temple and became the richest and wisest of all men. Solomon wrote Proverbs, the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes.

Israel had three Kings that somehow, somehow kept Israel united. But it was the fourth King that would change all of that. Today we enter the next era: The Divided Kingdom.

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM ERA

Much of the power struggle, personality struggle, economic struggle and religious struggle that we will be reading and studying over the next several weeks could literally be today's headlines in any newspaper in this country or any other country in the world.

The Divided Kingdom Era reminds us of the relevancy of scripture, almost daring us to look in the mirror at ourselves as a society, as a church, and as Christ Followers.

When Solomon, the third King of Israel died, the Nation of Israel (being comprised of the 12 Tribes of Israel) was united. Though the 12 Tribes naturally fell into Northern regions and Southern regions, nevertheless, it was a United Kingdom.

Solomon's son Rehoboam was to be the fourth King of Israel. Rehoboam was born into royalty and privilege. He also had enormous pressure to continue in the footsteps of his grandfather David and father Solomon.

Ironically his name, Rehoboam means "people enlarged or increasing the people"; which you would think meant that the Kingdom would grow. However, the opposite happened in that the land was reduced from 12 tribes to only 2 tribes (Judah and Benjamin) which would become the Southern Kingdom, known only as Judah. We begin today's lesson in 1 Kings Chapter 12:

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

1 Kings 12: 1 *And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. (Chronological Bible pg. 665; June 8)*

In a monarchy, the throne continues through the bloodline. Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, the grandson of David. This verse seems very natural to the point that there should not be any objection whatsoever from anyone. Everyone expected Rehoboam to be King.

"For all Israel had gone to Shechem to make (Rehoboam) King."

Shechem is a significant place and a good choice for such an occasion as the coronation of a King. Shechem is the place God used in the life of Abraham, who built a tent and altar there after receiving his first divine promise from God. Shechem is also significant in the life of Jacob as

well as the location where Jacob's son, Joseph was buried. In fact, in the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges scripture refers to Shechem as hallowed above other cities. So, this location was significant during the Patriarch Era, Exodus Era, Conquest Era, and Judges Era. Now in the Divided Kingdom Era, Shechem is being used as the place to inaugurate the fourth King of Israel; or at least that is as it appears in 1 Kings 12:1 and what the people expected. However, expect the unexpected.

Then we come to the first three words of verse 2; "So it happened..." Thus enters another leader into the picture.

1 Kings 12: 2 *So it happened, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard it (he was still in Egypt, for he had fled from the presence of King Solomon and had been dwelling in Egypt),³ that they sent and called him. Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying,⁴ "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you."* (Chronological Bible pg. 665; June 8)

On one hand we have Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and grandson of David; part of the bloodline of the monarchy; the expected. On the other hand, we have Jeroboam who was a leader in the court of Solomon, trusted and hardworking; though not part of the bloodline of the monarchy; the unexpected.

WHO IS JEROBOAM?

Jeroboam had been a trusted leader under Solomon, helping him build the Temple and establish his wealth and lifestyle. But towards the end of Solomon's life, Jeroboam began to turn in a different direction. To understand something that Rehoboam was unaware of, look at 1 Kings 11:28 and following. (Teachers, you may want to just use this for your own information or telling the story rather than reading all the verses)

1 Kings 11: 28 *The man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor; and Solomon, seeing that the young man was industrious, made him the officer over all the labor force of the house of Joseph.²⁹ Now it happened at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite met him on the way; and he had clothed himself with a new garment, and the two were alone in the field.³⁰ Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces.³¹ And he said to Jeroboam,*

“Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you ³² but he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. (Chronological Bible pg. 650; June 5)

Solomon had trusted Jeroboam and put him in a position of leadership, but there was a prophet name Ahijah who confronted Jeroboam with a prophecy. Solomon did not like the thought of having the United Kingdom of Israel divided and he sought to kill Jeroboam.

1 Kings 11: 40 *Solomon, therefore, sought to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. (Chronological Bible pg. 650; June 5)*

In Chapter 12 we see the Prince, Rehoboam ready to be crowned King, but we also see Jeroboam enter the picture from Egypt, knowing something no one else seems to know; a division is about to happen.

NEGATIVE WORDS PLANT SEEDS OF DOUBT

The first words out of the mouth of Jeroboam were negative words about the former King, Solomon; Rehoboam’s father and Jeroboam’s former boss.

This is no different than what we go through every 4-8 years when a President is elected. The people begin talking either very negatively about how it was left by the “other” guy; or they plead for change, relief, lower taxes, higher pay, etc. These things are part of both monarchies and democracies. Both are made up of human beings living in a fallen world chasing after worldly dreams.

Jeroboam had become the mouthpiece of the people saying that Solomon was too hard of a leader, that the burden he put on the people was too heavy, and that now a break was needed. He asks of Rehoboam, “Can you, as the new King do this for us? Can you handle the position and responsibility?”

With these words, seeds of doubt are planted in both Rehoboam and the people of Israel.

In 2019 we are experiencing, perhaps like no other time in history, the power of the “mouthpieces” of the people, whether they are elected officials, media outlets, or conversations at the ballpark.

Though we are looking at the historical era of the Divided Kingdom, it is like we are looking in the mirror for our country. We are on the threshold of being a divided country (not a Kingdom). And any sort of division is not healthy in a scenario where there should be unity. (*Teachers: don't dwell in this area, but it is important to recognize the relevancy of where we are today based on this scripture.*) This is true for a country, a corporation, a state, a city, a church, a family, a marriage, and even a friendship.

There is nothing that Satan would like more than dividing that which is supposed to be united.

In reading these verses in this particular chapter, I can imagine the sadness and disappointment God must have had for His people.

These are the people that were promised to Abraham in the Patriarch Era. These are the people that Moses led out of bondage and slavery in Egypt during the Exodus Era. These are the people that Joshua led across the Jordan River into the Promised Land in the Conquest Era. These are the people that God continually forgave and restored in the Judges Era. These are the people that God had blessed in the Kingdom Era: a people that failed and struggled, yet remained united.

And now with the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was not just crumbling, but dividing into two very specific and non-equal Kingdoms.

WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

Look at how the story unfolds in the next verses:

Kings 12: 5 *So he (Rehoboam) said to them, "Depart for three days, then come back to me." And the people departed. ⁶ Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, "How do you advise me to answer these people?" ⁷ And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." (Chronological Bible pg. 665; June 8)*

Rehoboam is 41 years old when he is about to be crowned King. So, these "elders" who stood with his father were probably 65-85 years old. They had been around long enough to see how things worked and how people responded. You would hope that these elders were faithful to God in their walk, though we are not told specifically.

The advice they give is good, sound, reasonable advice. All Rehoboam had to do was listen to them and implement the advice, but that would be too easy.

1 Kings 12: 8 *But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. ⁹ And he said to them, “What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us’?” ¹⁰ Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, “Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us’—thus you shall say to them: ‘My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s waist! ¹¹ And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!’”* (Chronological Bible pg. 665; June 8)

The young men are those who grew up with him, so it means they were probably mid 30’s to mid 40’s in age. They are not just the kids, but these are the “peers” that he presumably has known all his life. More than likely they have been living a privileged life, as had Rehoboam. More than likely they were accustomed to having anything they wanted at any time; in today’s terminology they probably felt “entitled”.

We can sense their arrogance and audacity. They wanted Rehoboam to rule with an iron fist and maximize his power and position without thought of the people he would be leading.

Jeroboam and the people came back after the 3-day period to get the response of Rehoboam. And it was apparent that Rehoboam was listening to his peers and not the elders.

Notice what was left out in this entire process: God. Nowhere did anyone recommend prayer or fasting. No one recommended godly counsel from the priests. No one even suggested learning from the good and bad choices of David and Solomon. This decision was based on personal opinions with no regard to how God would lead or what God would desire.

Again, we have to look no further than a mirror, whether it be our country or ourselves to see what happens when we leave God out of the decision. We know what it is like to leave God out of our collective lives and personal lives. We know what it is like to leave God out of communities and relationships. Who do we listen to when faced with difficult challenges and decisions?

There was such potential and opportunity for Rehoboam to build and grow the nation of Israel as his name implied by its meaning. But the opposite happened.

A KINGDOM UNITED BECOMES DIVIDED

This was the decision that divided a Kingdom. The prophecy about Jeroboam came to pass.

Jeroboam would be the first king of the Northern Kingdom (called Israel). Rehoboam would be the first king of the Southern Kingdom (called Judah).

The Kingdom was officially divided.

The division would last generations and lead to captivity and exile in Babylon, losing everything they had known as a people and nation. And it all started here with this encounter between Rehoboam and Jeroboam; history in the making.

Rehoboam put together an army of 180,000 men who were warriors to fight the Northern Kingdom to take back those tribes and unite Israel once again. But there was a man of God that spoke on behalf of God telling him not to do it.

1 Kings 12:22 *But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, ²³ “Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, saying, ²⁴ ‘Thus says the LORD: “You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me.”’ “Therefore, they obeyed the word of the LORD, and turned back, according to the word of the LORD. (Chronological Bible pg. 667; June 8)*

Though this act of Rehoboam was obedience, sadly that was not what defined his reign as King. In fact, one verse sums up the reign of Rehoboam:

2 Chronicles 12:1 *Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him. (Chronological Bible pg. 671; June 9)*

Rehoboam was King of the Southern Kingdom, perhaps Jeroboam would do a better job as King of the Northern Kingdom? That is a bit optimistic. Suffice it to say that from the very beginning Jeroboam was jealous and insecure; never a good combination for a leader.

He felt insecure in that if the people of God made their way back to Jerusalem (which was part of the Southern Kingdom) they would realize what they had done and want to go back to being a part of the house of David (a name used in this chapter for a United Israel). So, Jeroboam did not want to let Rehoboam have his people be part of the Southern Kingdom, so he took action immediately.

1 Kings 12:27 *If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.”* ²⁸ *Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!”* ²⁹ *And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.*
(*Chronological Bible pg. 667; June 8*)

You can get a sense of jealousy and insecurity in these verses. He was not confident in what he had to offer as a King, so he didn't want his people to even be swayed by going back to Jerusalem. So, he created two golden calves. This is reminiscent of the Exodus Era in Exodus 32 when Aaron and the people of God make a golden calf and worshiped it instead of God. Then and now with Jeroboam, it was an idol that mocked God.

WORSHIP IS NOT ALWAYS CONVENIENT

As King he gives the appearance about being concerned for his people, not wanting them to have to travel all the way to Jerusalem. But it was in Jerusalem where the Temple was located that Solomon had built for God. It was in Jerusalem that the Ark of the Covenant was representing the presence of God. It was in Jerusalem where the Festivals and Feasts would take place honoring God. Choosing to Worship is not always convenient.

It would mean that they had to travel and make plans to go to Jerusalem. Not unlike what everyone did today in making plans to get dressed, get out of the house and into a car to drive here. You had to find a parking place and walk into this room. Worship was never designed to be convenient.

Worship was and is designed to honor and glorify God. Worship is for Him and we should be humbled to live in a country where we can get out of the house into a car, find a parking spot and walk freely into this building to Worship God.

There are going to be times where it is absolutely inconvenient because of weather, schedules, even apathy. But faithfulness should always override convenience.

Jeroboam neglected faithfulness to God in order to elevate convenience of what would be false worship of a false god. He took it to a level that took people away from God.

Look at what happens next:

1 Kings 12: 30 *Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. ³¹ He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. (Chronological Bible pg. 667; June 8)*

There is no way to camouflage what he did; it was sin. They forsook the Worship of the One True God for a golden calf because it was more convenient. Jeroboam as King led them astray from the very beginning making the division of the kingdom even greater.

Beyond false gods, he appointed priests that were not part of the tribe of Levi (the one tribe priests were to come from based on what God had said during the Exodus Era). Jeroboam completely disregarded the Word of God and opted for convenience once again, appointing basically anyone who wanted to be a priest, as a priest.

Once he started down this path, he never turned back to God.

1 Kings 13: 33 *But even after this, Jeroboam did not turn from his evil ways. He continued to choose priests from the common people. He appointed anyone who wanted to become a priest for the pagan shrines. ³⁴ This became a great sin and resulted in the utter destruction of Jeroboam's dynasty from the face of the earth. (NLT)*

THE SO WHAT FACTOR

So what does all this mean for us today? Look no further than the mirror for our country and ourselves. But today let's focus on ourselves.

- Do we settle for convenient Worship; maybe not as blatant as a golden calf that Jeroboam set up. But do we look for ways that would be easier for us to check the box pertaining to Worship or Bible Study?
- Do we settle for alternatives if not downright false gods to take the place of Worship and Bible Study?
- Summer is the perfect time to reconnect and recommit. This summer let it be an opportunity for you to make the effort and commitment to grow closer to God through prayer, Bible Study, and Worship.

The first steps to the Divided Kingdom were steps of convenience, made based on jealousy and insecurity. It led to a downfall that lasted generations.

God wants us to have united families, united marriages, united friendships, and even a united country. It can only happen if we make God our priority in each of those areas, not out of convenience, but out of obedience.

- **God Speaks** by establishing guidelines in relationships with others and Himself.
- **God Acts** by judging man's choices of convenience over obedience.
- **God Reveals** the consequences for decisions based on insecurity, jealousy, and disobedience - division of that which was designed to be united.

Resources:

www.workingpreacher.org—commentary on 1 Kings 12:1-17,25-29

The Wiersbe Bible Commentary OT

Chronological Life Application Study Bible