

# **God's Big Story: The Kingdom Divides**

## **I Kings 11-12**

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula  
at the West University Church of Christ,  
Houston, Texas, on February 5, 2012**

There's an old saying, "Man proposes but God disposes." We'll see that in our lesson today. God had built his people into a mighty nation through the kingship of David and Solomon. That kingdom stretched all the way from the Euphrates River in the east to the border of Egypt in the south. Saul had ruled for 40 years, David had ruled for 40 years and David's son Solomon ruled for 40 more. That's 120 years of the United Monarchy in Israel.

When Solomon became king at age 20, his aged Father David gave him some spiritual instructions. Listen to what David told him: [read I Kings 2:1-4]. Solomon loved the Lord his God [3:3]. Solomon was a mighty man of wisdom, wealth, and building.

God had appeared twice to Solomon. The first time was when he was 23 years and God said that he would give him anything he wanted. Solomon asked for a wise and understanding heart so that he would know how to lead the Lord's people. God gave him that plus much, much more. Solomon's spent seven years building the temple of the Lord. When Solomon dedicated the temple of the Lord, the Lord appeared to him again. At this time Solomon spoke about the necessity and blessings of obeying the Lord and the curses and consequences of disobeying the Lord. Solomon then bowed before the Lord and prayed. Then the Bible says, [read 8:56-61].

Next, Solomon spent 13 more years building his own palace. Solomon had spent 20 years on these magnificent building projects. To do all this work, Solomon had conscripted 183,000 men to build the temple of the Lord, his own personal palace, and fortresses around the country. Solomon needed money to operate his kingdom and to do all this building so he inflicted heavy taxes on the people.

The reign of Solomon could have been far greater and more glorious than that of his father David but it was not because of one thing: Solomon forget the Lord. Somewhere in the middle of Solomon's reign of 40 years,

he began to love foreign women and to worship their gods. Here's what the Bible says [read 11:1-8].

Solomon was living in direct disobedience to the will of God. Solomon knew what God said. His father some 25 years before had given him plain instructions about following the Lord. At age 30 when he completed the temple of the Lord, he spoke strongly to the people about obeying God and worshiping him only. But now, in his later years, he is living in direct and flagrant disobedience to God. Solomon had so many advantages and opportunities: he had wealth, wisdom, power, influence, and the support of his people. Most of all, he had the presence and the power of God blessing his life.

Solomon is both the greatest wise man in the Bible and he is also the greatest fool in the Bible. Solomon is violating the first two great commandments of God: "You shall no other gods before me," and "You shall not make any graven image to form a likeness of God."

Even though Solomon is the son of David, a man after God's own heart, and God had appeared to him twice, and he was king of one of the mightiest and richest nations on earth, God did not overlook his sin. Listen to God's reaction to Solomon's sins: [read 11:9-13].

God says he will tear the kingdom apart because of Solomon's sin. Sin always carries a heavy price tag. Not even the king of Israel can sin without facing the consequences. The Bible says, "Whatever a person sows, that will he reap" (Gal. 6:8). Solomon sowed to the wind and reaped the whirlwind.

God says that he will tear the kingdom away from Solomon and give it to one of his subordinates. God allows Solomon's family dynasty to remain with one tribe because of his promise to David to build him a great and perpetual dynasty. This destruction of the United Kingdom will occur when Solomon dies.

God raised up adversaries that were a threat to Solomon and his rule. One of them was an industrious worker and foreman of some of Solomon's building projects named Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim. The prophet of God Ahijah met Jeroboam and took a new cloak and tore it into twelve pieces, one piece for each tribe of Israel. He gave ten pieces to Jeroboam signifying that Jeroboam would rule over ten tribes in a separate kingdom. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, would remain together and preserve the Davidic dynasty.

The reason for this division was not political, social or economic. The reason was strictly spiritual. Ahijah explained this in 11:33 [read the verse].

Ahijah also told Jeroboam that God would be with him and build his kingdom if he obeyed and served God [read 11:38].

This makes it very clear that obedience to God brings blessings and disobedience to God brings curses. Solomon himself had written in the Proverbs: “Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.”

Some way Solomon found out that Jeroboam was going to be given leadership in the new kingdom so Solomon tried to kill him (11:40). Jeroboam fled to Egypt to escape from Solomon. This shows how far Solomon had fallen from being a man concerned about truth and righteousness. Instead of repenting and turning to God, Solomon instead becomes determined and hardened in his departure from God.

Solomon died at the age of sixty. He had reigned forty years from 970 B.C. to 930 B. C. Solomon’s only son, Rehoboam, now age 41, succeeded him.

Rehoboam went to the middle of the country to a historically-famous city called Shechem which was in the center of the territory of Ephraim. Jeroboam had heard that Solomon was dead so the Ephraimites had recalled him from Egypt to help present their grievances to Rehoboam. The people pled with Rehoboam to lighten up, to lower their taxes and their force labor. Taking a cue from today’s politics, you might say this was the “original Tea party.” Solomon’s building programs and heavy taxes had extracted strength and spirit from the people. They were tired of heavy-handed, autocratic power and asked Rehoboam to give them some relief. Rehoboam listened and told them that in three days he would give them an answer.

Rehoboam asked the older men of the people what to do and the older men unanimously said, “Yes! Lighten up. Your father was way too hard on us. If you will make it easier on the people, they will serve you forever.”

The elders are asking Rehoboam to be a servant leader, that is, one who cares about his people and does whatever he can to help them. David was this kind of leader, so was Moses, Joshua, and Samuel. Jesus, the son of God, taught us the greatest is the one who serves. Jesus serves us. He washed the disciples’ dirty feet, he listened to their stories and met their needs, and he cared about the poor, the women, the children, the widows, the sinful and the disenfranchised. Jesus did not come into the world to be served, but to serve.

Rehoboam showed that he is unfit to be king when he rejected this advice. He went to some of his contemporaries, cronies of his that were about his age and who formed his inner circle of friends. He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me,

‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us’?” Rehoboam’s friends answered contemptuously with little ditties, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. My father put a heavy yoke on you; I am going to make it heavier. He whipped you with whips; I am going to whip you with metal-spiked leather lashes.” These counselors did not care about the people. They said, “Get tough. A strong show of force is all that these people will listen to. Show them who’s in charge.”

Rehoboam accepted this arrogant, selfish, cruel advice and three days later he told the people this. Rehoboam is soon to find out that we make our decisions and our decisions make us.

Rehoboam did not seek the council of God. The Bible says that if we lack wisdom we should ask of God and he will give it to us liberally (James 1:5). As believers today, we need to give diligence to listen to God.

Naturally, the people were highly incensed and insulted that the king would be so obstinate and mean. They immediately rejected him from being their king. They all got mad and said, “Let’s go home!” Stupidly, the king wanted to enforce his rules so he sent out Adoniram who had been in charge of forced labor to get the job done. The people stoned Adoniram to death and would have come after Rehoboam, too, but he quickly escaped in his chariot to head back to safety in Jerusalem and Judah. The tribe of Ephraim and the tribes in the north immediately called Jeroboam and made him their new king.

Rehoboam did not listen to the wise council of the older people. He acted like some church leaders who think that the church is theirs instead of God’s. They strong handedly enforce their decisions as though they are “little tin gods” (J. B. Phillips translation in I Peter 5:2). They want what they want and are willing to do whatever they can to get it, regardless of the consequences. Of course, there are people who act like this in education, business, law, medicine, and probably every other area of life.

Once safely back in Jerusalem, Rehoboam quickly called together an army of 180,000 men to go fight the northern tribes. However, God sent a prophet to tell Rehoboam not to do that [read 11:24]. God said, “This is my doing.” These four words stopped Rehoboam from initiating war that could have led to a terrible devastation. God said, “This is my doing.” Here God’s sovereignty and man’s free will interacted. God knew what was going to happen but his decree used Rehoboam’s arrogant egotism and stubbornness. Rehoboam was responsible for his pride and his sin. God’s foreknowledge did not eliminate man’s responsibility.

The main thing to see here is God’s faithfulness. Man is unfaithful to God but God remains faithful to his promises. God made a commitment that

David's dynasty would never be destroyed but that a king from his lineage would sit upon his throne. God will keep his word without or without Rehoboam's obedience and cooperation. It would be better for Rehoboam if he would work with God but if he will not then God will still continue to keep his promises to David.

The fulfillment of God's promise to David that his light would never go out is fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, who is the Light of the World. The first verse of the N.T. calls Jesus the son of David, meaning that he is the descendant of David. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the apostles preached that upon Jesus' ascension into heaven that he began reigning and ruling from David's spiritual throne in heaven.

Jesus promised, "I will build my church. The gates of Hades will never overcome it." Jesus did not say, "I hope to build my church," or, "I might build my church." He said, "I will build my church." The promise of Jesus is nonnegotiable. He is building a church for all races, all colors, and all nationalities. Jesus is building this church with or without me, and with or without you.

You and I can harm the image of the church by ungodly attitudes and sinful actions but we cannot stop the building of the church. God is building his church, with or without us. God will accomplish his mission of bringing all people into a relationship with him through Christ and with one another in the church. I had much rather be used by God because of what I do for him rather than in spite of my disobedience.

Now the people of God were formally and really divided. The ten tribes in the north became known as the Kingdom of Israel and the two tribes in the south became known as the Kingdom of Judah.

In the north, Jeroboam wanted to solidify his leadership and the commitment of the people to him. He was afraid that if Israel went south into Judah to worship at the temple and to observe the feast days God had commanded through Moses that they would want to be reunited with Judah. So Jeroboam set up his own religion, a religion of convenience and popular appeal. He had his own priests, his own places of worship, his own days of worship and his own way of worship. He set up two golden calves and said to Israel, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." That is exactly what Aaron said at Sinai some four hundred before when he made the golden calf to worship. This was a clear violation of the first two commandments, "You shall no other gods before me," and "You shall not make unto you any graven image."

In the 1920s and 30s in this country when prohibition was the law of the land, people were known to make their own whiskey and sell it. They

were known as bootleggers. They operated outside the law and even set up their own laws. Spiritually, that is what Jeroboam did. He started his own religion with his own priests, his own places of worship, and his own ways of worship. He fathered what I call “bootleg religion.” This religion came out of his mind. The Bible says this originated when “Jeroboam thought to himself” (v. 26). Instead of listening to God, he did things “of his own choosing” (12:33). Worship will either follow God’s divine prescription or it will follow our own preferences.

There is still much bootleg religion in our world today. Under our constitutional laws, anyone anywhere can start any kind of religion they want to. They can write their own rules and mentally shape their own gods and make it so appealing to the masses. For example, Mormonism is one of the largest churches in America. Mormonism is represented by celebrities, athletes, television personalities, government leaders, and presidential candidates. Their ads with loving families are very appealing. Yet their theology is the worst of heresies. The Mormon doctrine states that Jesus is the son of a literal, physical sexual union between God and Mary and that Satan, Lucifer, is the brother of Jesus Christ. They also teach that Jesus celebrated his own marriage to Mary and Martha. This is “bootleg religion” in the likes of Jeroboam.

Things were really not any different in Judah, even though they had the Levitical priests, the temple, and the correct days of worship. The Bible tells us what happened in Judah during Rehoboam’s reign: [read I Kings 14:22-24]. Rehoboam ruled in Judah for 17 years and he died at the age of 58 and his son succeeded him as king.

Up north in Israel, Jeroboam reigned for 22 years and he was succeeded by his son. Jeroboam’s life was that of an ambitious and greedy opportunist. He would go to any ends to get his own way, ignoring God and his ways in the process.

The rest of I and II Kings is story of the kings who followed in Judah and Israel. Over the years, the tribes competed with one another and at times, warred against each other and sought to destroy each other. There were 19 kings in Judah: two were righteous (Hezekiah and Josiah), eight were mediocre or mixed with good and evil, and 9 were wicked. There were 20 kings in Israel and all of them were wicked. Not a righteous king among them. Of all 19 successive kings following Jeroboam, it is said of each of them that he “walked in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who led Israel to sin.” Because of Israel’s sins, God raised up the pagan Assyrians to the east who conquered them in 721 B.C. and carried them away into captivity. They were lost in history, never to return. The southern kingdom

of Judah lasted until 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered them, burned the temple, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, and carried thousands of them into captivity to Babylon, 500 plus miles to the east. The people of God were subjugated for some 70 years before finally being allowed to return to their homeland.

All during the 209 years of the Kingdom of Israel and the 345 years of the Kingdom of Judah, God sent prophets to them to reveal God's word, point out the people's sins, and urge them to repent. God promised them hope and better days ahead. The writings or stories of some of these prophets are found in the five books of Major Prophets and 12 books of Minor Prophets in our O.T. The stories of other influential prophets like Elijah and Elisha are found in books of Kings.

The sins of Solomon brought about the destruction of the United Monarchy. This tragic division forever changed the history of the Jewish people. The sins of Solomon in the last fifteen years of his reign brought about a division that lasted hundreds of years, even until the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, in the first century of our common era. The arrogant, high-mindedness and self-will of Rehoboam was the catalyst that ignited the rebellion. Following this, there was four hundred years of strife, weakness, and eventually, the destruction of the entire nation.

This shows the power of sin to wreck and destroy for generations to come. In 1837, in the Dakotas of our country a small pox epidemic broke out among the white traders on the boat "St. Peters." While the boat was docked at Fort Clark, a Mandan Indian chief stole a blanket from an infected deck hand. Officers tried to obtain the blanket by offering a new one but the chief refused. He insisted on keeping "his" blanket. In about three days the Mandans began to get sick. Things progressed until hundreds were dying each day. Some of them preferred suicide. When all was over, only thirty Mandans remained of a tribe numbering 1, 700. All because a blanket was stolen. That's how sin works in our lives, too.

Sin in your lives today will not only affect you now, and those around you now, but will also affect your children and can affect your grandchildren for generations to come.

Likewise, serving God will affect your children, grandchildren and generations to come. I urge you today to let God's will be your will, and his way your way. You can begin that today by accepting Jesus the Christ as the divine son of God. He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He is God's way to man and man's way to God. He died on the cross as a sacrificial offering for your sins and God raised him from the dead to give you eternal life. He came that you might have life and have it more

abundantly, life now and life eternal with God. He invites you to come to him and receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Come now, while we stand and sing.

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