

September 6, 2026 (Lesson 1)

KINGDOM OF ISRAEL DIVIDED

1. **Why the Kingdom Was Divided** (1 Kings 11:1-13)
2. **King Rehoboam's Folly** (1 Kings 11:42-12:14)
3. **King Rehoboam's Loss** (1 Kings 12:15-24)

Central Truth: Arrogance, injustice, and lust for power cause division.

Focus: Consider the far-reaching consequences of foolish decisions and choose godly counsel.

Evangelism Emphasis: A life committed to Jesus Christ is the wisest decision anyone can make.

Golden Text: "Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished" (Ecclesiastes 4:13).

We begin a study of one of the most tragic periods in the history of ancient Israel. This period followed the rule of three kings—Saul, David, and Solomon. For 120 years, the people of Israel were united as one nation. (These three kings each ruled for forty years.) Under David and during the early reign of Solomon, the Israelites experienced their golden age. They were victorious in battle. They expanded their borders. They were prosperous and thriving. They built a glorious temple to honor and worship the Lord. In every way, God blessed them. But as Solomon aged, he turned from a pure heart and pure worship. The king who had built a magnificent temple to honor the one true God turned to idols and built shrines to honor the gods of the surrounding nations.

As a result of Solomon's infidelity, the judgment of God came upon the land and the people. What should have been a royal dynasty lasting for ages was torn away from Solomon's family, and the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms. The southern kingdom was called *Judah*, and its 19 kings were all descendants of David. Judah endured for about three hundred years. The northern kingdom was called *Israel*. It also had 19 kings, but from various tribes and families. Israel followed other gods, especially Baal and the gods of the Canaanites. This kingdom lasted about two hundred years before facing ultimate destruction.

1. WHY THE KINGDOM WAS DIVIDED

A. Solomon's Unfaithful Heart (1 Kings 11:1-8)

¹ But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites: ² Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.

Why did Solomon rebel against God and worship false gods? In many ways, this is hard to understand. Solomon was considered the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 4:29-31). He was given wisdom by God (3:12). He had knowledge of many things in the natural world (4:33), and he could quickly perceive situations and render incisive decisions (3:27-28). He also understood how to live righteously in obedience to God's laws. The Hebrew word for "wisdom" is *chokma*. It is derived from a root referring to craftsmanship, such as the ability to make pottery or do woodwork. It indicated skilled ability. So, we could say *wisdom (chokma)* means "skill at living well." It is the ability to know right and to live well by doing right.

Yet, Solomon failed to apply this lifestyle wisdom to his own life. Why? The Scripture gives one reason: The influence of his pagan wives led him astray (1 Kings 11:4). First, he acted in disobedience to God's instructions for kings not to marry foreign wives (v. 2; Deut. 7:3-4). Like many kings throughout history, Solomon probably married most of his wives to form political alliances (1 Kings 3:1). As practical as this may have seemed politically, it obviously contradicted God's Word. Then, having married women from other lands, Solomon sought to please them by erecting temples for their gods (11:7-8). Eventually, these temples went from being places for his wives to worship to places where Solomon himself worshiped. This illustrates the dangers of other people's influence. We must be careful about how friends, family, and peers can impact our lives. As Paul noted, "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33 NASB).

While Solomon's idolatrous wives influenced him to rebel against God, we can speculate about other factors that influenced him. Solomon likely penned Ecclesiastes in his old age. In this rather pessimistic book, the elderly, wiser king reflects on his life. He describes how he tried a wide variety of things to give meaning to his life. He tried building projects, seeking wealth, living for pleasure, and striving for success (2:3-10). Perhaps his running after other gods was yet another attempt to inject purpose into his life. But it was a dead-end pursuit. Indeed, his attempts to find fulfillment in this world were to no avail. All of these various pursuits were "vanity"—empty and meaningless (v. 11). He concluded by saying meaning and purpose are found in this: "Fear God, and keep his commandments" (12:13). If Solomon had only followed his own wise counsel in this matter!

Solomon's sin was blatant. He actively disobeyed God and worshiped false gods. Indeed, two of the gods he honored, Chemosh and Molech, were reprehensible (1 Kings 11:7). People worshiped these gods by sacrificing children to their idols—no wonder the judgment of God was soon to follow.

Warning Ignored

Roger Boisjoly was an engineer who worked for a company under contract with NASA. In 1986, Boisjoly tried to stop the launch of the *Challenger* space shuttle. He warned that the elastic seals in the booster rockets would not function in cold weather. Yet, the consensus of everyone at NASA was that the seals were fine. Ignoring the good advice of this one man resulted in one of the most tragic accidents in American history—the explosive destruction of the *Challenger*.

B. The Lord's Decree (1 Kings 11:9-13)

¹¹ Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

¹² Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.

Solomon was guilty of multiple transgressions of God's law. The Lord did not ignore these sins. Rather, "the Lord became angry with Solomon" (1 Kings 11:9 NKJV). Before this, God had twice appeared to Solomon (v. 9). The first time was at Gibeon at the beginning of his reign, when Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule the Israelites (3:5). The second appearance was at the dedication of the temple, when the Lord promised Solomon blessings and declared David's line would rule over Israel forever (9:1-5). However, the promised favor of God was conditional on Solomon following in the ways of his father, David, and serving only the one true God (3:14; 9:4-5). God specifically commanded him not to worship other gods (9:6, 9). Thus, Solomon not only had the Law of Moses for guidance, including the Ten Commandments which prohibited idolatry, but he also had a specific word from God himself to not follow after false gods.

Yet Solomon rejected both the written word of the Lord and the commands given to him in divine visions (11:10). As a consequence, God said He would tear the kingdom away from Solomon (v. 11). As noted above, it had been the Lord's intent to establish a sacred dynasty of the descendants of David. Solomon was the beginning of this dynasty. And Solomon and his sons were to rule over Israel forever (see 1 Chron. 22:9-10). Now this promise was forfeited. God would "rend" (tear away) the kingdom from Solomon.

Even while pronouncing divine judgment, the Lord showed mercy. First, He spared Solomon the agony of seeing this happen in his lifetime. God said He would delay the division of the kingdom until Solomon's son began to reign (1 Kings 11:12). The Lord also promised He would not

take every tribe away from Solomon's family. Solomon, as a member of the tribe of Judah, would naturally expect this tribe to serve his son. God said He would also give him the tribe of Benjamin, who followed Solomon's son and became part of the kingdom of Judah (12:21). In all this, God preserved the line of David through the southern kingdom (see 11:36).

§ *In 1 Kings 11:30-31, how is the word "tear" again used in reference to Solomon and Israel?*

2. KING REHOBAM'S FOLLY

A. Contradictory Advice (1 Kings 11:42-43; 12:1-11)

12:1 And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. ² And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) ³ That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, ⁴ Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. ⁵ And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.

⁸ But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him.

Solomon could have left a righteous legacy. Instead, there now loomed over the nation the impending judgment of God. Upon Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam became king (1 Kings 11:43). At first, the people of Israel gathered to acknowledge Rehoboam as the rightful heir. This was consistent with the pattern of validating previous kings, such as Saul (1 Sam. 11:15) and David (2 Sam. 5:1-3). However, the people gathered in Shechem, which is significant. Shechem was an ancient city, located within the territory of Ephraim, about thirty miles north of Jerusalem. There, Israel's covenant with God was affirmed during the time of Joshua (Josh. 24:25). To hold such a convocation away from Jerusalem, David's royal capital, and in a northern tribe, probably indicated the people's mood. There always had been some reluctance on the part of the northern tribes to accept the rule of kings from the south. They were cautiously open to Rehoboam's rulership but would do so only under certain conditions.

Solomon's reign had been glorious. He built fabulous buildings and created a vast governmental structure. But even in ancient times, public buildings and government bureaucracies cost a lot of money. Solomon had required forced labor from the people (1 Kings 5:13) and taxed them heavily (4:21-23, 26-28). The people described the heavy burden they carried as a "yoke" (12:4). The image is of the instrument placed on the necks of oxen as they plowed. It was often used to describe oppression, affliction, or even bondage. The people desired relief after suffering hardship under Solomon. Their condition for acknowledging Rehoboam as king was for him to lighten the burden of taxes and forced labor. Rehoboam listened but put off the decision for three days, to consult with others.

He first consulted with the older leaders of Israel—men who had served under his father (v. 6). These were seasoned veterans of government service. Their advice was to agree to the people's wishes. They advised Rehoboam to act as a servant leader (v. 7). They saw this as an opportunity for Rehoboam to establish a relationship with his subjects built on respect and trust.

However, Rehoboam had an authoritative attitude about his role as king. He quickly rejected the advice of the elders. This was not only a reflection of the king's lack of character, but showed his disregard for Israelite culture and law, in which elders were to be respected and their counsel heeded (see Lev. 19:32; Job 12:12; Prov. 16:31). He then turned to younger counselors (1 Kings 12:8). These were men who had grown up with him (his "buddies"). They are called men who "stood before him," thus men whom he had quickly put in administrative positions as soon as he ascended the throne. They were not young people, but they were younger in comparison to the elders. Rehoboam was forty-one when he became king (14:21), so these men were probably about the same age.

Their advice was to reject the people's appeal for relief. They advised Rehoboam to say, "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist!" (12:10 NKJV). This was apparently a reference to an ancient proverb. The words indicated he was mightier than his father, and would be more severe in dealing with the people. He should promise an even heavier yoke, a greater burden of taxes and labor. Whereas Solomon used "whips" to force the people to work, Rehoboam should use "scorpions" (v. 11)—either the stings of actual scorpions or spiked lashes that inflicted severe pain. Whatever Solomon had done, Rehoboam would be more severe.

The Worst Enemy

No enemy is worse than bad advice.—Sophocles

B. Foolish Decision (1 Kings 12:12-14)

¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. ¹³ And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;

¹⁴ And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, 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.

On the third day, the people of Israel returned, led by Jeroboam, a former high official in Solomon's administration. Rehoboam followed the counsel of the younger court officials, quoting them word for word. He promised hardship instead of leniency, oppression instead of relief. In this, he displayed the character of a despot, not a servant leader. This was in contradiction to God's intent for Israel's kings. Theirs was to be a covenantal relationship, based on God's Law and entered into mutually for the benefit of the ruler and the people (see Deut. 17:14-20). A king was not to be "lifted up above his brethren" (v. 20). This covenantal relationship is what happened when Samuel anointed Saul as king (1 Sam. 10:24-25). Likewise, David entered into covenant with the Israelites as he began his reign (2 Sam. 5:1-3). The people of Israel were also involved with Solomon's coronation (1 Kings 1:38-40).

The covenantal nature between ruler and ruled is the basis for the concept of *Lex Rex*, that is, "Law is king." This principle is traced to Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish preacher of the 1600s who wrote a book titled *Lex Rex*. He asserted that kings are subject to the law, and only rule with the consent of the governed. This idea was foundational in the development of Western democratic ideals. Much of the freedom we enjoy today is grounded in the Biblical concept that all people are created equal, and equally subject to the Law of God.

Thus, when Rehoboam took this stance, he was not only rejecting the pleas of his own people—those God intended him to serve and rule over with compassion—but he also rejected the Law given to Moses in Deuteronomy 17. The foolishness of this rash and reckless decision became immediately apparent. The king and all of Israel suffered the consequences of Rehoboam's selfish choice.

§ *As Christians, how can we distinguish wise counsel from bad advice?*

3. KING REHOBOAM'S LOSS

A. Nation Divided (1 Kings 12:15-19)

¹⁶ So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. ¹⁷ But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

¹⁹ So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

The response of the people was immediate. “All Israel”—the ten northern tribes—decided on the spot to reject Rehoboam as their king. Their refusal to serve Rehoboam united them. They chose to leave Shechem, saying, “To your tents, O Israel” (v. 16). They also cast off any allegiance to the house of David. The only members of the ten northern tribes who would live under Rehoboam’s authority were those who had already made their home in Judah (v. 17). In his arrogance, Rehoboam thought he could squelch this uprising. Adoram (also called *Adoniram*) was the official in charge of forced labor. He had served Solomon in this capacity for many years (4:6). The king ordered him to get the situation under control. This action demonstrated both the arrogance and foolishness of Rehoboam. He tried to use the official who was in charge of forced labor to pacify the people protesting against forced labor. In an angry and violent response, the people stoned Adoram (12:18). What a sad ending for a senior official who had been in public service for years!

Seeing what happened to Adoram, Rehoboam feared for his life, so he fled to Jerusalem. From that day forward, the northern tribes lived in rebellion against the southern kings and the household of David. For centuries afterward, the Israelites lived as two nations, two kingdoms: the southern kingdom of Judah (consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), and the northern kingdom of Israel (consisting of the rest of the tribes).

As tragic as this situation was, it was still within the sovereign working of the Lord. As noted in 1 Kings 12:15, this “turn of events” was “from the Lord” (NKJV). It fulfilled a prophecy made to Solomon (11:11) and a prophecy given to the prophet Ahijah (vv. 29-39). As Isaiah 46:10 says, He is the Lord “declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times [the] things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (NKJV). While God did not approve of the stubbornness of Rehoboam, or the northern tribes’ rebelliousness, He worked through the situation to accomplish His will.

Power Lost

Rebellion, and the disobedience it causes, keeps us from having the power of God that’s available to us as Christians.—Joyce Meyer

B. Civil War Averted (1 Kings 12:20-24)

²¹ And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon.

²⁴ Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the Lord, and returned to depart, according to the word of the Lord.

King Solomon experienced a peaceful reign until God’s judgment came on him because of his sins. God raised up enemies to rebel against him (1 Kings 11:14, 23). One of these was Jeroboam, a valiant warrior whom Solomon had promoted to a prominent position (v. 28). But Jeroboam

rebelled against Solomon. As a result, Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam. So he fled to Egypt to escape (v. 40), living there until after Solomon's death.

As the northern tribes prepared to meet with Rehoboam at Shechem, they sent for Jeroboam (12:3). He became part of the assembly that gathered to confront the king with their demands. When Israel rebelled against Rehoboam, Jeroboam was acclaimed as king of Israel (v. 20). Note that he is said to be king "over all Israel," perhaps indicating that the northern tribes claimed they were the true people of Israel. Of course, this was a rebellion not only against the house of David but against the Lord, since God had established David and his family as the legitimate rulers of God's people.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Rehoboam decided to quell the rebellion. He gathered troops from Judah and Benjamin. Benjamin was included as the one tribe that God gave to Solomon's son besides Judah (see 11:13). The king marshaled 180,000 fighting men. But before Rehoboam could begin his campaign, the Lord sent him a message by the prophet Shemaiah (12:22). God commanded the army to stand down and not fight (v. 24). He expressly said what happened had come from the Lord himself. This is consistent with what we saw previously in verse 15. You may note Shemaiah is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. He wrote a history of the reign of Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:15). Another prophecy given to him is found in 2 Chronicles 12:5-8.

Despite his haughty attitude, Rehoboam did heed this word from the man of God. The troops from Judah and Benjamin left and went home. Thus, a full-scale civil war was averted. This would have been a bloody and disastrous affair, pitting Israelite against Israelite. Although in years to come there would be battles and skirmishes between the two kingdoms, there was never an all-out civil war.

§ *Does God still use individuals to speak prophetic warnings? If so, how do we know when a warning is from God?*

THE WISEST DECISION

Our lives are ruled by our decisions. This is illustrated clearly in the accounts of the kings who came after David. Solomon began his reign seeking wisdom. God blessed him abundantly with wealth, power, and prestige. Yet, he squandered the blessings of God and made foolish choices. For political convenience, he married foreign women and ended up worshiping their gods. This resulted in God pronouncing judgment on him. His son, Rehoboam, could have listened to wise and godly counsel, but he chose to reject it in favor of what was convenient for his own proud agenda. As a result, his kingdom was divided, and he was left with only Judah and Benjamin to rule.

The wisest and most profitable decision we can make in life is to submit to God, follow Him wholeheartedly, and live in obedience to His Word.