

### The Division of the United Kingdom of Israel

#### 1 Kings 12:1-24

1 Kings 12:1-24 – *“And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. 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), that they sent and called him. Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘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.’ So he said to them, ‘Depart for three days, then come back to me.’ And the people departed.*

*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?’ 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.’ 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. 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?”*

*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! 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!’”*

*So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had directed, saying, “Come back to me the third day.” Then the king answered the people roughly, and rejected the advice which the elders had given him; and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!” So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word that He had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.*

*Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: “What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!” So Israel departed to their tents. But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of the revenue; but all Israel stoned him with stones, and he died. Therefore King Rehoboam mounted his chariot in haste to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.*

*Now it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had come back, they sent for him and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.*

*And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came to Shemaiah, the man of God, saying, "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, '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."*

## **Background Notes**

The United Kingdom of Israel under Kings Saul, David and Solomon lasted from 1051BC to 931BC - 120 years. 1 Kings 11 ended with, *"Then Solomon rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place."* But in chapter 12 a division of the kingdom took place.

King Rehoboam, Solomon's son, went from Jerusalem to Shechem to be crowned as king over all Israel (v1). Shechem was closer to the center of the land than Jerusalem, and Shechem was a place of great memories. The Lord had appeared to Abraham at Shechem and Jacob's well was located at Shechem. So Shechem was an ideal place for a coronation. But Rehoboam was in for a rude awakening.

When Jeroboam heard that Solomon had died, he returned from Egypt at the request of the northern tribes of Israel. Remember Jeroboam? In 1 Kings 11 we learned that Jeroboam was a high ranking servant of King Solomon, and the prophet Ahijah told him that he would be given ten tribes of Israel. Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to King Shishak in Egypt, and he remained in Egypt until Solomon's death. Now Jeroboam returned to Israel, and he became the spokesman for all Israel when Rehoboam came to Shechem to be crowned king.

Jeroboam and the elders of Israel came to Rehoboam and requested that he go easy on the people, that he would lighten the heavy tax burden that people had been bearing under King Solomon. Rehoboam said, "Give me three days to think it over." During the three days, he consulted first with the wise elders of Israel who had been counselors to his father Solomon. These wise elders gave him good counsel: "Lighten up on the people! Serve them, and the people will serve you in return."

But Rehoboam didn't like this good counsel, so he consulted with the young men who had grown up with him. They told him: "Don't go easy on the people. Increase their heavy tax load. Tell them that your little finger will be thicker than your father's waist! Tell them that your father disciplined them with whips, but you will discipline them with metal-tipped whips."

Unfortunately, Rehoboam went along with the counsel of his younger friends, and the people revolted. As a result, the kingdom of Israel was divided into the northern kingdom, Israel, consisting of ten tribes, and the southern kingdom, Judah, consisting of the tribe of Judah and the closely associated tribe of Benjamin. Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and Rehoboam was the first king of the southern kingdom of Judah.

When Rehoboam realized that the kingdom was slipping away from him, he sent Adoram, the head of his "IRS," to the people as his representative, but they stoned Adoram to death. So Rehoboam fled back to Jerusalem, raised an army of 180,000 troops, and was ready to attack Jeroboam and the northern kingdom. But the word of the Lord came to him through the prophet Shemaiah: "Don't go up and fight against your brothers!" This time Rehoboam wisely listened to the word of the Lord, and he called off the battle.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God can accomplish His purposes through foolish counsel.

Rehoboam was not wise when he went along with the foolish counsel of his young friends. But look at verse 15: "*So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word that He had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam.*" That prophecy was given in 1 Kings 11.

"*The turn of events was from the Lord...*" What is the Bible teaching us here? Is the Bible teaching that God manipulates or forces people into following foolish counsel? No! The Bible clearly teaches that we should follow **wise** counsel, and God will use it to guide us. (Read the Book of Proverbs!) When people follow foolish counsel, they do so by their own will. And they suffer the consequences.

But God can **use** the foolish counsel of people and its unfortunate results to accomplish His purposes. This is one way that God "*works all things after the counsel of His will*" (*Ephesians 1:11*). Of course this does not condone foolish counsel, and it does not justify following foolish counsel - and in no way does it mean that God is the source of foolish counsel! But God **can use** (and **does use**) **all things** to accomplish His purposes.

Here's an illustration: Look at the situation in the Middle East right now. We don't have to look very far to find foolish counsel, and there are sad results - on both sides. But God is using all these complicated events to accomplish His purposes. The groundwork is being laid, and the way is being paved, for the events of the Last Days and the return of the Lord! God can accomplish His purposes through foolish counsel.

### 2. God can accomplish His purposes through wise counsel.

In verses 22-24, Shemaiah, a man of God, gave Rehoboam wise counsel about not fighting Jeroboam. We know it was wise counsel because it came from the Lord! "*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” (v24).* Rehoboam wisely followed Shemaiah’s counsel and told the troops to go home. Can you imagine the reaction of 180,000 fighting men who were prepared for battle – then suddenly they’re told that Rehoboam had called off the attack?

Well, regardless of the what anyone thought, it was wise counsel because it was from the Lord. Rehoboam wisely followed this counsel, and God’s purposes were accomplished. The northern kingdom was established under Jeroboam, according to God’s word through the prophet Ahijah, and the division of Israel came about without a lot of bloodshed. God can accomplish His purposes through wise counsel.

At the end of James 3, we read about the wisdom that’s “from above.” That is the source of wise counsel! Anyone who looks to the Lord for “wisdom from above” will get wise counsel, and will be able to give wise counsel to others. Let’s pray that our nation’s leaders, from the presidents on down, would follow wise counsel - counsel that finds its source in the Word of God, the “wisdom from above.” Remember - God can accomplish His purposes through wise counsel.

## **Practical Application**

### **Practice “soft answers”!**

Proverbs 15:1 is a well-known proverb: *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”* Solomon wrote this proverb. Maybe his son Rehoboam heard this proverb from his father even before Solomon wrote it down. Unfortunately, Rehoboam didn’t follow the wise counsel of this proverb. He responded to the people’s request for lower taxes with harsh words: “You think you had it hard under my father’s reign? Well, you haven’t seen anything yet!” How foolish he was! Those harsh words certainly did stir up anger, just as the proverb says.

What about us? How do we respond to people’s concerns? Do we respond to people with quiet and considerate answers? Or do we speak with harsh, scornful words? Soft answers will help to dissipate anger - but soft answers don’t usually come automatically. In confrontational situations, we must make an effort to keep from responding with harsh words. And we need to make a practice of responding with “soft answers.”

Just the other day, I could have reacted harshly to an uptight student who came to me with a complaint. I responded to the student with a soft answer, and the situation calmed down. It works! So - practice “soft answers”!