

The Kingdom Divided: Israel Splits in Two

After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam's harsh response to the people's petition causes ten tribes to rebel, splitting Israel into two kingdoms that would never reunite.

1 Kings 12:1-24

CHARACTERS: Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Elders of Israel, Young counselors

THEMES: Consequences of foolish counsel, Fulfillment of prophecy, Pride and oppression, Division and civil strife

SOLOMON'S GLORY CAME at a price—heavy taxation and forced labor that burdened the people. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam journeyed to Shechem, where all Israel gathered to make him king. Jeroboam, Solomon's former servant who had fled to Egypt after a prophet promised him ten tribes, returned to lead the delegation. Their petition was reasonable: '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.' Rehoboam requested three days to consider. He first consulted the old men who had advised Solomon. Their counsel was wise: 'If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.' Servant leadership would secure the kingdom. But Rehoboam forsook this wisdom and turned to the young men who had grown up with him, companions of privilege who knew nothing of the people's burdens. Their counsel dripped with arrogance: 'Thus shalt thou speak unto this people... My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father

hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.' When Rehoboam delivered this harsh answer, the northern tribes rebelled: 'What portion have we in David?' They made Jeroboam their king over Israel, leaving only Judah and Benjamin loyal to David's house. Rehoboam assembled 180,000 warriors to restore the kingdom by force, but God sent Shemaiah the prophet: 'Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren... for this thing is from me.' The division fulfilled God's word to Solomon: because of his idolatry, the kingdom would be torn from his son. Thus began a tragic chapter—two kingdoms where God intended one, a division that would last until both fell to foreign conquerors, Israel to Assyria, Judah to Babylon.

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