

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM AND DEPARTURE INTO IDOLATRY

BIBLE TEXT : **I Kings 12:1-33; 14:21-23; II Chronicles 12:1-16.**

LESSON 287 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

1 Kings 12:1-33 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.

⁶ And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people?

⁷ And they spake unto him, saying, 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.

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:

⁹ And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter?

¹⁰ And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins.

¹¹ 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.

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

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Rehoboam Crowned

After the death of King Solomon it was natural that his son should become king. All Israel gathered at Shechem on the great coronation day to honour Rehoboam as the new king of Israel on his father's throne. Nothing is told us about Rehoboam prior to this time. He perhaps never did anything worth recording while he was growing up.

We are, however, given an account of Jeroboam, an industrious young man who had bravely fought for Israel and had won the affection of the people. He had had to flee to Egypt because of Solomon's jealousy. When he heard that Solomon was dead, and that Rehoboam was to be crowned, he returned for the ceremonies. A prophet had told Jeroboam before his exile that he would be given ten tribes of Israel to rule, and he no doubt wondered now how the prophecy would be fulfilled.

The People Burdened

After Solomon had turned from the Lord and worshipped idols he had become greedy for worldly gain. He had taxed the people very heavily, and had required many of them to be in his army and labour camps. It has been a hard life for the Children of Israel, and they had suffered under their cruel taskmasters.

Jeroboam, on behalf of the Israelites, now asked Rehoboam how he was going to conduct his affairs. Would he be kind to the people and lift the heavy yoke that the people had to carry? Rehoboam asked for three days in which to think up an answer.

During those three days Rehoboam called in some advisers. They were older men who had perhaps been members of his father's cabinet. They were wise men and had had many years of experience, and understood the needs of the people. Rehoboam was young, and it was a good move on his part to ask advice of such men of experience. These men told him that if he would be kind to the people and speak good words to them, they would willingly be his subjects and do good to him. If he was to be their king, it was his duty to help his people.

Jesus gave some instructions for successful leadership. He said: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shalt exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:11, 12). At another time Jesus said: "He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:26).

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.

¹⁵ Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

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.

¹⁸ Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.

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

²⁰ And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

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.

²² But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying,

²³ Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying,

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.

²⁵ Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel.

²⁶ And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:

²⁷ If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

Think what a successful king Rehoboam could have been if he had served his people as God had ordained! In David's last song, he sang: "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (II Samuel 23:3).

All this good advice was wasted on Rehoboam. He called for some of his young friends and asked them what they thought. They were mean and did not love the people. They told Rehoboam to make the yoke twice as heavy, and to punish the people even more severely than Rehoboam's father had done.

Disappointed People

When Jeroboam returned after three days to hear the decision of Rehoboam, this is what he heard: "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." What cruel words! Think of the people's disappointment! They had hoped that the new king would bring them a happy and peaceful life, and now they heard this!

But God had plans for His people. They were not going to suffer all that cruelty. Solomon would be punished for his sins by Jeroboam's ruling ten of the tribes of Israel, instead of Rehoboam. The people could not feel that they owed any allegiance to Rehoboam when he cared so little for them, so they deserted. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam.

Of course, Rehoboam was not happy about the division, so he organized a great big army – 180,000 men – and was going right out to conquer the rebellious tribes. But God was watching, and sent a Prophet to tell Rehoboam that it was His will that Israel and Judah be separate. There must be no war. Rehoboam obeyed, and there was peace in the land.

From this time on we shall hear about two nations, Judah and Israel, instead of just Israel. The history of the following years will tell of many wars fought between the two. They continued to have separate kings until they were all carried away into the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many centuries later. At the time of our lesson Jeroboam is the king of Israel, and Rehoboam is the king of Judah.

God's Promises to Jeroboam

God had made wonderful promises to Jeroboam: "I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (I Kings 11:38). We know of the blessings that attended David's reign because he obeyed God. Now God was willing to do like things for Jeroboam, if he kept the commandments.

We, too, have the promises of God in His Word, but they are all conditioned upon our obedience to God. His rules of conduct are very plainly given in the Bible, and if we follow them we can expect to enjoy the blessings.

²⁸ Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

²⁹ And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.

³⁰ And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan.

³¹ And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

³² And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.

³³ So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

1 Kings 14:21-23 ²¹ And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam *was* forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name *was* Naamah an Ammonitess.

²² And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.

²³ For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.

2 Chronicles 12:1-16 ¹ And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.

² And it came to pass, *that* in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD,

³ With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people *were* without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians.

⁴ And he took the fenced cities which *pertained* to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.

⁵ Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and *to* the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them,

Thus far Jeroboam had fulfilled the will of God. If he had continued to ask His guidance, he would have enjoyed a long and peaceful reign. But soon he began to worry about how he would keep the loyalty of the people. God had given him the throne, and surely God could have kept it for him. But rather than trust God, he began to plan his own way to rule, and he found himself in trouble.

Much of our trouble comes to us in the same way. We want to plan our own lives, rather than carefully follow God's plan for us, and then we suffer. The Lord knows better than we do what is good for us; we could save ourselves much grief if we would in everything ask the Lord's direction.

Jeroboam's Sin

The seat of Rehoboam's government was in Jerusalem; and Jeroboam reasoned with himself that if the Israelites went to Jerusalem to the Temple to worship they might again become followers of Rehoboam, and desert Jeroboam. He thought he could keep the people from Rehoboam by setting up altars of worship near at hand so that the people would not have to go to Jerusalem. He made two golden calves and set them up to be worshiped. He told the Israelites, "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

Do you remember what happened to the Israelites once before when they worshiped a golden calf? Three thousand men were killed by the sword in one day, and Israel suffered plagues afterward. God said that He is a jealous God and wants us to worship Him, and Him alone.

Anyone knows that the image of a calf could never have brought Israel out of Egypt where they were slaves. Not even a living calf could have done it. What good could these two golden calves do for Israel now? In addition to that, Jeroboam made priests of unworthy men; and he changed the date of a sacred feast day. These were things that God had appointed, and man had no right to change them. Jeroboam's doings were sin in the sight of God, and his bad reputation followed him for centuries afterward. Almost every time his name is mentioned, these words are added: "Who made Israel to sin." That was the memorial Jeroboam left to himself – he made Israel to sin.

We may not have influence over a whole kingdom of people as Jeroboam had, but no one can commit sin without influencing someone. No man lives entirely for himself; and if he causes another to sin, God's judgment will surely strike him.

Rehoboam's Sin

Rehoboam, too, turned to idolatry. Right there within the shadow of God's holy Temple, he built altars to the worship of idols. Under every green tree, wherever the people wished, were images of heathen gods.

God did not let that sin go unpunished. About five years after Rehoboam became king, Shishak, the king of Egypt, came with

Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.

⁶ Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD *is* righteous.

⁷ And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; *therefore* I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.

⁸ Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.

⁹ So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

¹⁰ Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed *them* to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house.

¹¹ And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber.

¹² And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that he would not destroy *him* altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

¹³ So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam *was* one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name *was* Naamah an Ammonitess.

¹⁴ And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.

¹⁵ Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, *are* they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And *there were* wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.

¹⁶ And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.

1200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and people without number to fight against Judah. They walked right into the land and conquered even the fenced cities. But when the Egyptian armies began moving toward the city of Jerusalem, Rehoboam decided it was time to do something. But what could he do?

There was a Prophet of God in Judah, and he came to tell Rehoboam the words of the Lord: "Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak." That was the secret of the trouble that had come upon Rehoboam and Judah: they had forsaken God. The natural thing to do now to get out of trouble would be to return to God.

Rehoboam and his princes humbled themselves before the Lord and said, "The LORD is righteous." When God saw it, He immediately gave them relief. He said that King Shishak would not destroy them, but they would have to pay tribute to him. For a while things went well in Judah, but throughout Rehoboam's reign of 17 years there was war between Jeroboam and Rehoboam. When Rehoboam died, Abijah, his son, became king of Judah.

QUESTIONS

Name Solomon's son who became king after him.

Why had God threatened to take away part of Israel from Solomon's house?

Why was not all the kingdom taken from him?

How did Rehoboam plan to treat the people in his kingdom?

What were God's instructions to rulers and those who wanted to be great?

What tribes were given to Rehoboam to rule?

Who was given the other ten tribes?

How can anyone benefit by God's blessings?

What was Jeroboam's sin?

What memorial did Jeroboam leave to himself?