

1 Kings 11-12

Chapter 11

The End of Solomon's Reign and the United Kingdom

The study of Israel's history during the time of the Kings divides into two parts – The United Kingdom and the Divided Kingdom. The United Kingdom includes the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon. The unity of Israel was always fragile. The tribes had a strong sense of independence and, from the time of the patriarchs, there were two rival leader tribes, Judah and Ephraim, one representing the sons of Leah (Judah) and the other representing the sons of Rachel (Ephraim). Saul, coming from the tribe of Benjamin held the loyalty of the northern tribes, especially Ephraim. David, coming from the tribe of Judah would naturally control the south but it would take time to win over the northern tribes. Understanding this, it makes sense that when division comes at the death of Solomon, it will be a leader from Ephraim that will pull the northern tribes away from the Davidic Kingdom. Jerusalem will hold the small tribe of Benjamin, mainly because Jerusalem sits right on the border between the tribal territories of Judah and Benjamin (kind of like Washington DC sits on the boarder of Virginia and Maryland.) The divided kingdom will last from the death of Solomon until the Babylonian Captivity. Israel will be destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) was composed of Judah and Benjamin and the Northern Kingdom (Israel) will take the rest with Ephraim as their leading tribe.

Now let's talk about Solomon's sin. The Bible says that "Solomon loved many foreign women..." The writer then quickly give commentary that his marriage to these women was in violation of the Lord's command not to intermarry with the nations of Canaan because they will turn your heart toward their gods and you will forsake the worship of the LORD. Solomon had 700 royal wives and 300 concubines. This harem represents his wealth and power but it also was part of the way that he made political and economic alliances with the surrounding nations. The bible points to his "love" for them indicating that he has the same issue of sexual sin as his father David. Verse 6 gives us the summary statement that Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not follow the Lord completely as his father David had done. We will see this comparison between the sitting king and David made throughout the period of the Kings. To please his wives and because he is now worshiping the gods of his wives, Solomon begins the practice of setting up shrines and worship centers on the high places around Jerusalem.

God becomes angry with Solomon, and he determines to take away all but one tribe from under his control. For the sake of David, God allows Solomon to rule over the entire kingdom until his death but then the division would happen under Solomon's son. Next the Lord raises up adversaries to Solomon. One is in Edom to the south and one is in Damascus to the North and the final one is an internal enemy from Ephraim inside of his kingdom. This rebel is a man named Jeroboam. He works for Solomon and proves to be very talented and is seen as a threat to the king so Solomon tries to kill him and Jeroboam flees to Egypt where he remains in exile until the King's death. This scenario sounds a lot like David rise under King Saul. We see the pattern repeating itself. Jeroboam received a prophesy from Ahijah of Shiloh that the Lord would give him 10 of the 12 tribes to rule. This prophesy in 11:34-39 is important

containing a hint of the Messiah as this humbling of David's descendants will not last forever.

Chapter 12

Rehoboam's foolish Decision

Rehoboam is the son of Solomon that inherits the throne upon Solomon's death. The 12 tribes convene a council in Shechem, which is in the tribal territory of Ephraim. There Jeroboam shows up from Egypt and leads the assembly in requesting of the new king that he lighten up the tax and forced labor load that Solomon had placed on the people for the building of the temple and the other infrastructure of the nation. Rehoboam asked for three days to consider their request and consults with his father's old advisors who tell him to give the concessions to consolidate his rule over the northern tribes and maintain the unity of the nation. He then consults his young friends (his fraternity brothers) and they tell him to show those people who is boss! If your father was hard on them you be even harder! Rehoboam follows their advice and rejects the way of wisdom. Three days later the assembly reconvenes and Rehoboam gives his answer and the people reject him as their king – they say, "What share do we have in David?" They leave and return to their homes. Rehoboam sends his commander of the forced labor and the Israelites stone him to death. Rehoboam responds by raising an army to force submission but Shemaiah, a man of God, comes and tells the army to stand down! God is the one doing this and they do not go up to fight against their brothers.

How quickly the people of God move from this Golden Age of Solomon to a divided kingdom and the beginning of rebellion against God and his covenant. Leadership is the key. Solomon led them in wisdom and then he led them in folly. He chose man's way over God's way. He built fortresses, he collected horses, chariots and implements of war, he amassed gold and silver, he built alliances and trading relationships with nations of the region, and he married foreign women to satisfy his lust for sex and power. He put his trust in the human pathway to success instead of staying faithful to God who had given him all that he desired. We see it happen quickly but it was over a period of 40 years.

God punishes the sin of Solomon by taking away the majority of his kingdom but he keeps his promise to David by leaving a Davidic king on the throne and by honoring his temple in Jerusalem. Verse 36 says that David's lamp will continue to burn in Jerusalem. Several times this idea of David as the lamp of Israel is mentioned. Ultimately this will be fulfilled in the light of Jesus who will come to fulfill the promises and be the true Prince of Peace. Finally, the humbling of David's descendants will not last forever... One day a new son of David will be born and he will take the throne of his father and he will rule forever over the people of God. No one imagined what this would look like but we know that it is referring to Jesus and the Kingdom of God.