

THE PROBLEM OF A DIVIDED HEART
2 CHRONICLES 10-12

INTRODUCTION

Most of us Christians recognize that there are some bad things going on in our culture, perhaps that our civilization is in decline. We Christians are not ultimately pessimists. For as people of the Book, we know that good wins in the end. But we are also realists, and we recognize that our culture is generally straying from Biblical values. We have had legalized abortion for a generation. Euthanasia is being promoted in many states. In the last few decades we have seen standards of sexuality decline. Marriage has been redefined. Kids, as well as adults, are having to deal with strange things like gender identity. Educational standards have declined. There is a rise in crime in our urban areas. Political differences have become sharper with fewer attempts to achieve compromise.

Israel in the tenth century before Jesus was faced with a similar situation. The nation had inherited a godly tradition. David was a great king, and Solomon was recognized as the wisest man in all the earth. Like our own Founding Fathers, these men had flaws, but they were described as having a heart for God and a desire to pursue wisdom and God's will for their nation.

The area in which David and Solomon messed up was an area that our generation can understand. They did not follow God's directions concerning male-female relationships. We studied the life of David on Sunday mornings a couple of years ago. We saw how he committed adultery and how that created problems in his family and among his kids. In addition to that he caved in to the culture of that day which said that kings were to show their power by having lots of wives and lots of kids.

Solomon followed the bad example of his father and had even more wives and more kids. This wrong view of marriage led to more serious problems for his family and his descendants and his nation. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 KINGS 11:3) In 1 Kings # 11 vv. 3 & 4 we are told, **"He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. (I KINGS 11:4) For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father."** This bad behavior will lead to a split in his kingdom. It will allow for an opening for idols and false worship, which will in turn lead to a decline in Israel's culture. In this we may find lessons for us. (PROJECTOR OFF)

My general approach to messages on Sunday morning is to go back and forth between the New Testament and the Old Testament, studying books of the Bible and Bible characters with an occasional topical study thrown in. In my time here in this church I have dealt with most of the famous characters of the Old Testament. I haven't looked at

the kings of Israel who followed David and Solomon. So I thought that these kings who ruled in the southern kingdom of Judah might be worth some consideration.

II.

The Books of the Kings cover what happened in both Israel and the divided kingdom in north and south. Second Chronicles focuses attention on what happened in the southern kingdom of Judah. The Bible tells us that the kings in the north were all evil. In the southern kingdom of Judah there is a mix of good and evil. Perhaps in their experience there will be relevance for us.

So we are going to consider first THE PURPOSE OF 2 CHRONICLES. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 CHRONICLES) First and Second Chronicles were originally one book. It seems that when the original Hebrew manuscripts were translated into Greek before the time of Jesus, they were divided into two books. The Chronicles trace the history of Israel from Adam to the Babylonian Captivity when Israel ceased to exist as a nation. Second Chronicles begins with Solomon and traces the history of his descendants and what happened in the southern kingdom of Judah.

The story ends in roughly 500 BC. There is a strong Jewish tradition that Ezra was the author, or the editor, of the Chronicles. He was the subject of the Old Testament book which bears his name. He was the priest who led a return of Jews to Judah and Jerusalem from their captivity in the Babylonian Empire. Ezra sensed a need for his people to understand their history. They needed to realize the importance of following God's word, in particular the covenant which the Lord had made with David. They needed to restore proper worship to the temple in Jerusalem.

A scholar by the name of Eugene Merrill (MERRILL QUOTATION) puts it this way, **"The purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles is to show God's elective and preserving grace in this covenant people through David, the messianic priest and king."** (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 591)

We are going to pick up the story in #10 after the death of Solomon. We will see how the culture declines and how the kings of Judah contribute to that. But we will also see glimpses of God's grace and godly people who show up on the scene and seek to stem the tide of religious and cultural deterioration.

II.

In #10 we confront THE DANGER OF LISTENING TO BAD ADVICE. (II. THE DANGER OF LISTENING TO BAD ADVICE) We read in vv. 1-4 (p. 366), **"Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. 2 And as soon as Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. 3 And they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 4 'Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.'"** Rehoboam was the son whom Solomon chose to replace him.

In our study of the life of David we saw that there was underlying tension between the tribes of the northern part of the country and David's home tribe of Judah. It made sense for Rehoboam to have a big meeting in Shechem (SHECHEM MAP), which was in the territory of the northern tribes. This big meeting was an effort to get all of the people of Israel, especially the northern tribes to ratify the choice of Rehoboam as king. Shechem also had a long history for being the site of important meetings and altars built for the Lord going all the way back to Abraham. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Jereboam had earlier worked for King Solomon. A prophet of God had appeared to Jereboam and told him that he would one day lead the northern ten tribes. Solomon got wind of that prophecy and tried to kill Jereboam. Jereboam fled to Egypt where he was protected by the pharaoh there. Now he has come back.

Meanwhile Solomon had created a large federal bureaucracy. He had built a beautiful temple and established forts around the country and had an army. \$3.5 trillion spending programs have to be paid for in some way. That means taxes and perhaps drafted labor. In 1 Kings #5 vv. 13 & 14 (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 KINGS 5:13-14) we are told, **“King Solomon drafted forced labor out of all Israel, and the draft numbered 30,000 men. 14 And he sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month in shifts. They would be a month in Lebanon and two months at home.”** It is not clear whether they were paid for this or not. But the people felt all of this as a heavy burden. They wanted relief.

In v. 5 Rehoboam wisely asks for three days to think about their request. According to vv. 6 & 7, **“Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer this people?’ 7 And they said to him, ‘If you will be good to this people and please them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.’”** This was a good move to get wise counsel from his father's advisors.

But then in vv. 8-11 we find that he did this: **“But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. 9 And he said to them, ‘What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, “Lighten the yoke that your father put on us”?’ 10 And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, ‘Thus shall you speak to the people who said to you, “Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us”; thus shall you say to them, “My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. 11 And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”””**

We will find out later that Rehoboam was 41 years old at this time. So he was not a kid any more. These young men were probably his contemporaries, probably his brothers and step-brothers and young men who had grown up in the palace. They were enjoying

the good life. They were benefitting from all of the national government expenditures. They wanted to see their good life continue.

Verses 12 -14: **“So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, ‘Come to me again the third day.’ 13 And the king answered them harshly; and forsaking the counsel of the old men, 14 King Rehoboam spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men...”**

The Book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon to the immediate audience of his sons. Rehoboam would have been exposed to these wisdom proverbs. In Proverbs #15 v. 17 (PROJECTOR ON--- PROVERBS 15:17) he would have been taught, **“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”** Maybe Rehoboam missed school that day. This is a bit of wisdom that all of our leaders would benefit from learning and applying.

Rehoboam’s failure to apply it leads to a bad result. (PROJECTOR OFF) According to the second part of v. 15 this was also according to the sovereign plan of God who had prophesied that Jeroboam would lead a separated northern kingdom.

We read in vv. 16 & 17, **“And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, ‘What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each of you to your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.’ So all Israel went to their tents. 17 But Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah.”** Thus there is a split in the country which will last for the next two centuries. The northern kingdom will be known as Israel. The southern kingdom will be known as Judah. Second Chronicles will focus on what happens in the south. There will be a series of twenty rulers in Judah. Some will be good; most will be bad. Eventually the Judeans who survive will mostly end up in captivity in Babylon.

There are multiple causes for this state of affairs. Ultimately it is part of the sovereign plan of God. Some of the blame is placed upon Solomon for his choice to marry so many wives and to end up worshipping the false gods of too many of these wives. There is another level of responsibility which Rehoboam bears. He was taught the wisdom of his father contained in the Proverbs. But he disavowed too much of that wisdom. He listened to bad advice.

I suspect that this is part of the reason for the recent debacle in Afghanistan. The president listened to bad advice. Oftentimes we listen to bad advice because we listen to what we want to hear. Years ago there was a young woman who came to my wife and asked what she thought about her boyfriend. We had some exposure to this young man, and we saw some significant character flaws in him. My wife asked this gal if she had decided that she was going to marry him. She said, “Yes.” Suzy wisely said, “Then there is no point in me giving you any contrary advice.” The marriage ended up badly.

III.

In #11 we come to THE BENEFIT OF LISTENING TO GOOD ADVICE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE BENEFIT OF...) According to v. 1, **“When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, 180,000 chosen warriors, to fight against Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam.”** King Rehoboam recognizes the importance of unity in his kingdom. He decides to re-establish it by force. Yet the prophet Ahijah in 1 Kings #11 had made it clear that it was God’s plan for Rehoboam to be king of a separated kingdom in the north.

The Chronicler continues in vv. 2-4: **“But the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah the man of God: 3 ‘Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, 4 “Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up or fight against your relatives. Return every man to his home, for this thing is from me.”’ So they listened to the word of the Lord and returned and did not go against Jeroboam.”**

This is not just good advice. This is the word of God given through the prophet Shemaiah. Rehoboam, perhaps surprisingly, listens to the prophet. He may have recognized that his earlier decision to listen to the young men did not turn out well. A sign of wisdom is to recognize wrong decisions that we have made in the past. It would be nice to see this more often in our political leaders of whatever party.

At least Rehoboam now listens to good advice. His father Solomon (PROVERBS 19:20) wrote in Proverbs 19 v. 20, **“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”** We are never too old to keep learning wisdom and to get good advice.

Verses 5-12 advance the story: **“Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem, and he built cities for defense in Judah. 6 He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, 7 Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, 8 Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, 9 Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, 10 Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, fortified cities that are in Judah and in Benjamin. 11 He made the fortresses strong, and put commanders in them, and stores of food, oil, and wine. 12 And he put shields and spears in all the cities and made them very strong. So he held Judah and Benjamin.”**

(REHOBAM CITIES) The fortified cities which Rehoboam established appear to defend the central part of the southern kingdom. The much larger kingdom of his father Solomon has apparently shrunk in size and influence. In this list you may recognize the towns of Bethlehem, Gath, and Hebron. Rehoboam by this defensive line seems not to be worried about attacks from Israel to the north. He is protected from the Philistines on the west, Egypt and Edom on the south, and Moab on the east.

According to vv. 13-15, **“And the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him from all places where they lived. 14 For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the**

Lord, 15 and he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made.”

When the Lord divided up the land of Canaan among the twelve tribes of Israel in the time of Joshua, He spread the priests and Levites throughout the country. The Old Testament Law required that the priests and Levites go up to the temple in Jerusalem for various occasions. Jereboam sets up his own worship sites (BETHEL DAN MAP) in Dan in the north and Bethel in the south of his territory. He doesn't want his people having their loyalties drawn toward the southern kingdom of Judah by going regularly to the temple in Jerusalem.

Most of the priests and Levites appear to recognize that this is wrong. It is contrary to God's law. So they seem to give up their houses and their property in the north to move to the south. This was probably costly for them. But true worship is often costly. It costs something in terms of our time, money, and energy. For many of our fellow Christians around the world it means serious persecution. Perhaps that will be more common in our experience in our declining culture. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The story continues in vv. 16 & 17: **“And those who had set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their fathers. 17 They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon.”** This seems to imply that there were other serious believers who also moved to the south. They likewise were resisting the pressure of the culture in the north. Their move to the south and their presence in the kingdom of Judah has a part in strengthening Judah for the next several years. True believers who live out godly values are always good for the society in which they live.

Verses 18-23 describe King Rehoboam's family life. He acquires 18 wives and 60 concubines. Concubines functioned as kind of secondary wives. These wives produced 28 sons and 60 daughters. In the Ancient Near East having lots of wives and lots of kids was the sign of a powerful king.

But this was a cultural value that was contrary to God's word and God's standards for marriage. (PROJECTOR ON--- DEUTERONOMY 17:17) In Deuteronomy #17 v. 17 the Law of Moses warned future kings, **“And he [the king] shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away...”** The violation of this standard by David and Solomon got them into trouble. It is a problem now for Rehoboam. In our day the culture says that living together before marriage, and gay marriage, and ending inconvenient pregnancies are normal. But these violations of God's standards lead to negative consequences. Now in public education kids are even being exposed to the idea of changing one's gender identity. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Because Rehoboam in this chapter listened to good advice, life in his kingdom was better for a while. The country did not go to war. Worship of the true God was

maintained. Godly people came down from the north and benefitted the society. There were good results that came from listening to good advice.

IV.

In #12 we come to THE RESULTS OF A DIVIDED HEART. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE RESULTS OF ...) Verse 1 tells us, **“When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him.”** The text here does not describe the nature of this abandonment. But in a parallel passage in 1 Kings #14 we are told this (1 KINGS 14:23-24A), beginning in v. 23: **“For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 24 and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land.”** This latter passage does not directly blame Rehoboam for what happened. But he was the king, and he could have stopped it and did not. Perhaps he encouraged it. The king seems to have had a divided heart. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to vv. 2-4, **“In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the Lord, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem 3 with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt—Libyans, Sukkiim, and Ethiopians. 4 And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem.”**

Shishak was king of Egypt between 945 and 924 BC. Taking on Judah for him was like the US taking on Iraq in the Gulf War. He had the equivalent of tanks and an air force and superior numbers that just overwhelmed the armed forces of Judah.

Archaeologists have discovered a wall in Karnak in Egypt near the Nile River (SHISHAK WALL). This wall lists 150 towns that Shishak conquered in Judah. It does not list Jerusalem. That is consistent with what our text says about Shishak’s conquests. He came as far as Jerusalem. It appears that Rehoboam waved the white flag and gave what Shishak wanted from Judah. Laying siege to Jerusalem would have meant a project which would have taken a couple of years. Rehoboam realized that he eventually would be overwhelmed and could lose his life. So he gave up the valuables that Shishak was seeking. Rehoboam was also going to have an ongoing relationship of subservience to the king of Egypt.

We read in v. 5, **“Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, “You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.””** Here is the divine indictment. So what will we get from Rehoboam?

Here is the response in vv. 6-8: **“Then the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, ‘The Lord is righteous.’ 7 When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah: ‘They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of**

Shishak. 8 Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him, that they may know my service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.” When the Lord pronounces judgment, there is often an implied opportunity to repent. Such is the case here.

This is also an illustration of the principle that is recorded a bit earlier in 2 Chronicles. In #7 v. 14 (2 CHRONICLES 7:14) the Lord tells Solomon, “... **if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**”

We also see at work here in God’s dealings with Rehoboam the principle that sin is not without consequences. The Lord may indeed forgive. But He may allow us to experience some of the negative consequences of our actions. We saw that at work with David. David committed adultery and murder. The rightful penalty for that was death. God forgave David, but he also pronounced that there would be division in his family because of his bad actions. (PROJECTOR OFF)

We learn about some of the consequences of those actions for Rehoboam in vv. 9-12: **“So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away the shields of gold that Solomon had made, 10 and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. 11 And as often as the king went into the house of the Lord, the guard came and carried them and brought them back to the guardroom. 12 And when he humbled himself the wrath of the Lord turned from him, so as not to make a complete destruction. Moreover, conditions were good in Judah.”**

Jereboam had worked for King Solomon in Judah and Jerusalem. He knew about the treasures in the temple in Jerusalem. When he fled from Solomon and went to Egypt, I wonder if he told Shishak about the riches in the temple. Perhaps that was part of Shishak’s interest in Jerusalem.

Verse 6 says that there was some genuine humility exercised by King Rehoboam and the princes. So conditions were tolerable in Judah after that. The Lord responds to genuine humility before him.

In vv. 13-14 we find the final Biblical evaluation upon Rehoboam: **“So King Rehoboam grew strong in Jerusalem and reigned. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. 14 And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord.”**

To outward appearances Rehoboam did OK. He had a huge family. He had money and wealth. He stayed in power. He had significant foreign policy challenges. His country was overrun by the Egyptians. But they came out of that and survived. The economy came back and there was peace.

Yet God's final evaluation is that Rehoboam did evil, because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord. He had a divided heart. How do you suppose that God will evaluate our lives? Did Kurt really set his heart to seek the Lord? Were there idols in his heart? Are there idols in your heart? Does the God of heaven have first place in your life?

The starting place is to make sure that we have accepted the gift of eternal life which God freely offers us. The good news is that God sent His Son to become a human being and to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Our responsibility is to embrace Him as our Savior. We must recognize that we are sinners who have nothing to offer by which we can earn our way to heaven. We must simply put our trust in Christ, and accept the salvation which He freely offers us. The promise of God is that when we do that we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Our eternal destiny is set. Beyond that the Lord desires as an appropriate response that we set our hearts to continually seek Him.