

CHAPTER 12

The glory of the kingdom of Israel was in its height and perfection in Solomon; it was long in coming to it, but it soon declined, and began to sink and wither in the very next reign, as we find in this chapter, where we have the kingdom divided, and thereby weakened and made little in comparison with what it had been. Here is,

- I.** Rehoboam's accession to the throne and Jeroboam's return out of Egypt (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The people's petition to Rehoboam for the redress of grievances, and the rough answer he gave, by the advice of his young counsellors, to that petition (v. 3-15).
- III.** The revolt of the ten tribes thereupon, and their setting up Jeroboam (v. 16-20).
- IV.** Rehoboam's attempt to reduce them and the prohibition God gave to that attempt (v. 21-24).
- V.** Jeroboam's establishment of his government upon idolatry (v. 25-33). Thus did Judah become weak, being deserted by their brethren, and Israel, by deserting the house of the Lord.

1 KINGS 12:1-15

THE FOLLY OF REHOBOAM

Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines, yet we read but of one son he had to bear up his name, and he a fool. It is said (~~2000~~ Hosea 4:10), *They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase.* Sin is a bad way of building up a family. Rehoboam was the son of the wisest of men, yet did not inherit his father's wisdom, and then it stood him in little stead to inherit his father's throne. Neither wisdom nor grace runs in the blood. Solomon came to the crown very young, yet he was then a wise man. Rehoboam came to the crown at forty years old, when men will be wise if ever they will, yet he was then foolish. Wisdom does not go by age, nor is it the multitude of years nor the advantage of education that reaches it.

Solomon's court was a mart of wisdom and the rendezvous of learned men, and Rehoboam was the darling of the court; and yet all was not sufficient to make him a wise man. *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* No dispute is made of Rehoboam's succession; upon the death of his father, he was immediately proclaimed. But,

I. The people desired a treaty with him at Shechem, and he condescended to meet them there.

1. Their pretence was to make him king, but the design was to unmake him. They would give him a public inauguration in another place than the city of David, that he might not seem to be king of Judah only. They had ten parts in him, and would have him among themselves for once, that they might recognize his title.

2. The place was ominous: at *Shechem*, where Abimelech set up himself (Judges 9); yet it had been famous for the convention of the states there, ~~<641>~~Joshua 24:1. Rehoboam, we may suppose, knew of the threatening, that the kingdom should be rent from him, and hoped by going to Shechem, and treating there with the ten tribes, to prevent it: yet it proved the most impolitic thing he could do, and hastened the rupture.

II. The representatives of the tribes addressed him, praying to be eased of the taxes they were burdened with. The meeting being appointed, they sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt to come and be their speaker. This they needed not to have done: he knew what God had designed him for, and would have come though he had not been sent for, for now was his time to expect the possession of the promised crown. In their address, 1. They complain of the last reign: *Thy father made our yoke grievous*, v. 4. They complain not of his father's idolatry and revolt from God; that which was the greatest grievance of all was none to them, so careless and indifferent were they in the matters of religion, as if God or Moloch were all one, so they might but live at ease and pay no taxes. Yet the complaint was groundless and unjust. Never did people live more at ease than they did, nor in great plenty. Did they pay taxes? It was to advance the strength and magnificence of their kingdom. If Solomon's buildings cost them money, they cost them no blood, as war would do. Were many servile hands employed about them? They were not the hands of the Israelites. Were the taxes a burden? How could that be, when Solomon imported bullion in such plenty that silver was, in a manner, as common as the stones? So that they did but render to

Solomon the things that were Solomon's. Nay, suppose there was some hardship put upon them, were they not told before that this would be the manner of the king and yet they would have one? The best government cannot secure itself from reproach and censure, no, not Solomon's. Factious spirits will never want something to complain of. I know nothing in Solomon's administration that could make the people's yoke grievous, unless perhaps the women whom in his latter days he doted on were connived at in oppressing them.

2. They demand relief from him, and on this condition will continue in their allegiance to the house of David. They asked not to be wholly free from paying taxes, but to have the burden made lighter; this was all their care, to save their money, whether their religion was supported and the government protected or no. All seek their own.

III. Rehoboam consulted with those about him concerning the answer he should give to this address. It was prudent to take advice, especially having so weak a head of his own; yet, upon this occasion, it was impolitic to take time himself to consider, for thereby he gave time to the disaffected people to ripen things for a revolt, and his deliberating in so plain a case would be improved as an indication of the little concern he had for the people's ease. They saw what they must expect, and prepared accordingly. Now,

1. The grave experienced men of his council advised him by all means to give the petitioners a kind answer, to give them good words, to promise them fair, and this day, this critical day, to serve them, that is, to tell them that he was their servant, and that he would redress all their grievances and make it his business to please them and make them easy. "Deny thyself (say they) so far as to do this for this once, and they will be *thy servants for ever*. When the present heat is allayed with a soft answer, and the assembly dismissed, their cooler thoughts will reconcile and fix them to Solomon's family still." Note, The way to rule is to serve, to do good, and stoop to do it, to become all things to all men and so win their hearts. Those who are in power really sit highest, and easiest, and safest, when they take this method.

2. The young men of his council were hot and haughty, and they advised him to return a severe and threatening answer to the people's demands. It was an instance of Rehoboam's weakness,

(1.) That he did not prefer aged counsellors, but had a better opinion of the young men that had grown up with him and with whom he was familiar, v. 8. Days should speak. It was a folly for him to think that, because they had been his agreeable companions in the sports and pleasures of his youth, they were therefore fit to have the management of the affairs of his kingdom. Great wits have not always the most wisdom; nor are those to be relied on as our best friends that know how to make us merry, for that will not make us happy. It is of great consequence to young people, that are setting out in the world, whom they associate with, accommodate themselves to, and depend upon for advice. If they reckon those that feed their pride, gratify their vanity, and further them in their pleasures, their best friends, they are already marked for ruin.

(2.) That he did not prefer moderate counsels, but was pleased with those that put him upon harsh and rigorous methods, and advised him to double the taxes, whether there was occasion for so doing or no, and to tell them in plain terms that he would do so, v. 10, 11. These young counsellors thought the old men expressed themselves but dully, v. 7. They affect to be witty in their advice, and value themselves on that. The old men did not undertake to put words into Rehoboam's mouth, only counselled him to speak good words; but the young men will furnish him with very quaint and pretty phrases, with pointed and pert similitudes: *My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins*, etc. That is not always the best sense that is best worded.

IV. He answered the people according to the counsel of the young men, v. 14, 15. He affected to be haughty and imperious, and fancied he could carry all before him with a high hand, and therefore would rather run the risk of losing them than deny himself so far as to give them good words. Note, Many ruin themselves by consulting their humour more than their interest. See,

1. How Rehoboam was infatuated in his counsels. He could not have acted more foolishly and impolitically.

(1.) He owned their reflections upon his father's government to be true: *My father made your yoke heavy*; and therein he was unjust to his father's memory, which he might easily have vindicated from the imputation.

(2.) He fancied himself better able to manage them, and impose upon them, than his father was, not considering that he was vastly inferior to him in

capacity. Could he think to support the blemishes of his father's reign who could never pretend to come near the glories of it?

(3.) He threatened not only to squeeze them by taxes, but to chastise them by cruel laws and severe executions of them, which should be not as whips only, but as scorpions, whips with rowels in them, that will fetch blood at every lash. In short, he would use them as brute beasts, load them and beat them at his pleasure: not caring whether they loved him or no, he would make them fear him.

(4.) He gave this provocation to a people that by long ease and prosperity were made wealthy, and strong, and proud, and would not be trampled upon (as a poor cowed dispirited people may), to a people that were now disposed to revolt, and had one ready to head them. Never, surely, was man so blinded by pride and affectation of arbitrary power, than which nothing is more fatal.

2. How God's counsels were hereby fulfilled. It was *from the Lord*, v. 15. He left Rehoboam to his own folly, and *hid from his eyes the things which belonged to his peace*, that the kingdom might be rent from him. Note, God serves his own wise and righteous purposes by the imprudences and iniquities of men, and snares sinners in the work of their own hands. Those that lose the kingdom of heaven throw it away, as Rehoboam did his, by their own wilfulness and folly.

<1126> 1 KINGS 12:16-24

REVOLT OF THE TEN TRIBES

We have here the rending of the kingdom of the ten tribes from the house of David, to effect which,

I. The people were hold and resolute in their revolt. They highly resented the provocation that Rehoboam had given them, were incensed at his menaces, concluded that that government would in the progress of it be intolerably grievous which in the beginning of it was so very haughty, and therefore immediately came to this resolve, one and all: *What portion have we in David?* v. 16. They speak here very unbecomingly of David, that great benefactor of their nation, calling him *the son of Jesse*, no greater a

man than his neighbours. How soon are good men, and their good services to the public, forgotten! The rashness of their resolution was also much to be blamed. In time, and with prudent management, they might have settled the original contract with Rehoboam to mutual satisfaction. Had they enquired who gave Rehoboam this advice, and taken a course to remove those evil counsellors from about him, the rupture might have been prevented: otherwise their jealousy for their liberty and property well became that free people. *Israel is not a servant, is not a homeborn slave; why should he be spoiled?* ^{<443E>}Jeremiah 2:14. They are willing to be ruled, but not to be ridden. Protection draws allegiance, but destruction cannot. No marvel that *Israel falls away from the house of David* (v. 19) if the house of David fall away from the great ends of their advancement, which was to be *ministers of God to them for good*. But thus to rebel against the seed of David, whom God had advanced to the kingdom (entailing it on his seed), and to set up another king in opposition to that family, was a great sin; see ^{<443E>}2 Chronicles 13:5-8. To this God refers, ^{<3X04>}Hosea 8:4. *They have set up kings, but not by me*. And it is here mentioned to the praise of the tribe of Judah that they *followed the house of David* (v. 17, 20), and, for aught that appears, they found Rehoboam better than his word, nor did he rule with the rigour which at first he threatened.

II. Rehoboam was imprudent in the further management of this affair, and more and more infatuated. Having foolishly thrown himself into a quicksand, he sunk the further in with plunging to get out.

1. He was very unadvised in sending Adoram, who was *over the tribute*, to treat with them, v. 18. The tribute was the thing, and, for the sake of that, Adoram was the person, they most complained of. The very sight of him, whose name was odious among them, exasperated them, and made them outrageous. He was one to whom they could not so much as give a patient hearing, but *stoned him to death* in a popular tumult. Rehoboam was now as unhappy in the choice of his ambassador as before of his counsellors.

2. Some think he was also unadvised in quitting his ground, and making so much haste to Jerusalem, for thereby he deserted his friends and gave advantage to his enemies, who had gone to their tents indeed (v. 16) in disgust, but did not offer to make Jeroboam king till Rehoboam had gone, v. 20. See how soon this foolish prince went from one extreme to the other. He hectorated and talked big when he thought all was his own, but sneaked and looked very mean when he saw himself in danger. It is

common for those that are most haughty in their prosperity to be most abject in adversity.

III. God forbade his attempt to recover by the sword what he had lost. What was done was of God, who would not suffer that it should be undone again (as it would be if Rehoboam got the better and reduced the ten tribes), nor that more should be done to the prejudice of the house of David, as would be if Jeroboam got the better and conquered the two tribes. The thing must rest as it is, and therefore God forbids the battle.

1. It was brave in Rehoboam to design the reducing of the revolters by force. His courage came to him when he had come to Jerusalem, v. 21. There he thought himself among his firm friends, who generously adhered to him and appeared for him. Judah and Benjamin (who feared the Lord and the king, and meddled not with those that were given to change) presently raised an army of 180,000 men, for the recovery of their king's right to the ten tribes, and were resolved to stand by him (as we say) with their lives and fortunes, having either not such cause, or rather not such a disposition, to complain, as the rest had.

2. It as more brave in Rehoboam to desist when God, by a prophet, ordered him to lay down his arms. He would not lose a kingdom tamely, for then he would have been unworthy the title of a prince; and yet he would not contend for it in opposition to God, for then he would have been unworthy the title of an Israelite. To proceed in this war would be not only to *fight against their brethren* (v. 24), whom they ought to love, but to fight against their God, to whom they ought to submit: *This thing is from me*. These two considerations should reconcile us to our losses and troubles, that God is the author of them and our brethren are the instruments of them; let us not therefore meditate revenge. Rehoboam and his people *hearkened to the word of the Lord*, disbanded the army, and acquiesced. Though, in human probability, they had a fair prospect of success (for their army was numerous and resolute, Jeroboam's party weak and unsettled), though it would turn to their reproach among their neighbours to lose so much of their strength and never have one push for it, to make a flourish and do nothing, yet,

(1.) They regarded the command of God though sent by a poor prophet. When we know God's mind we must submit to it, how much soever it crosses our own mind.

(2.) They consulted their own interest, concluding that though they had all the advantages, even that of right, on their side, yet they could not prosper if they fought in disobedience to God; and it was better to sit still than to rise up and fall. In the next reign God allowed them to fight, and gave them victory (2 Chronicles 13), but not now.

<1125> 1 KINGS 12:25-33

JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRY

We have here the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam. He built Shechem first and then Penuel — beautified and fortified them, and probably had a palace in each of them for himself (v. 25), the former in Ephraim, the latter in Gad, on the other side Jordan. This might be proper; but he formed another project for the establishing of his kingdom which was fatal to the interests of religion in it.

I. That which he designed was by some effectual means to secure those to himself who had now chosen him for their king, and to prevent their return to the house of David, v. 26, 27. It seems,

1. He was jealous of the people, afraid that, some time or other, they would kill him and go again to Rehoboam. Many that have been advanced in one tumult have been hurled down in another. Jeroboam could not put any confidence in the affections of his people, though now they seemed extremely fond of him; for what is got by wrong and usurpation cannot be enjoyed nor kept with any security or satisfaction.

2. He was distrustful of the promise of God, could not take his word that, if he would keep close to his duty, *God would build him a sure house* (<1118> 1 Kings 11:38); but he would contrive ways and means, and sinful ones too, for his own safety. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all our treacherous departures from him.

II. The way he took to do this was by keeping the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship. That was the place God had chosen, to put his name there. Solomon's temple was there, which God had, in the sight of all Israel, and in the memory of many now living, taken solemn possession of in a cloud of glory. At the altar there the priest of the Lord attended, there

all Israel were to keep the feasts, and thither they were to bring their sacrifices. Now,

1. Jeroboam apprehended that, if the people continued to do this, they would in time return to the house of David, allured by the magnificence both of the court and of the temple. If they cleave to their old religion, they will go back to their old king. We may suppose, if he had treated with Rehoboam for the safe conduct of himself and his people to and from Jerusalem at the times appointed for their solemn feasts, it would not have been denied him; therefore he fears not their being driven back by force, but their going back voluntarily to Rehoboam.

2. He therefore dissuaded them from going up to Jerusalem, pretending to consult their ease: "*It is too much for you to go so far to worship God, v. 28. It is a heavy yoke, and it is time to shake it off; you have gone long enough to Jerusalem*" (so some read it); "the temple, now that you are used to it, does not appear so glorious and sacred as it did at first" (sensible glories wither by degrees in men's estimation); "you have freed yourselves from other burdens, free yourselves from this: why should we now be tied to one place any more than in Samuel's time?"

3. He provided for the assistance of their devotion at home. Upon consultation with some of his politicians, he came to this resolve, to set up two golden calves, as tokens or signs of the divine presence, and persuade the people that they might as well stay at home and offer sacrifice to those as go to Jerusalem to worship before the ark: and some are so charitable as to think they were made to represent the mercy-seat and the cherubim over the ark; but more probably he adopted the idolatry of the Egyptians, in whose land he had sojourned for some time and who worshipped their god Apis under the similitude of a bull or calf.

(1.) He would not be at the charge of building a golden temple, as Solomon had done; two golden calves are the most that he can afford.

(2.) He intended, no doubt, by these to represent, or rather make present, not any false god, as Moloch or Chemosh, but the true God only, the God of Israel, the God that brought them up out of the land of Egypt, as he declares, v. 28. So that it was no violation of the first commandment, but the second. And he chose thus to engage the people's devotion because he knew there were many among them so in love with images that for the sake

of the calves they would willingly quit God's temple, where all images were forbidden.

(3.) He set up two, by degrees to break people off from the belief of the unity of the godhead, which would pave the way to the polytheism of the Pagans. He set up these two at Dan and Beth-el (one the utmost border of his country northward), the other southward, as if they were the guardians and protectors of the kingdom. Beth-el lay close to Judah. He set up one there, to tempt those of Rehoboam's subjects over to him who were inclined to image-worship, in lieu of those of his subjects that would continue to go to Jerusalem. He set up the other at Dan, for the convenience of those that lay most remote, and because Micah's images had been set up there, and great veneration paid to them for many ages, ^{<4783>}Judges 18:30, 31. *Beth-el* signifies *the house of God*, which gave some colour to the superstition; but the prophet called it *Beth-aven*, *the house of vanity*, or iniquity.

4. The people complied with him herein, and were fond enough of the novelty: They *went to worship before the one, even unto Dan* (v. 30), to that at Dan first because it was first set up, or *even* to that at Dan, though it lay such a great way off. Those that thought it much to go to Jerusalem, to worship God according to his institution, made no difficulty of going twice as far, to Dan, to worship him according to their own inventions. Or they are said to go to one of the calves at Dan because Abijah, king of Judah, within twenty years, recovered Beth-el (^{<4439>}2 Chronicles 13:19), and it is likely removed the golden calf, or forbade the use of it, and then they had only that at Dan to go to. *This became a sin*; and a great sin it was, against the express letter of the second commandment. God had sometimes dispensed with the law concerning worshipping in one place, but never allowed the worship of him by images. Hereby they justified their fathers in making the calf at Horeb, though God had so fully shown his displeasure against them for it and threatened to visit for it in the day of visitation (^{<4224>}Exodus 32:34), so that it was as great a contempt of God's wrath as it was of his law; and thus they added sin to sin. Bishop Patrick quotes a saying of the Jews, That till Jeroboam's time the Israelites sucked but one calf, but from that time they sucked two.

5. Having set up the gods, he fitted up accommodations for them; and wherein he varied from the divine appointment we are here told, which

intimates that in other things he imitated what was done in Judah (v. 32) as well as he could. See how one error multiplied into many.

(1.) He made a house of high-places, or of altars, one temple at Dan, we may suppose, and another at Beth-el (v. 31), and in each many altars, probably complaining of it as an inconvenience that in the temple at Jerusalem there was but one. The multiplying of altars passed with some for a piece of devotion, but God, by the prophet, puts another construction upon it, ~~<2081>~~Hosea 8:11. *Ephraim has made many altars to sin.*

(2.) He made priests of the lowest of the people; and the lowest of the people were good enough to be priests to his calves, and too good. He made priests *from the extremest parts of the people*, that is, some out of every corner of the country, whom he ordered to reside among their neighbours, to instruct them in his appointments and reconcile them to them. Thus were they dispersed as the Levites, but *were not of the sons of Levi*. But the priests of the high-places, or altars, he ordered to reside in Beth-el, as the priests at Jerusalem (v. 32), to attend the public service.

(3.) The feast of tabernacles, which God had appointed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he adjourned to the fifteenth day of the eighth month (v. 32), *the month which he devised of his own heart*, to show his power in ecclesiastical matters, v. 33. The passover and pentecost he observed in their proper season, or did not observe them at all, or with little solemnity in comparison with this.

(4.) He himself assuming a power to make priests, no marvel if he undertook to do the priests' work with his own hands: *He offered upon the altar*. This is twice mentioned (v. 32, 33), as also that he burnt incense. This was connived at in him because it was of a piece with the rest of his irregularities; but in king Uzziah it was immediately punished with the plague of leprosy. He did it himself, to make himself look great among the people and to get the reputation of a devout man, also to grace the solemnity of his new festival, with which, it is likely, at this time he joined the feast of the dedication of his altar. And thus,

[1.] Jeroboam sinned himself, yet perhaps excused himself to the world and his own conscience with this, that he did not do so ill as Solomon did, who worshipped other gods.

[2.] He *made Israel to sin*, drew them off from the worship of God and entailed idolatry upon their seed. And hereby they were punished for deserting the thrones *of the house of David*. The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology, for the adjusting of the annals of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, supposes that Jeroboam changed the calculation of the year and made it to contain but eleven months, and that by those years the reigns of the kings of Israel are measured till Jehu's revolution and no longer, so that during this interval eleven years of the annals of Judah answer to twelve in those of Israel.