
Day 152 - June 1

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Division between Israel and Judah

Readings: *1 Kings 12:1-33; 2 Chronicles 11:13-17; 1 Kings 13:1-32*

Reflections:

- The immediate aftermath of Solomon's death, is a page of history every leader should study carefully. It is the chronicle of what happens when weak leadership chooses to use power to control people rather than serving the people with the power of servant leadership.
- First, new King Rehoboam makes his first mistake by rejecting the gracious and wise counsel of the elders of Israel to embrace the thinking of the hard-nosed younger generation. Tough love. That is what the young leaders wanted. And what did his tough stance earn him as a new king? A divided kingdom. This is a powerful lesson. Older leaders if they have served well for many years know that a soft touch is critical to gaining the trust and unity of the people you serve. Young leaders can at times care more about vision than about people and as a result, take hard-nosed stances on issues that ultimately fracture and divide the community.
- Another King is exalted as Rehoboam is rejected. His name is Jeroboam and he takes charge of Israel leaving Rehoboam with Judah and Benjamin. Civil war is about to break out until a prophet calls off the battle and indicates that this is all God's doing. Here we see that the fall of Israel is clearly a part of what God wants people to see and understand in the unfolding story: People can't save themselves! Religion doesn't work. Leaders, even the wisest in the world, can't help. The division of Israel begins the slide of the nation down into the pit of failure and this is the conclusion God has understood right from day one. This is the story of what doesn't work but even as it begins its descent into tragedy, even this is a part of God setting the stage for the second major act. "Jesus and the story of what does work!"
- Jeroboam now unifies Israel under the religion the people have been returning to in the later days of Solomon. "Welcome back, golden calf!" Times two! This whole return to religion is very messed up. He institutes his own priesthood and his own festivals. Anyone who is loyal to God, particularly the Levites, get out of there in a hurry as they return to Jerusalem to worship God. Again, here is a key leadership lesson. Weak

leaders immediately want to put their own leaders in place to fortify their position. But the leaders they choose are leaders who will support them rather than truly submit and follow God. When bad leaders take control, good people end up leaving just to survive.

- All of this sin evokes a response from God as he sends a prophet to confront Jeroboam. A split altar and a withered hand don't bring the kind of repentance you would expect. Again we see, as in the case of Pharaoh, that outward judgment doesn't humble the heart. Jeroboam still wants to "look good by hanging out with the prophet" but is refused. God has warned the prophet and rejects the invitation. Again another sign of corrupt and weak leadership: the attempt to be righteous by association, trying to look good by hanging out with quality people.
- Now the next story is frightening. This prophet who has been faithful to God and survived one test fails a second test. Rather than a corrupt king tempting him to deny the word of God, another prophet claiming to have his own word from God, comes to tempt him to disobey God. The prophet ends up listening to the old prophet, disobeys God and in the end is killed by a lion for his sin. Now the judgment of this prophet is clearly miraculous as the lion mauls him but does not eat him or the donkey. In fact, the lion waits until the other prophet comes to take the body for burial. Yikes! There are lots of questions that we can ask. What is up with God testing this prophet this way and then killing him so savagely? How can God be viewed as a kind and merciful God with this kind of story? The story itself suggests that the old prophet still honors him, identifies with him and even affirms that his prophecy will come true. The judgment that fell on this prophet was because he disobeyed God. We can only guess why God would do this. The lesson is clear. When God commands you to do something and he makes it crystal clear what you are to do, then he expects you to do what he has asked you to do regardless of what other people say, even the most righteous of people. God expects his leaders to follow him with undivided loyalty and complete faith and trust in him alone. This is a powerful reminder for us today, even in the new season of grace when disobedience doesn't bring a pouncing lion upon us. God expects his leaders to listen to his voice alone. Period. Even if other completely godly leaders say they know from God that you are to reject what God has shown you, you are not to listen to them. You are to trust God until God makes it clear to you.