

1 Kings 11:26-12:24 // The King Who Broke The Kingdom

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[0 : 00] This second reading is from 1 Kings chapter 12 verses 1 to 24 which can be found on page 351 of the church bibles.

! That's 1 Kings chapter 12 verses 1 to 24. Israel rebels against Rehoboam. Rehoboam went to Shechem for all Israel had gone there to make him king.

When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this he was still in Egypt where he had fled from King Solomon he returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him your father put a heavy yoke on us but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us and we will serve you.

Rehoboam answered go away for three days and then come back to me. So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. How would you advise me to answer these people he asked. They replied if today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer they will always be your servants.

[1 : 15] But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. He asked them what is your advice?

How should we answer these people who say to me lighten the yoke your father put on us? The young men who had grown up with him replied. These people have said to you your father put a heavy yoke on us but make our yoke lighter.

Now tell them my little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke. I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips.

I will scourge you with scorpions. Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam as the king had said come back to me in three days. The king answered the people harshly.

Rejecting the advice given him by the elders he followed the advice of the young men and said My father made your yoke heavy. I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips.

[2 : 17] I will scourge you with scorpions. So the king did not listen to the people for this turn of events was from the Lord. To fulfil the word of the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them they answered the king What share do we have in David? What part in Jesse's son? To your tents Israel look after your own house David. So the Israelites went home. But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah Rehoboam still ruled over them. King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram who was in charge of forced labour.

But all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam however managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

[3 : 26] When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. A hundred and eighty thousand able young men to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon.

But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God. Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah. To all Judah and Benjamin and to the rest of the people.

This is what the Lord says. Do not go up to fight against your brothers the Israelites. Go home. Every one of you. For this is my doing. So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again as the Lord had ordered.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you so much Ali for reading.

And let me add my welcome. I hadn't realised before this morning what a budding artist we have in Robbie. A kind of cross between abstract expressionism and kind of naive cave painting.

[4 : 31] Well let's bow our heads as we come to God's word in prayer. Asking for his help.

Heavenly Father we ask that by your spirit you would take your word and press it into our hearts and our minds.

Help us to see you more clearly. To know you more truly. And to grasp more deeply who Jesus is. And why he is such a great king and saviour.

Please use our time now in your word. To do in us by your spirit all that you would intend. For we ask in Jesus name.

Amen. Well when things fall apart. The question isn't just what went wrong. But is anyone actually in control?

Is anyone actually in control? Now it can get quite confusing can't it in kings. Once you get past Solomon. When all these kings and half of them sound the same.

[5 : 46] Jeroboam. Rehoboam. I mean come on. But they are also apparently wine bottle sizes. Jeroboam.

Rehoboam. Don't think that actually helps anyone follow the story. But there we are. But it's not just confusing. It's actually quite depressing.

Because again and again you see leaders fail. And that's disappointing. And we all know what that feels like.

Disappointment when things don't go the way we'd hoped or planned. When people don't turn out how we expected. Particularly disappointing with people we'd had high hopes for.

And sometimes if we're honest. The deepest disappointment is disappointment in ourselves. What was I thinking? Why did I do that thing?

[6 : 45] And that kind of disappointment. It can be deeply unsettling. It can make you wonder. Is anything really in control? Now I was reading through the book of Kings with my daughter.

Recently in her children's Bible. And as we went through all these kings. Getting a bit lost with who's who. Along the way we kept coming back to two simple questions.

What kind of God do we have? And what kind of king do we need? What kind of God do we have? What kind of king do we need?

Because as you read these kings. Some good. Mostly bad. Even the good ones flawed. You start to realize. We need a king better than any of these.

Now as we come to our passage in front of us. Today there's a lot going on. There's drama. There's tension. There's division. There's the beginnings of a civil war.

[7 : 49] It looks chaotic. It feels unstable. But right in the middle of it. We get these two remarkable lines. Chapter 12 verse 15. Firstly.

Chapter 12 verse 15. Halfway through the verse. This turn of events. This turn of events. Was from the Lord.

To fulfill the word of the Lord. And verse 24. For this is my doing.

Says the Lord. In the middle of all the mess. God says. I am in this.

I've got this. So here's the question we need to ask. Is there a plan? Is there a plan? When things feel chaotic. When leaders fail.

[8 : 43] When life doesn't go as we'd hoped. Is God really in control? And if he is. Does it actually matter.

What he says. Because this passage says. God is not just watching these events unfold from the sidelines. He is in absolute control of them.

Even the painful ones. Even the ones that look like complete mess and disaster. God is in charge. So what does that mean for us?

Well here's the reality. Let me put it to you. That there's a direct correlation. A direct link between. How much you think God is in charge about the future.

And how seriously we take what he says about the future. A direct link between. And how much we believe that God is in charge. And how much we take his word seriously.

[9 : 51] In other words. If you really believe that God is in control. You'll take his word seriously. And if you don't. You won't. And alongside that.

As we watch another king fail. Another leader disappoint. We're forced to ask. What kind of king do we actually need? What kind of king do we need?

So as we walk through this passage. We're going to see three things. Firstly the God that we have. Secondly the king that we need.

And finally what happens when we don't have that king? So what kind of God do we have? And as this scene unfolds.

Three things come into focus. God is in control. God brings judgment. And yet God shows mercy.

[10 : 54] So let's step into the scene. Verse 26 of chapter 11. Jeroboam son of Nebat. Rebelled against the king.

He was one of Solomon's officials. Here's the account of how he rebelled against the king. Solomon had built the terraces. And filled in the gap. In the wall of the city of David his father.

Now Jeroboam was a man of standing. And when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work. He put him in charge of a whole labor force. Of the tribes of Joseph. About that time

Jeroboam is going out of Jerusalem.

And Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh meets him on the way. Wearing a new cloak. The two of them are alone out in the country. And Ahijah takes hold of the new cloak he's wearing. And tears it into 12 pieces.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being there? This brand new garment. His brand new Christian jaw. Robes ripped to shreds.

[11 : 57] Just like that. It's not something that you'd forget quickly. So what's going on? Well I guess we're used to the idea of ripped clothes these days.

I guess they used to be a bit edgy. A kind of symbol of non-conformity. But now people pay good money for them. This isn't a fashion statement from Ahijah.

This is a sign. A prophetic sign. It explains what he's done. I'm going to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon. And give you 10 pieces.

So Jeroboam, this very capable guy. This guy fast-tracked on the civil service. He's told you'll rule most of the kingdom.

And Solomon, he's going to lose almost all of it. Now this isn't guesswork. God is declaring what will happen because God is in charge of the future.

[12 : 57] God knows the future. But why? Why is this happening? Well look at verse 33. It happens because they've turned away from the Lord.

That's the reason. And God says that matters. This is not inconsequential. This is not trivial.

Judgment is coming because you've turned away from me, the living God. So the tearing of the kingdom isn't just politics.

It is God's response to their rejection of him. And you know that raises a question for us. Does it actually matter if we reject God?

If we walk away from God? Does that matter? Does it matter who or what we worship? Can we just do our own thing and it'll all be fine?

[14 : 13] Why not just live life the best you can? Is God in charge enough for that to matter? Well our passage says, yes it does.

It matters to God a lot. And yet, right in the middle of this judgment there's something unexpected. A scrap, a scrap of cloth remains.

Verse 32. He, Solomon and his successes will have one tribe. Verse 34. I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand.

Verse 36. I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me. Verse 39.

I will humble David's descendants because of this. But not forever. So do you hear the rhythm? I will tear it away but not yet.

[15 : 15] I will tear it away but not completely. I will tear it away but not forever. There is judgment.

God is angry. And yet there is mercy. Why? For the sake of my servant David. God remembers his promises.

God had promised that there would be a king from David's line that would endure forever. So even here in judgment there is grace.

This is not the end of the story. And that's the tension running through everything. A God who judges and yet a God who remembers mercy.

Is God in charge? Will his word actually come true? Solomon doesn't seem to think so.

[16:15] Notice how Solomon responds in verse 40. He tries to kill Jeroboam. Which I guess politically makes sense. Eliminate the threat. Problem solved.

It's strongman politics. But theologically it's madness, isn't it? Because God has already said I'm giving him ten tribes. So what on earth is Solomon thinking here?

He's thinking maybe God's word won't happen. Maybe God's word doesn't really apply to me.

Maybe I can get away with it. And if we're honest with ourselves, that's not a million miles away from how we sometimes can think. I know what God says.

But surely this won't really matter. I can just do this my own way. And it'll all be fine. So Solomon tries to outmaneuver God.

[17:19] And what happens? Jeroboam escapes. He flees to Egypt. And the message is clear. You cannot outrun the word of God.

You cannot overturn his plans. You cannot outplay his purposes. God said it. And God does exactly what he says. So what kind of God do we have?

A God who is in control of the future. A God whose word always stands. A God who judges sin. And a God who shows mercy even in judgment.

And if that's the kind of God that we have, then what kind of king do we need? Well, we're about to find out in chapter 12. Solomon dies.

And remember that God's already said the kingdom will be torn, but not yet. Well, now his son steps onto this stage. Rehoboam. Chapter 12, verse 1. Rehoboam goes to Shechem.

[18:21] For all Israel had gone there to make him king. This is his moment. The crowns on his head. The whole nation in front of him. And immediately he faces his first big test. The first big political test of his leadership.

Verse 4. People say, So here's the question hanging over this whole scene.

What kind of king will he be? Will he use his powers for the people? Or will he use his power against the people? What kind of king will he be?

So he asks for advice. First, the elders. Men who'd been around Solomon at his best and at his wisest. Verse 7. If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.

So just stop there. That's astonishing, isn't it? The king as a servant. That's their vision of leadership.

[19:31] If you will be a servant king who serves the people, they will gladly follow you.

That's the first voice. But then he turns to his mates and everything changes. Verse 8. But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him.

He asked them, What is your advice? The young men who had grown up with him replied, These people have said to you, Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.

Now tell them, My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke. I will make it even heavier.

My father scourged you with whips. I will scourge you with scorpions. This is classic lads chat, isn't it? Pure bravado.

[20:29] Posturing. And you can almost picture them, can't you? Stumbling off a Jet 2 flight from Ibiza. Bleary-eyed, a little bit leery, still in lads holiday mode.

And suddenly finding themselves setting government policy. And actually it's quite crude, their advice. I won't spell it out for you, but let's just say the word translated finger isn't in the original. Be the big man. Don't give an inch. You show them who's in charge. And actually it's worse than just laddish nonsense. It's Pharaoh-like thinking.

Back in Exodus, back when God's people cried out in their oppression, Pharaoh's answer was make it harder.

Make the work harder. Crush them. So here are two ways to rule. Be a servant king or be a tyrant.

[21:34] So what does he do? Chapter 12, verse 12. Three days later, Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam. The king answered the people harshly.

He rejects the wise elders. He follows his friends and he says, My father made your yoke heavy. I will make it even heavier. What an idiot.

It's a catastrophic decision. If you turn against your people, they will turn against you and it will tear the kingdom apart. And it's tragic.

Because he's not just rejecting the counsel of the elders. This is the son of Solomon. He is rejecting the wisdom of his own wise father, Solomon.

The fact is that Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs, that book of wisdom, for his son. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction.

[22 : 34] The book of Proverbs is full of pertinent, helpful advice. A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

And Rehoboam does just the opposite, doesn't he? Surrounded by wisdom and he ignores it. Doesn't answer graciously or sweetly. And as you watch this unfold, you start to realize this isn't just about Rehoboam.

This is where all these kings lead us. Disappointed, frustrated, wanting something far better. And this is, I think, exposing our need for a very different kind of king, a very different vision of leadership.

And that's exactly what we're given in the Lord Jesus, a servant king. Because when Jesus comes, he doesn't just talk about servant leadership.

He embodies it. In Mark chapter 10, he says, the son of man didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[23 : 46] At the last supper, Jesus says, I am among you as one who serves. The king at the table serving his people. And listen to the contrast.

Rehoboam says, I will make your yoke heavier. Jesus says, Come to me. Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

For my yoke is easy. My burden is light. One king adds to the burden. The other lifts it. One king crushes the people.

The other carries them. And this really matters, because under a king like Rehoboam, God's people are burdened, they're crushed, they're fractured.

But under King Jesus, we are served. We're forgiven, and we're given rest. Remember the God that we saw in chapter 11, a God who is fully in control, a God who judges sin, a God who nevertheless shows mercy.

[24 : 52] If that's the kind of God that we live under, then we don't just need better leadership. We need a king who can deal with our sin, a king who can carry our burden of guilt, a king who can stand in our place under the judgment of God.

That is exactly the kind of king we have in King Jesus. What happens when you have a king like Rehoboam?

Verse 16, And just like that, the kingdom rips apart, exactly as God had said.

Now on one level, you get it, don't you? Rehoboam has just said, I'll make your burden heavy. Of course they walk away. Of course they reject him. And yet, there's something deeply tragic here, because in rejecting this foolish king, they're also rejecting the house of David, the line that God had placed his promise in, their only hope under God's purposes.

What share do we have in David? Sounds like freedom. It sounds like a cry for independence, but it's actually stepping away from God's salvation.

[26 : 19] And things spiral quickly. What does Rehoboam do next? Does he rethink his strategy? No, of course not.

He's still listening to the manosphere. He's still listening to his mates. He thinks, I will scourge them with scorpions. He sends in the enforcer, Adoniram.

How does that go? They stone him to death. And Rehoboam barely escapes with his life. So he regroup's plan B. Send in the army.

Shock and all tactics. Overwhelming force. Verse 21. When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered 180,000 able young men to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom.

Brother against brother. This is moments away from civil war. And then God steps in. Verse 24.

This is what the Lord says.

[27 : 18] Do not go to fight against your brothers. Go home, every one of you. For this is my doing, says the Lord. Everything stops.

No battle. No bloodshed. Why? Because God said, Stop. Enough. None of this should surprise us. Because right back in verse 15, we're told, This turn of events was from the Lord to fulfill the word of the Lord. In other words, this isn't chaos.

This isn't things spinning out of control. This whole messy, painful, disappointing situation. This whole thing is under the sovereign hand of God who is in charge, who is in control.

So just take a step back and see what's happening here. The kingdom is torn exactly as God had said.

[28 : 23] Judgment falls, but it is restrained. It could have been total destruction, but God says, No further. And running through it, are one unbreakable truth.

God's word comes true exactly as he said it would. Always. Whether people resist it or submit to it. Solomon tried to resist it. We saw that last week. If you intermarry these foreign women, they'll turn your hearts away. And God's word comes true. Rehoboam tries to force things his own way. Disaster. You cannot outrun the word of God. You cannot overturn his purposes. You cannot outmaneuver it. Twisting God's arm doesn't work.

Trying to do a runner from God doesn't work. His word stands. And that brings us back to the cry in verse 16. What share do we have in David?

[29 : 27] Because that question doesn't just remain in 1 Kings. It echoes forward. Later in the Bible, another son of David comes. A better king.

A perfect king. Not like Rehoboam who rejected the wisdom of his father, but one who perfectly obeys his father even to the point of death.

What happens to Jesus? He's rejected by his people. crucified. It looks like a disaster.

The worst failure. The greatest evil. And yet, at the very same time, it is the fulfillment of God's good purposes, of his plans.

what people meant for evil. God meant for good, for salvation. So in Rehoboam, we have a king who broke the kingdom.

[30 : 36] But in King Jesus, we have a king who was broken for the sake of the kingdom. And the cross shows us this. God is so sovereign, so in control, so completely in charge that even human rebellion, even the darkest evil, cannot thwart his purposes.

They become the very means by which his purposes are accomplished. So now the question comes to us. What share do we have in David's son?

What share do we have in this king? Because unlike Israel here, we're not stuck with a foolish king.

We have the true king, the servant king, the crucified king, the risen king, Jesus.

The king who says, come to me and I will give you rest. That's our king.

And one day this king will return. He will judge the world. So he calls us now to turn to him and be saved.

[32 : 01] So what will we say? Because let me remind you that there's a direct connection between how much we believe God is in control and how seriously we take his word.

If God is really in charge, then his word about Jesus, it isn't optional. So how do we respond? To walk away?

To say, what share do we have in this king? That would be the real tragedy. But to come to him, to trust him, to submit to him even when things don't look promising or things aren't going the way that we'd planned our hope, that is where real rest is found.

That is where mercy is found. That is where life itself is found. The people obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again as the Lord commanded.

Heavenly Father, you move in mysterious ways your wonders to perform. We praise you that you are in control, that you know the end from the beginning and that all your purposes will stand.

[33 : 27] thank you that your word is trustworthy and that you keep your promises. Please help us to trust you even when life doesn't go as we expect or hope.

And we thank you for King Jesus, our servant King, who went to the cross for us and lifted the burden of our sin. Help us to trust him, to submit to him and to gladly follow him wherever he leads. In his name. Amen. Amen.