

File No. 69

I KINGS 11:1–13, 26–43; 12:1–24

SOLOMON'S SAD END / ISRAEL BECAME TWO KINGDOMS

(SBS Bk 3 Story Nos. 1 & 2)

Story Notes

Chapter 11–12

The story has moved to when Solomon was old. From the beginning of his reign, he gathered foreign wives. His own needs for political stability may have given him excuse to ignore the warnings of Moses (Exod. 34:12–16). He thought his own heart was secure from turning aside to idols, but it was not so. The two warnings God gave him did not prevent him from turning away. He loved these idols and provided shrines for them. Solomon had broken the covenant.

However, God would keep his covenant by bringing judgement on Solomon's dynasty, delaying the judgement and keeping one tribe 'for the sake of your father David'. As with Abraham and Moses, we see God's purpose to have a faithful covenant partner to whom he could respond in love. David had been this faithful one, in anticipation of the Christ who would be the beloved Son in whom God was well pleased. For his sake, God would have mercy on us all and keep his covenant 'for the sake of Jerusalem'.

The downfall of Solomon's united kingdom came through the industrious young warrior, Jeroboam, whom Solomon had appointed to look after the Northern workforce. God sent a prophet to Jeroboam to announce his charter and limitations. (Israel's kings, even Jeroboam who would lead a revolt, could not succeed without a prophetic word.) Jeroboam could not foil God's promise to keep a 'lamp' alight in Jerusalem for David and to have his own name remembered at Jerusalem. He and his sons, if they kept the commands of God, could reign until God's purpose in this separation of North and South was accomplished.

A 'lamp' is a figure of speech for a life or a dynasty. It could also signify divine guidance (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23). God had been David's lamp (II Sam. 22:29) and David was a lamp for Israel (II Sam. 21:17). Now, the purpose of God in David would be continued in his sons (I Kings 5:4).

Solomon did not accept that his kingdom would be divided and continued in his political mind-set causing Jeroboam to flee the country. In this state, Solomon's life and reign came to an end.

Perhaps we should see this in contrast to David who had accepted the chastenings of God.

Samuel had warned that kings would demand a lavish lifestyle (I Sam. 8:10–18). Now, Solomon's luxurious ways had bred resentment, particularly in the powerful Northern tribes centred in Shechem. (It is doubtful if it was as harsh as they claimed. Solomon's reign had brought abundant prosperity to the whole country.) Rehoboam chose the city of Shechem to be made king, perhaps aware that the North would have to be won over. Jeroboam came back and represented Israel's cause to the new king.

Solomon's older counsellors advised Rehoboam to moderate his Father's demands, saying the people would serve him if he served them. But the young king preferred the advice of his peers and rejected the loss of glory involved in downsizing his court. In this manner, God's judgement against Solomon was at work.

This episode demonstrates the folly of ignoring the advice of elders. It also suggests that service is the true spirit of leadership (Luke 22:25–27). Solomon could hold his large kingdom together, but his heir had little or none of his father's wisdom. Even at 40 years of age, he could not recognise the power of the forces set against him and moderate his demands with a view to the greater good.

It would be wrong to generalise from the particular elements of this story however. More broadly speaking, kingship involves discretion at all times, and severity and kindness at different times (see Proverbs 20:8, 26, 28). In Israel, kingship could be nothing less than representing the covenant faithfulness of God to the nation. We may compare God's own goodness and severity to his people (Rom. 11:22).

Rehoboam's claim to his father's kingdom was thwarted. His ambassador lost his life and the young king had to be content with Judah as his kingdom. He could raise a considerable army, but a prophet showed him that this had happened by God's will and that he should not war against his brothers.

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