

## Sermon 15: Jeroboam's Revolt, 1 Kings 12:1-24

Sing: Psalm 2, "How Marvellous, How Wise, How Great"?, "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart"

Confession of Faith WCF 5.4 (Trinity Hymnal page 676)--Read during the sermon

- I. The Assembly at Shechem (vv. 1-14)
  - A. Rehoboam to Shechem (v. 1)
  - B. Jeroboam to Shechem (vv. 2-3)
  - C. The Dialogue with Rehoboam (vv. 4-14)
    1. The People's Demands (v. 4)
    2. Rehoboam Consults his Advisors (vv. 5-11)
    3. Rehoboam Rejects the People's Demands (vv. 12-14)
- II. The Event Explained (v. 15)
- III. The Rebellion Against the Lord's Anointed (vv. 16-20)
- IV. The Divinely Imposed Peace (vv. 21-24)

Proposition: Rehoboam's folly became the excuse for Israel's rebellion, yet it all happened under God's wise and powerful bounding and restraining.

### Homiletical Outline

- I. Rehoboam's Folly Lost the Kingdom (vv. 1-14)
  - A. Rehoboam Goes to Shechem (v. 1)
  - B. Jeroboam Goes to Shechem (vv. 2-3)
  - C. The Dialogue with Rehoboam (vv. 4-14)
    1. The People's Demands (v. 4)
    2. Rehoboam Consults his Advisors (vv. 5-11)
    3. Rehoboam Rejects the People's Demands (vv. 12-14)
- II. God's Providence Split the Kingdom (v. 15)
- III. Israel's Rebellion Against Yahweh's Anointed (vv. 16-20)
- IV. God's Restraint on Israel's Rebellion (vv. 21-24)

### Manuscript

Intro The prophet Isaiah preached during the reigns of Jotham, Uzziah, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Yet his book records events that indicate that he lived into the reign of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah and the most wicked king to ever sit on the throne of Judah. In fact, Jewish tradition indicates that Hezekiah married Isaiah's daughter. Their son Manasseh was Isaiah's grandson. And according to that same tradition, it was Manasseh who had Isaiah sawn in two as a method of execution.

Now, obviously I have no idea whether these Jewish fables are true. But I just want you to consider with me a "what if." What if they are all true? What if Isaiah, languishing in prison

under the direct orders of his grandson, knowing that he was going to be executed in the morning, was still able to sit down and write his famous words, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Isaiah 52:7)?

Again, I don’t know whether that ever happened. But it could have. And would it have been true? Would that have been good news, even in the darkness of a prison cell the night before being executed by your own God-hating grandson? Yes! The gospel is good news, no matter what circumstances we may be in. And brothers and sisters, the portion of 1 Kings 12 that we just read contains similar good news. God reigns, even when fools and knaves sit on the throne. Tonight, with God’s help, I will show you that Rehoboam’s folly became the excuse for Israel’s rebellion, yet it all happened under God’s wise and powerful bounding and restraining. Rehoboam split the kingdom; Israel rebelled against the Lord’s Anointed--yet it all came from the hand of God.

### **I. Rehoboam’s Folly Lost the Kingdom (vv. 1-14)**

Though this chapter contains rich theological meat, the first bit of it is simply slow build-up. The first fourteen verses of this chapter describe the assembly at Shechem and what took place there on the human level. Several things are worthy of note--the place, the cast of characters, the solemn assembly.

#### **A. Rehoboam Goes to Shechem (v. 1)**

Who is this man Rehoboam? Well, the fact that he is the only son mentioned in the narrative has led some to speculate that he was Solomon’s only son. One thousand wives and concubines, and the man managed to have only one son. Certainly the bareness of the narrative invites speculation. One is reminded of Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, who speculated that Solomon wanted to chop the child in half back in chapter 3 because he had so many children running around all over the place most of the time. Whether that’s true or not, the only progeny of Solomon mentioned in Scripture is this man Rehoboam. And as the narrative indicates, he was more than half a fool. All kinds of moralizing conclusions can be drawn from this. Certainly it is true that neither grace nor wisdom runs in the blood, and a wise father can have a very foolish son. Look at Bruce and Brian Gordon. Well, Rehoboam was 41 years old when these events took place. The Jews who translated the OT into Greek thought that Rehoboam was so stupid that they changed the text here; the LXX says that he was only sixteen years old when he became king. While that’s not true, he might as well have been for all the wisdom he had.

Shechem, meanwhile, was a historic town in Israel. Most recently, it was the place where Abimelech had been proclaimed king, back in Judges 9. It had a more central location than Jerusalem, and it was a stronghold of the tribe of Ephraim. Remember, Jeroboam was an Ephraimite from around that area. Before this, Joshua had renewed the covenant at Shechem, and Joseph’s bones are buried there, in the field Jacob bought from Hamor the father of Shechem. So this is a historic place. This place relates very closely to God’s promise to give Israel the land.

Finally, the national assembly is an interesting phenomenon. There was no such assembly to make Solomon king. But there was one that crowned David (2 Samuel 5:1), and one crowned Saul as well (1 Samuel 10). The understanding seemed to be that a king was elected by popular consent. Rehoboam knew enough to understand that he was supposed to show up at his own coronation. But beyond that, he seems to have missed the memo--the people don't automatically crown you king just because of who your daddy was. You need to have some political savvy.

### **B. Jeroboam Goes to Shechem (vv. 2-3)**

Jeroboam, on the other hand, received a special invitation to this coronation event. It was going to be an interesting political convention--Rehoboam fresh from court life and, presumably, his father's funeral; Jeroboam, Solomon's biggest adversary, freshly arrived from Egypt. The event has the necessary ingredients for some pretty shocking developments.

### **C. The Dialogue with Rehoboam (vv. 4-14)**

The confrontation begins right away. Rehoboam is the candidate to beat, while Jeroboam is the leader of the opposition.

#### **1. The People's Demands (v. 4)**

The people's demands sound very reasonable. As one of you is constantly quoting to me, America once went to war over a 2% increase in the price of a breakfast beverage. Where is our fighting spirit now? Well, Israel in 930 B.C. had that fighting spirit in spadefuls. They were spoiling for a brawl, and their target was Rehoboam. "Lighten your father's burdensome yoke, and we will serve you!" The scenario sounds less the American Revolution and more like the French Revolution, as the aggrieved lower classes confront the child of privilege and power and demand that he stop grinding their faces in the dust.

But was this demand justified? Well, the narrator doesn't say so. Instead, we heard a few chapters ago that Judah and Israel ate and drank and were happy. Surely Solomon taxed the people to pay for his numerous building projects--but on the other hand, they got to reap the benefits of those taxes. As Matthew Henry pointed out, some people simply will not be satisfied, no matter how well they are provided for and no matter how wisely they are governed. Solomon was the wisest politician in history, and people were still mad about his administration.

In short, though perhaps Solomon could have gone a little easier on the people, I think the bottom line is really the old, old story of Psalm 2. Most of Israel — 10 tribes out of 12, or 83%, was rebellious against the LORD's Anointed. They did not want to submit to the Davidic monarchy, and any excuse to rebel was a good excuse. The text contains plenty of evidence for this view — we'll look at it under point 3. In any case, Northern Israel made it clear: they would submit to the line of David only on their own terms. Now, has this attitude ever characterized you? "God, I'll submit to you when you do x, y, and z. I'll be kind to my wife when she quits nagging me. I'll play catch with my kids when they get their room clean. I'll stop stealing office supplies when my company starts paying me enough." Well, let's see--did this attitude work out well for Israel?

#### **2. Rehoboam Consults his Advisors (vv. 5-11)**

Rehoboam, predictably, follows the advice of the fools. Now, though the advice of the old men was better pragmatically, it was no better spiritually. Conciliate the people now, and then do whatever you want, the old men said. True enough--once you have power, you can do anything, even when popular opinion is overwhelmingly against you. This is the method largely pursued by our current leaders. They say whatever they need to say to get into office, and then they use their power however they jolly well please.

The younger advisors are more obviously crude and arrogant and stupid. They like the slogan they invent — probably a crude sexual reference, “my little thingie is thicker than my father’s waist” — and so does Rehoboam.

Now, did Solomon chastise them with whips? Well, it’s not very clear. The text says he didn’t make any Israelites forced labor (9:22). But Rehoboam seems to believe that his father had some somewhat draconian policies. Regardless, Rehoboam chooses the politically clueless advisors.

### **3. Rehoboam Rejects the People’s Demands (vv. 12-14)**

In a move that is downright stupid, and also sad, he simply says, “If you want good government, forget it. I run on a platform of naked tyranny, and there is nothing you can do about it.”

No doubt about it: Rehoboam was a fool. And folly is wicked. Can you blame the Israelites for rejecting him?

## **II. God’s Providence Split the Kingdom (v. 15)**

Yet notice the theological point that the narrator gives us: this thing was from Yahweh. The LORD brought it to pass, in order to fulfill the prophetic word.

In other words, yikes. Something this foolish and sinful came straight from the hand of God. This was the threatened judgment on Solomon, and it was being carried out on Rehoboam. Now, do you feel sorry for Rehoboam? One commentator insists that this is a case of the iniquity of the fathers being visited on the children. Rehoboam, he says, had done nothing to deserve the way in which the kingdom was torn away from him.

Well, whether Rehoboam deserved it or not, he got himself there. He made his own bed, engineered his own downfall. The least politically savvy among us can recognize that Rehoboam, with his arrogant attitude, didn’t have a ghost of a chance at conciliating the belligerent Israelites. And yet this thing was from the LORD. God had set all this up, so it would play out exactly as he intended it to. Throughout the chapter, you can see Rehoboam’s bone-headed free will at work, getting him deeper and deeper into trouble. But behind Rehoboam’s disastrous way of working lies God’s way of working.

Now, God does this all the time. In fact, He’s always doing it. Everything that happens has a second cause — a historical chain of events that explains why it happened — and a first cause, which is the determinate counsel and decree of God. Let me read you some of the cross-references to this verse.

Deu 2:30 "But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today.

Jdg 14:4 However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

2Ch 25:20 But Amaziah would not listen, for it was from God, that He might deliver them into the hand of Joash because they had sought the gods of Edom.

Jos 11:20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

2Sa 17:14 Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the LORD had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, in order that the LORD might bring calamity on Absalom.

Act 2:23 this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Do you think this a theme in Scripture? Obviously, it is! Many are the plans of a man's heart, but he counsel of the LORD, that shall stand (Proverbs 19:21)! God is in charge, and behind all the varying events of this world is the unifying force of His eternal decree.

As a side note, this is why we as Calvinists are in favor of science. No doubt, if you have any interest in scientific things, you have heard of the search for a Grand Theory of Everything. Basically, science is the effort to trace everything back to its root cause. We want to find the thought, the organizing principle, that determines why everything is the way that it is. Well, this is found in the eternal decree of God. A Grand Theory of Everything represents nothing less than the attempt to retrace God's thoughts, to reverse-engineer the cosmos, to understand why He made everything the way that He made it. Evolution militates against this. Evolution insists that there is no cosmic unity, that there is no single principle or thought behind all the varied phenomena, that the world is a chance world in which anything could happen. We say the opposite. We know that in all the varied circumstances of human life and in all the varied scenes of history, nothing happens but what God has decreed.

Surely this should comfort your soul. The Obergefell decision is under God's control. The concentration camps of Nazi Germany were under God's control. The heart of Barack Obama and the heart of the school shooter are alike under God's control. He is not guilty of their sin, but He is in control of it. Indeed, as our last cross-reference pointed out, God was even in control of the greatest wickedness ever perpetrated — the crucifixion of the Son of God.

### **III. Israel's Rebellion Against Yahweh's Anointed (vv. 16-20)**

Well, God's eternal decree stands forever and works itself out through the free actions of righteous men and wicked men. The action particularly in view here is the rebellion of Israel.

Remember that I said a bit ago that this was a rebellion against the Lord's Anointed. I say this because the people don't even mention Rehoboam. It's not that he was the problem, and except for the fact that Rehoboam was stupid they would have been quite content to live under Davidic rule. Is that what they say? No, they refer throughout to David. The message of v. 16 is clear: "We, the people of Northern Israel, want nothing to do with the Davidic line. We want to cast off the rule of the LORD and His Anointed." When Rehoboam sends someone who can negotiate with them, they reject him and stone him. Finally, the narrator makes it clear the Rehoboam was not the problem. The bigger issue is the house of David (v. 19). They found a king after their own hearts in Jeroboam.

Now, does the modern church ever do that? What I mean is this: do we, through huge swaths of the church, cast off the rule of King Jesus and prefer our own fleshly substitutes instead? You'd better believe it. Wanting to worship God in our way, wanting to use the Lord's Day for our own pleasure rather than for enjoying God, wanting to have ungodly entertainment because everybody's doing it — well, all these things are very prominent in the church, and it's because we too are guilty of wanting to cast off the Lord and His Anointed.

Do you think that the homosexual mirage issue is about rights? Do you think it's about discrimination? Do you think it's about people who simply want to experience the delights of the flesh more conveniently? Brothers and sisters, don't be naive. Homosexual mirage is basically about attacking Jesus Christ, the Lord's Anointed. He is the perfect husband. He is always faithful to His bride. Homosexual activity, and especially their parody of marriage, is about discrediting Jesus. By taking the title "marriage" for their foul deeds of darkness, they are ultimately trying to besmirch the name and character of Christ. They may not know that or be able to say it in so many words. But rest assured, that is ultimately what this is about. They want to make His faithfulness look weird. They want to make His holiness look perverted. They want to make good evil and evil good. Because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, we must fight their effort to deface and defile that picture.

Well, Israel's rebellion against David was a rebellion against Christ, as the further history of the Northern Kingdom so amply confirms. Don't let your history be that of a rebel against Christ. You will perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.

#### **IV. God's Restraint on Israel's Rebellion (vv. 21-24)**

Nonetheless, the chapter ends on a note of good hope: the word of God prevails. God restrains rebellion against His Anointed--and in this case, He restrains Rehoboam from doing further damage. In effect, He tells Rehoboam to submit to His providence.

And brothers and sisters, that is the message we need to take from our text this evening. Since God controls everything, even evil, which He wisely and powerfully bounds and restrains, our call is to submit to His providence. Now, obviously we need to flee evil ourselves. But we must not rage against His government of the world. When the wicked rule a country, we have every responsibility to pursue the ordinary means of driving them back out. But when something is manifestly from God, even if it's a bad thing, we must submit to it. Now, I don't pretend to

have the wisdom to know when to fight and when to submit. But I do know that God's providence is holy, wise, and powerful. When He takes your child, your bank account, your home, or your job, submit. When He places wicked men in power, submit insofar as you can, remembering that when man's law conflicts with God's, too bad for man's law. Rehoboam was obligated to let God's will be done--but a resident of Northern Israel was obligated to shun the state-supported golden calf worship Jeroboam instituted.

Rehoboam's folly became the excuse for Israel's rebellion. Don't let your father's folly or your pastor's folly or your presbytery's folly become your excuse for rebellion. Remember that whatever happens happens under God's wise and powerful bounding and restraining. He is in charge. Even when Jeroboam reigns, the good news is that God reigns! You may be in what feels like a prison cell. Our whole country may yet become a vast prison camp, at least for those who believe that Jesus Christ is always faithful to His bride. Yet even there, even the midst of the worst circumstances imaginable, your God reigns. He holds the heart of the king in His hand. The very devil is God's devil. So rejoice! God reigns!