



ROSE
HILL
CHURCH

1 Kings 12:1-14
The Story
A Kingdom Torn in Twoⁱ

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This morning we continue our journey through the Story. Many in the church are reading the book called, “The Story” which essentially is a chronological walk through the Bible that focuses on the main thread of the Biblical narrative. It sticks to the main plotline, without a lot of the tangential stuff that, while often helpful and worth studying, can also be a little confusing and quite daunting to wade through. The Bible is already about people and places from 2,000 – 4,000 years ago and beyond, that are foreign to us...and so just understanding the main points can be a challenge. And the book, The Story, helps us to do that – to understand what God is saying to us through Scripture.

So we started with Creation, and then from there we’ve followed God’s interaction with people and particularly his desire and His promise to work through a people that he calls his own...people He covenanted with: people who would be a light to the world about what it means to live in relationship with our creator. And we see that God is faithful to keep his promises – both his promises of blessing and his promises of consequences when his people stray from him and embrace idols, bless sin, and try to live apart from him.

Last week we took a short break from the series with a Sunday of worship through music...but the week before we looked at Solomon, who was a king who had it all. He had it all materially, but he also recognized that material wealth and the experiences of life weren’t the end-all, be-all. And part of what he tried out to see how satisfying it would be, was worshipping gods other than Yahweh, the God of the Bible. And it wasn’t him alone...it was many of the people of the nation of Israel...though the focus is on him in these chapters of the Bible. We talked about that some two weeks ago, so I won’t go back into it all now. But, these verses from 1 Kings 11, a little before the main passage we’ll read in a moment say this, **“As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites...On a hill east of Jerusalem,**

Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites” (1 Kings 11:4-7). The consequence of this was that God split the nation into two kingdoms toward the end of his reign, and beyond.

So there are two main guys you have to keep track of going forward as the nation is torn in two. The first is one of Solomon’s son’s, named Rehoboam. The other is Jeroboam, who was a high ranking official when Solomon was king (though had a falling out and left the country for a time), and ends up as king over part of the nation of Israel. So at the end of chapter 11, Solomon’s death is recorded and we’re told that upon his death, his son Rehoboam became King over Israel. And in this morning’s passage, we see how Rehoboam decided to act as king. So we’re in **1 Kings 12:1-14**.

As we see at the start of this passage, **Solomon’s son Rehoboam wanted to continue the luxurious lifestyle that Solomon had led.** Solomon was very wealthy, and he got that luxurious lifestyle the old-fashioned way: he inherited it, and he taxed the people. ☺ At least, that’s the old-fashioned way when you’re the king. Well, Rehoboam saw that, and he wants to keep it going.

But first, Jeroboam, this high-ranking and respected official who had served in Solomon’s government, goes to Rehoboam and says, “Look, your father really taxed the people – financially, and in labor – some of it pretty harsh labor. Why don’t you lighten the load on the people a bit, and we’ll serve you with gladness and joy.” That’s the gist of what Jeroboam says to him. Rehoboam wants some time to consider this, so he asks for a few days to think about it.

The first thing he does in considering what to do is to ask some of the elders who had served his dad, Solomon. This is wise. Whenever you’re making a big decision, it’s a good idea to get the counsel of others – especially those who have gone before you and have more experience than you do.

So these guys say to him, “Look, if you lighten the load, you’re going to gain

their favor, they will have gratitude...and grateful people are going to be loyal and they'll serve you well. So why don't you lighten the load on the people?"

Well, Rehoboam isn't satisfied with that answer, and he consults another group of people. There's really nothing wrong with that. Consulting a variety of people on a topic isn't wrong...whose to say the first answer is the best one? So he approaches some other guys who were his contemporaries: they're young, and they had grown up with him and were now serving him in his government. And they seem to just be a bunch of "Yes men" and their advice is just the opposite of the elders. Their advice is for him to do exactly what he already thinks he should do: That not only should he *not* lighten the load, their advice is to make the load heavier.

And that's the advice that Rehoboam goes with. He basically says to the first group (the elders), **"I could agree with you, but then we'd both be wrong."** So he breaks the news to Jeroboam and the others who came back to him a few days later as he had asked them to do, and of course they're upset. In fact, they're quite angry. A short time later, Rehoboam sends out one of his officials who oversees the laborers, and they end up killing that guy. That's how ticked off they are. Rehoboam realizes his own life is in jeopardy, but he doesn't have the courage or the humility to acknowledge he made a bad decision, and change it. I don't know, maybe there was something else going on that prevented him from doing that...but he decides the best thing to do is to get out of dodge. And so he flees from Shechem, which is the city from which he'd been governing, heads south, and goes to Jerusalem.

Now, before we continue on, I want to pause for a moment and ask this question: **To whom do you listen in your life to make wise decisions?** These could be decisions in regards to your career, investing your money for retirement, raising kids, what car to buy, what college to go to, and so forth. Of course, the college one is easy: UW. That's a bit of wise counsel I'll pass along for free today. And we all need wise counsel on things. The challenge is always that just because we get wise counsel doesn't mean we make the wise decision. Sometimes, like Rehoboam, we have competing advice given to us, and we have to sort that out to determine which piece of advice is best.

I read this week about a guy who tried using the wisdom of Solomon in his own family. You'll recall how Solomon had a wise solution to figure out which woman standing before him was the real mother of the baby they were fighting over, with each of them claiming that it was her own. So this guy had his two sons come to him, fighting over a Hot Wheels car, with each of them claiming that it was theirs. So he decided to try Solomon's tactics on his boys. He said, "Ok. Since you can't agree on this, I'll get out my saw and we'll cut the car in half and each of you can have half of it." He thought for sure the kid who really owned the car would hate to see his car get cut up, and so he'd know which child it belonged to. But instead, the idea backfired. They two boys said, "Cool! Let's get some more cars and cut them up, too!"

At least he got them to stop fighting...but it wasn't quite the result he was looking for! And his conclusion was that **"It takes wisdom to know how to use wisdom."** In other words, Solomon's tactics were wise, and they might be applicable in our own lives too...and we might get wise counsel from any of a number of people on any number of topics: But we have to have wisdom about whether or not it's wise to use the wisdom being offered. Is that clear? I hope so. And that doesn't mean you always have to make the right decision the first time. Part of wisdom is recognizing when the decision you made isn't going the direction you thought it would, and having the humility and the courage to say, "I think I need to try that other option that that other person suggested." And Rehoboam doesn't do that here. Instead, he flees to Jerusalem.

Now, that left an upset constituency in the northern part of the kingdom who didn't think their king was leading well. So they fill that leadership void with Jeroboam, and he is elected king. And so the nation of Israel is torn in two. The Southern portion is called Judah and is under the leadership of Solomon's son Rehoboam; and the Northern portion, which kept the name of Israel, is under the leadership of Jeroboam. You may recall that the nation of Israel was comprised of 12



“tribes.” So, in this division, 10 of them were in the north, and two – Judah and the tribe of Benjamin – were in the south, though collectively the south is simply known as Judah.

Now, in Jerusalem and the southern part of the kingdom, Rehoboam remained respected as king. So he fairly quickly assembled an army of 180,000 men to attack the northern part of the kingdom with the intent of overthrowing Jeroboam and bringing it all back together as one nation under his own kingship. And here’s what happened next: **“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’” (1 Kings 12:22-24). So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again, as the Lord had ordered.**

From the “lower story” perspective...from the perspective that they generally had and that we tend to view things from, I think Rehoboam learned from his earlier mistake. The first time, he didn’t listen to the wise counsel...didn’t listen to those who’d “been there and done that” and had insight born out of experience. This second time, he listens to the word that the prophet Shemaiah brings, that the Lord is in the midst of this, and he’s working things out as he has planned. He says, **“This is my doing” (1 Kings 12:24)**. The Lord told Solomon that the nation would be split. That’s going to be the consequence, and it’s going to stay that way for a while. And at this moment Rehoboam is able to trust God’s “Upper Story” perspective...he doesn’t totally see things from that same perspective...we never do see things completely clearly and as fully as God does from his upper perspective...but Rehoboam trusts that perspective and listens to the wise counsel of God that comes to him through this prophet.

God is working things out, whether we cooperate or not. Whether we make wise choices or not. Whether we’re on board or not. Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam turned their backs on God at different times. God is moving forward and carrying out his big picture mission whether they’re on board or not.

This is still true today, and Jesus speaks to it himself. For instance, Jesus doesn't say, "I might build my church," or "I hope to build my church," or "I'd like to build my church..." **Jesus says, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).**ⁱⁱ This is His doing. This is the new, unified Kingdom with one King: King Jesus. This building of His church is good news! He will build His Church across the globe and anyone can be a part of it, and it's not dependent upon any one of us to bring it to fruition. Doesn't matter the color of your skin, the value of your home, your marital status, or the educational level you achieved, the music you like, or the teams you root for – although, there's probably a little extra measure of grace for us Mariners fans who have suffered through wasted seasons for way too long. So, no matter what: Jesus *is* building His Church – he's the center of it, he's the foundation of it...and he *will* do it. But, as U2 once sang, he will do it "with or without you."ⁱⁱⁱ He says, "This is my doing." We get the joy of participating in what He's already doing. It's an honor, a privilege, and an opportunity...but ultimately it's His deal. God is saying to Rehoboam here, and He still says it to you and me: This is my doing. I'm building this.

So we see in the life of Rehoboam that wise decisions take counsel, and even a wise decision takes some wisdom to make the right choice. And when we get it wrong, we would be wise to have the humility to acknowledge that, ask for a do-over, and try a different route. Rehoboam didn't do that, as he skipped town, but he did learn from his mistake as he listened to the wise counsel the second time around. And from that we also see that God is going about His business of building His Kingdom. From His Upper Story perspective, He sees things that we do not see from our Lower Story perspective. And He invites us along to participate, to be a part of what he's doing, but ultimately, it's His doing. And while He will do it with you or without you, He wants you on board. I hope you're on board, participating in what God is doing in your life, in your home, in your church, and in your community, and beyond. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 14 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.

ⁱⁱ Thanks to Randy Frazee for this illustration in his book, "The Heart of The Story."

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.