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A House Divided

First Kings 12:1-24 and Second Chronicles 10:1 to 11:4

A house divided DIG: Given Rehoboam's character, what do you think would have been the best way the ten northern tribes and Jeroboam could have dealt with the situation? What would servant leadership have looked like in Rehoboam's situation? In your congregation?

REFLECT: Rehoboam was arrogant and angry. Have you ever known someone like that? If so, how did you deal with him or her? What legacy would you like to leave behind in the world when you are gone? When you have big decisions to make in your life, who do you go to for advice?

Servant leadership is the best kind of leadership, modeled after Yeshua's leadership.



Perhaps **Rehoboam** didn't sense the depth of the northern dissatisfaction with **Solomon's** policies. Maybe **he** assumed that since **David** and **Solomon** didn't gain consensus support immediately, that **he** would have to win over those who doubted **him**. Whatever **his** mindset was, **he** didn't handle the situation well. **The people** awaited **him** at **Shechem**, and there was not reason to believe that **they** were determined to reject **Rehoboam**.³²⁵

Rehoboam's action: After taking, or being called to, the throne of **Judah** in **Jerusalem**,

Rehoboam sought the endorsement by **the** northern **tribes**, who were already unhappy because of **Solomon's** harsh rule. **Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Isra'el had gone there to make him king (First Kings 12:1; Second Chronicles 10:1).** We are not explicitly told why **he went to Shechem**. That **city** does not appear in the narrative in relation to the kingship of either **David** or **Solomon**. It is, however, a name that strikes a number of chords with those who know the story of **Isra'el** prior to the monarchy. It seems likely, given the dialogue that follows, that this is significant. It is the place of real covenant renewal (**Joshua 24:1-27**) – a place where **the Israelites**, having entered **the Land**, first took stock of **themselves** and reflected upon **their** identity and direction. It is the place where **Joseph's bones** are **buried (Genesis 50:22-26)**. It is also the place where kingship first, if only briefly, intruded itself into the tribal life of **Isra'el**, a mortal being (and a wicked one at that) taking the place of **God** as ruler over **God's people (Judges 8:22-23 and 29)**. Thus, **Shechem** was an ideal place to which a prospective **king** might be invited if you wished to ask **him** (as **the Israelites** did) how **his** kingship was going to be conducted, so as to gauge the nature of **their** relationship.³²⁶

When Jeroboam, son of Nebat, heard of the assembly on what was friendly ground to him (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. Obviously **he** didn't fear **Rehoboam** as **he** had **Solomon**. **So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Isra'el 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."** The people were willing to serve **Rehoboam** only if **he** was willing to serve **them**. **Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me."** **So the people went away (First Kings 12:2-5; Second Chronicles 10:2-5 NIV).** The proposal for a **three-day** waiting period for **Rehoboam's** decision reflects a well-known motif in which **the third day** becomes a day of special emphasis, decision, and finality (**Exodus 19:10-16; Esther 4:15-16; Second Kings 20:8**). **Yeshua** predicted **His** own resurrection on **the third day**, a prophecy that was gloriously fulfilled.³²⁷ But now, sectionalism, with all its force and fury, had backed **Rehoboam** into a corner.

How would he react?

Right and wrong advice: Then King **Rehoboam** consulted the elders who had served his father **Solomon** during his lifetime. Those **elders**, who had undoubtedly had the benefit of **Solomon's** own wisdom (**First Kings 10:8**), and had little hope of or a desire for further advancement from **his son** – gave **Rehoboam** wise advice: that effective leadership is servant leadership (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Kh** -

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet).³²⁸ Those seasoned political veterans seemed to know exactly what **the** young **king** was facing. It was time to submit to the wishes of those **he** wished to lead.

"How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked. They replied, "If today you will be kind and a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants." Any politician could have given this advice. It was not exceptionally clever nor profound. Nor was it based on unique values of Torah. The concession they advised him to make was small, almost insignificant. It was a matter of words, not deeds. All he would have to do was to speak humbly and reassuringly. And even that, only for one day. Once he was crowned, he could do as he pleased. He would be their legal king, and all the powers that the Torah granted as a king would be his.³²⁹

But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him various governmental offices. There is no evidence that **the king** sought out **ADONAI** in prayer or that **he** consulted the high priest or a prophet. We get the impression that **his** mind was already made up, but that **he** was willing to go through the motions in order to please **the people**. One of the marks of **David's** leadership was that **he** was willing to humble **himself** and seek the mind of **YHWH**, and *then* pray for **God's** blessing on **his** decisions. Leaders who try to impress people with their skills, but take no time seek **God**, only prove that they don't know the most important thing in spiritual leadership: **They** are second in command (see **Joshua 5:13-15**).

The elders gave Rehoboam the best advice: be a servant leader. However, **Rehoboam** had already made up **his** mind, so **he** immediately rejected **their** advice and turned to **his** contemporaries, whom **he** knew would give **him** the answer that **he** wanted (**Second Timothy 4:3**). **He** had no intention of weighing the facts, seeking **God's** will, and making the wisest choice.³³⁰ So, **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'?"** They counseled **the young king** to intimidate the crowd by declaring that **he** was tougher than **his father**. **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. This is a proverbial expression meaning, "My power will be greater than the power of my father." 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' (First Kings 12:6-11; Second Chronicles 10:6-11 NIV)." Their theory was that servant leadership would not work. Only a bully**

could handle a diverse kingdom. Tragically, then, **Rehoboam** chose slogans over wisdom and machismo over servanthood.³³¹

The decision: 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; I will scourge (plain leather) you with scorpions (metal embedded in the leather).” So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite (First Kings 12:12-15; Second Chronicles 10:12-15 NIV). Nothing occurred here because of “chance.” There is no “chance.” ADONAI is sovereign. Still, **Rehoboam’s** decision was **his** own. The text maintains the tension between **God’s** sovereignty and human responsibility that can be seen all throughout the Bible.

Isra’el breaks away: Without hesitation **the people** reject **Rehoboam’s** harsh authority over them. **They** deny any obligation to **David’s** dynasty and leave **Rehoboam** to rule **Judah** and **Benjamin**. **When all Isra’el 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, Isra’el! 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. Solomon’s first official decision brought **him** the reputation for great **wisdom** (First Kings 3:16-18), but **his son’s** first official decision told the nation that **he** was foolish and unwise. For centuries, **the Jews** considered the division of the nation the greatest tragedy in **their** history and measured every other calamity by it. One incredibly poor decision tore down in a few days what **David** and **Solomon** labored eighty years to build.

King Rehoboam made one final, futile attempt to maintain control over the north. **He sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor** (First Kings 4:6), in an obvious attempt to reestablish **his** authority over **the Israelites**, but **Rehoboam** once again miscalculates **the northerners’** depth of anger and **they stoned him to death**. **King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem**. So **Isra’el** 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 (First Kings 12:16-20; Second Chronicles 10:16-19 NIV).

Rehoboam had followed the wrong counsel, used the wrong approach, and chosen the wrong mediator. What *else* could **he** do? **He** could declare war!

Rehoboam's plan for war averted: Persistent to the last, **Rehoboam** again tried to impose **his** will upon **the** ten northern **tribes** by force. **When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, and some other mysterious people - a hundred and eighty thousand able young men - to go to war against the northern tribes and to regain the kingdom for himself. But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, or prophet, "Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to all Judah and Benjamin, 'This is what YHVH says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is My doing.' "** To Rehoboam's credit, **he** called off the attack, **obeyed the word of the LORD and turned back from marching against Jeroboam, as Ha'Shem had ordered (First Kings 12:21-24; Second Chronicles 11:1-4 NIV).**

The plan of **God** was the most important factor, but there was another factor as well. It was wrong for **Judah** and **Benjamin** to fight against **their brothers**. It seems strange, yet family and national conflict appears repeatedly in the history of **Isra'el**. **Abraham** and **Lot** disagreed (**Genesis 13**), and **Abraham** reminded **his** nephew that **they** shouldn't fight because **they** were **brothers (Genesis 13:8)**. **Jacob** and **Easu** had a lifelong battle that **their** descendants continued for centuries (**Genesis 27:41-46; Psalm 137:8; Obediah 10-13**). **Joseph's brothers** hated **him (Genesis 37)**, and **Aaron** and **Miriam** criticized **their brother Moses (Numbers 12)**. **Sha'ul** was **David's** enemy and on many occasions tried to kill **him**. **O, how good, how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in harmony (Psalm 133:1).**

Frequently in the history of the TaNaKh we find a **prophet** confronting a **king** with: **This is what YHVH says**. Whenever a **king**, a **priest**, or even another **prophet** stepped out of line, a prophet would step forward and rebuke **him**, and if **the prophet's** message was ignored, **God's** hand of judgment would fall (see **First Kings 13:21-22, 14:6-11, 16:1-4, 20:28ff, Second Kings 1:16 and 22:14-15**). **Isra'el** was to be a **people of God's Word**, and **God's Word** must be held higher than even the word of **the king**.³³²