



Rehoboam: Failure to Plan

Lesson 5

*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD,
and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*

Ezra 7:10

Teacher's Note [[The story of Rehoboam is in both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. There is a lot of overlap between the two, but 2 Chronicles is a little fuller. Reading both accounts to prep would be good, but reading from Chronicles at the table whenever possible would probably make the most sense.]]

Rehoboam had some big shoes to fill. His grandfather was the godliest king to rule in Israel. His father was the wealthiest and wisest king to rule in Israel. He, on the other hand, was not wealthy, wise, or godly. The story of Rehoboam is the sad story of someone trying to be as big and important as his father and grandfather, yet missing the things that made them who they were. David's greatness came from his pursuit of God. Solomon's wisdom came from his dependence on God. Rehoboam exhibited neither of those, and his life shows it.

To Tax, Or Not to Tax?

That Rehoboam would lose a large chunk of his kingdom was a foregone conclusion (1 Kings 11:29-39). The way in which he lost the kingdom, however, was through the natural means of Rehoboam's own personal foolishness.

I. Rehoboam's problem (1 Kings 12:1-5; 2 Chronicles 10:1-5)

Rehoboam was 41 years old when he took the throne (1 Kings 14:21). As soon as he came into power, he was faced with a career-defining question: should he lower the taxes or not?

What reasons did the people give for wanting taxes lowered?

Who led the charge against Rehoboam? How might this have influenced Rehoboam's decision?

II. Rehoboam's decision (1 Kings 12:6-15; 2 Chronicles 10:6-15)

Rehoboam was given two very different perspectives on how he should proceed. The older generation told Rehoboam to lighten up on the taxes, whereas the advisors his age told him to tighten them. In the end, Rehoboam went with the poor advice of his own peers and threatened the people that their taxes were about to go way up, not down.

Why do you think Rehoboam went with the advice of those in his generation?

We live in a time of great generational conflict. For the younger generation to think they know better than those with grayer hairs is nothing new, but it is always foolish. Recently, a 25-year old politician in New Zealand was giving a speech on climate issues. While she was speaking, an older member of parliament began heckling her. At one point in the video, the 25-year-old pauses just long enough to throw a disgusted look his direction, say "Okay Boomer" and then move on with her speech.

Her comment referenced a trend among many her age, to use the phrase “Okay Boomer” as a way of dismissing those older than them (specifically Baby Boomers, born between 1946-1964) when they disagreed about issues. This attitude is a dangerous one, and one that we see costing Rehoboam big time.

Why do you think younger people tend to disregard the wisdom of those older than them?

How can you young people seek to honor those older and learn from them?

How can those older invest their wisdom in the future generations?

III. Rehoboam’s outcome (2 Kings 12:16-24; 2 Chronicles 10:14-11:4)

The result of this is that exactly what God had warned it would be. Rehoboam lost the ten tribes, in part as punishment for Solomon’s apostasy. While Rehoboam initially tries to keep control, he eventually listens to the prophet of God and accepts the new normal.

This division became permanent. From here on out, Israel¹ was used to refer to the northern 10 tribes and Judah² to the southern kingdom. This state of affairs continued until Israel was taken away by Assyria. God prophesied during the

¹ In later Scripture, including the prophets, Israel is often referred to as Ephraim, since Ephraim was the strongest tribe. It is also referred to as Samaria, since the capital of the northern 10 tribes eventually became Samaria.

² Judah is also referred to as Jerusalem, the capital city.

ministries of Hosea and Ezekiel that one day the two nations will be reunited (Hosea 1:11; Ezekiel 37:15-23). As we will see in future lessons, Israel and Judah rarely got along (2 Chronicles 12:15), and sadly when the nations get along the best it is not a good thing!³

A major theme throughout the books of Kings is the certain fulfillment of God's Word. What does this story teach us about how God keeps his Word?

How is it possible that someone whose father was the wisest man who ever lived make such a foolish first choice?

A Successful Recovery

To say that Rehoboam had a poor start is an understatement. Successor to the most politically successful king in Israel's history, Rehoboam saw the majority of his kingdom leave because of his own foolish, proud choices. What happens next in the story of Rehoboam, however, is much more positive.

I. Rehoboam listens to God's prophet (11:1-4).

Instances of obedience to the prophetic are, sad to say, rare in these books. Yet Rehoboam and the people listen to God's message from Shemaiah. Rather than begin a costly and ultimately doomed civil war, Judah accepts God's punishment and move on. The next few verses describe God's blessing then coming on the land.

Why do you think Rehoboam listened here and not later?

³ The best relations between Israel and Judah come between Ahab, the most wicked king of the North, and Jeroboam, a godly king from the South. This compromise has long lasting consequences for the southern kingdom.

II. Rehoboam builds up the national defense (11:5-12).

The following section details Rehoboam's program to build up the defense cities and make sure they were well supplied. These acts appear to have been successful, as 12:1 describes Rehoboam as being well established.

III. Rehoboam was joined by priests and Levites (11:13-15).

Next week we will discuss Jeroboam, who sets up golden calves and tries to keep the people from going to Jerusalem to worship. The priests and the Levites, those tasked with knowing and keeping the law, don't like this and come down to join Rehoboam in the south. Rather than participate in Jeroboam's corrupt counterfeit, these godly men left the land they had been given and came down to join Rehoboam.

IV. Rehoboam saw true worshippers join him (11:16-17).

Those who truly did love God continued to worship in Jerusalem, whether by moving or simply continuing to attend the feasts and pay the tithes. In either case, their support of Rehoboam gave him great political strength.

Like Father, Like Son

After the initial debacle, Solomon served God faithfully for three years (2 Chronicles 11:17). After this time, however, Rehoboam started making similar choices to his father, and ended up paying a high price as his father had.

I. Rehoboam's sinful choices (2 Chronicles 11:18-12:4, 9-12).

A. Rehoboam married many wives (2 Chronicles 11:18-23). In what looks like an attempt to mimic his father,

Rehoboam had a large harem and had multiple children. Compared to Solomon this was nothing, but it seems that the author of Chronicles is pointing out that Rehoboam is trying to be like his dad, because after relating his family, 2 Chronicles 12:1 tells us that once Rehoboam had established himself, he forsook God.

Why do you think that it was once he was established that he forsook God? How can that be a warning for us today?

B. Rehoboam worshipped foreign gods (1 Kings 14:21-24).

While 2 Chronicles only briefly tells us that Rehoboam “forsook the law of the Lord,” 1 Kings spells out what that looks like in gruesome detail. Under Rehoboam, new centers of worship were built for pagan deities. The word translated “groves” in the KJV is the Hebrew word *Asherim*. Recent archeological discoveries have shown that *Asherim* were likely wooden images depicting the pagan goddess Asherah, one of the wives of Baal. Not only that, but the KJV says there were sodomites in the land. The word for “sodomites” in Hebrew is *qadesh*, the word for “holy.” As sick as it might sound these were not just normal homosexuals, they were “holy” male prostitutes who “served” the Canaan fertility gods (cf Deuteronomy 23:17-18⁴).

⁴ In this passage, the KJV “whore” and “sodomite” are the same Hebrew word “*qadesh*” in the masculine and feminine. The “hire of a whore” and “the price of a dog,” although using different Hebrew words, are a reference to what cult prostitutes of either gender would be paid.

Rehoboam watched his father's reign rule in disgrace because of idolatry, and he watched Jeroboam's reign face the judgment of God. Why do you think he made the same mistakes? Why do we blow by God's warnings even after seeing others pay a heavy price for their sin?

II. God's righteous judgment (12:9-12).

God sent Egypt to attack Judah as punishment for Rehoboam's apostasy. Shishak the Pharaoh of Egypt came with a powerful army that captured all the cities right up to Jerusalem (12:4), and then wiped Jerusalem clean of its great treasure and wealth (12:9-10). The large golden shields that Solomon had made were replaced with cheaper bronze versions, a sign that some of the glory had departed from Judah.

God forgave Rehoboam, but Rehoboam's bronze shields didn't turn to gold. What are modern examples in which God's mercy can be seen, and yet consequences remain?

Rehoboam's End

Yet, when God turned on the pressure Rehoboam and the nation with him repented and saw the mercy of God. Throughout all the kings, we find that all those who humble themselves are shown mercy by the Lord.

I. Rehoboam is spared total destruction (2 Chronicles 12:5-9, 12).

Shemaiah the prophet comes to the nation and prophesies of God's impending judgment from Egypt (as Dr. Whitcomb pointed out, this is a far cry from the powerful nation that married Pharaoh's daughter a generation ago!). God decides to preserve the nation of Israel because they were willing to humble themselves after he pronounced judgment.

II. Rehoboam failed to fully seek after God (2 Chronicles 12:14).

So what went wrong with Rehoboam? Why was he spiritually all over the map? The beginning of his reign was awful, then he did well for 3 years, then he worshipped other gods and allowed wicked pagan practices, then he humbled himself and received mercy.

In the end, God views his reign negatively. When life started to fall apart, he sought God. But when things went well for him, he allowed his heart to get pulled away from God. He is described as an evil king, and the reason that is given is because he failed to prepare his heart to seek God. Rehoboam didn't put forth an effort to follow after God.

Although a slightly different expression, compare this with the description of those who came to worship from the north in 2 Chronicles 11:16 and Ezra in Ezra 7:10. What does it mean to prepare/set one's hear to seek God?

How can we prepare our hearts to seek God today?