

CHAPTER 14

A Kingdom Torn in Two

TIMELESS TRUTH: Leadership always has its consequences.

CHAPTER SUMMARY: (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

Solomon, whose name means peace, found peace slipping away during the final years of his reign. His son Rehoboam was to take his place as ruler over the 12 tribes of Israel. A large party of disgruntled leaders led by Jeroboam showed up at Rehoboam's coronation ceremony requesting that he grant relief from the heavy burden of taxation and forced labor that Solomon had placed on them. Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the experienced elders and took the advice of his immature peers who theorized that bullying and intimidation were better leadership tactics than servanthood. Rehoboam promised even heavier taxation and more forced labor. With one decision, the nation divided and its fate was sealed.

Only Rehoboam's tribe of Judah remained loyal to him. The other 10 tribes to the north seceded, took the name of Israel and made Jeroboam their king. Instead of appreciating the gracious gift of God, Jeroboam, like Aaron centuries before, set up idols of counterfeit worship, leading Israel into idolatry. God sent a prophet who warned of judgment for their idolatry and predicted that someday a king named Josiah, a descendant of David, would destroy their pagan worship sites (this was fulfilled 290 years later). As a sign to authenticate his message, the pagan altar split in two and Jeroboam's outstretched hand turned leprous.

This did little to curb Jeroboam's pagan practices. When his son became ill he sent his wife in disguise to the prophet Ahijah to inquire about their son's fate. Though blind, Ahijah's spiritual sight was 20-20. He not only saw through the charade, but gave Jeroboam's wife a message of doom predicting that her husband's dynasty would soon end and Israel would one day be carried away into captivity. The message of doom was to be authenticated with the death of their son as soon as her footsteps crossed the entrance to the palace. And so it came to pass.

God's chosen people were now committing the same idolatrous and immoral practices that compelled God to purge the land of its Canaanite inhabitants in the first place. God's righteousness and covenant loyalty moved Him to jealous anger. Rehoboam allowed Judah to fall into the same idolatry as the North. The golden years of peace faded further when God judged Judah by using Shishak, king of Egypt. He attacked Judah and carried off the all of the gold and silver treasures. Rehoboam replaced them with bronze, but the decline in moral and spiritual values was even sharper than the drop in value from gold to bronze.

The Lower Story is primarily a list of idolatrous kings who lead both Judah and Israel further and further away from God. Abijah son of Rehoboam became the next king of Judah. His tenure was short and sinful like his father's. No good kings reigned in Israel after the split of the kingdom. Things went from bad to worse with the house of Omri. His evil son King Ahab and her royal wickedness Queen Jezebel drove Israel to new lows in idolatry.

But in the Upper Story, we see two things: First, those who reject the LORD will reap His grim judgment. But second, this judgment is always designed to redirect His people and produce repentance back toward the God who still relentlessly pursues His people, through prophets like Ahijah and kings like Asa who forged a path for people to find their way back to Him. The era of the kings, despite their terrible freedom, inaugurates a path to the King of Kings, who would redeem not just this era of division and strife, but every age from everlasting to everlasting.

DISCUSSION STARTER:

What's the best advice you have received? What was the worst? Did you follow the advice?

GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. Rehoboam sought counsel to make an important decision (p. 194) and so did Jeroboam (p. 196). What criteria did each seem to use in evaluating the counsel of others? What makes for wise counsel? What kind of counsel does or should your small group provide for each other?
2. Jeroboam “counterfeited worship” by redirect Israel’s attention away from the temple in Judah to local idols. What did he gain from this?
3. The split of Israel and Judah led to continual warfare for hundreds of years. What issues divide God’s people today? Share with your group practical ways to promote unity at our church and unity with believers from other churches.
4. Does the prophecy from the man of God, the sign of the altar, and the leprous hand represent acts of grace or acts of judgment toward Jeroboam (p. 196-197)? What should Jeroboam’s response have been?
5. Jeroboam recognized that Ahijah spoke the truth, even when he did not like it. How do you respond when you hear a truth you do not like? How can you be different from Jeroboam and use these as opportunities to change?
6. Have you had an occasion when someone asked you for advice and counsel because he or she respected your integrity and truthfulness? What happened?
7. Under King Rehoboam, the people of Judah “engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.” The idolatry in the culture had become the idolatry of God’s people. In what ways are God’s people today similar to the non-Christian culture all around us? How are we different?
8. Why did the sons of Hiel die during the rebuilding of Jericho? Consult p. 93 of The Story or Joshua 6:26. What does this incident teach you about the character of God?
9. Why would God allow such evil kings to rule over His people? How do the tragedies in this chapter fit into God’s Upper Story?
10. What is the standard used in this chapter for a good king? What kind of standards are you setting for the generations that will follow you?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.